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For immediate release

European Parliament discusses feasibility of proposed European Institute of Technology

Study team recommends alternative cluster model that supports existing local strongholds in research, education and innovation

An independent study examining the feasibility of establishing a European Institute of Technology (EIT) has been presented to the European Parliament. The study was commissioned by the European Parliament, at the request of its Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, to obtain independent critical input and analysis regarding the feasibility and potential impact of developing the Institute.

The study team was led by Dr. Peter Tindemans, a former Chair of the OECD Megascience Forum, and Professor Luc Soete, Director of UNU-MERIT – a joint research and training centre of United Nations University and Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

The proposed European super-institute aims to be 'best in class' thereby becoming a reference for the reform of higher education, research and collaboration with industry. At the heart of the EIT is a network of "Knowledge and Innovation Communities" (KICs), which will be widespread communities of excellence comprising about 100 academic staff, 300 researchers, 600 technical and supporting staff, and 1000 PhD researchers and Masters students.

The study team sought to draw conclusions on the potential impact of EIT with regard to each of its three interrelated goals: graduate training, research and innovation.

Noting that the underlying rationale for setting up the EIT is critical, the report cautions against making blanket assumptions about Europe's inability to convert knowledge into commerce, to organize critical mass, or to reward entrepreneurship and excellence in research and education. The study team cites evidence from the latest European Commission Innovation Scoreboard, which found that several of the smaller European countries and Germany perform significantly better than, or as well as the US and Japan.

"Nobody in the US would think of establishing an AIT (American Institute of Technology) so if we think of creating a European Institute of Technology it should recognize the present strongholds in research, in graduate training and in innovation. Otherwise, it will represent

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little more than what the French call ‘un saupoudrage’ - of undoubtedly substantial additional research monies but which spread over such a wide number of research centres will barely make an impact,” says Prof. Soete.

He notes, however, that Europe’s preoccupation with developments in the US is not surprising, or unique, given the technological supremacy of the US and in particular its success in stimulating research cooperation between universities and private industry. Similarly in Japan there is talk of setting up an Okinawa Science and Technology Institute.

The report points out that neither imitating a centralized EIT nor establishing widely dispersed communities of knowledge and innovation in various fields will in themselves address Europe’s fundamental problems in technological and innovative performance. Such performance is, exactly as in the US, far from homogenous across the European landscape. Instead, there are many “poles” – local centres – of research excellence.

In particular, the decentralized EIT that has been proposed by the Commission is found to be not feasible. It is too dispersed; it would not increase significantly the research output in a field; it cannot match a top tier university in providing an environment for training graduates; and a dispersed institute cannot adequately organize technology transfer.

The report proposes an alternative that does support existing local strongholds in research, education and innovation. This so-called Cluster EIT would see ambitious and successful regions and universities compete to create strong institutes of several hundred staff at or linked to a strong university, and working closely with industry on problems that determine long-term industrial development. In the case of the US such institutes too are concentrated around elite institutions such as Massachusetts, Stanford, Austin and San Diego.

The study also highlights the need to work out an adequate financial basis for the EIT right from the outset. The Commission proposal is considered as not sustainable. Instead the report proposes to establish a European Innovation Fund using part of the money that year after year is left over from the EU budget.

In addition greater attention needs to be paid to the underpinning policies - including intellectual property, procurement, regional innovation strongholds and capital markets – that will provide the right incentives for collaboration between public and private partners, which is a prerequisite for innovation. They would not save the EIT as proposed but are vital to improve Europe’s performance with respect to growth and innovation.

Wider Application

There are many lessons to be learned from the current EU debate on the EIT for emerging and developing countries. In many of these countries similar debates are underway on the need for greater investments to deliver research excellence on the one hand, whilst leveraging such investment through local innovations.

While the development contexts differ considerably, a recent UNU-MERIT study for UNESCO on the Nigerian S&T system echoes the core issues raised in the EIT debate. The study underlines the need to recognize existing geographical strongholds and build on their strengths to bring them up to world standards with respect to research, graduate training and innovation, rather than seeking to create yet another research network or knowledge and innovation community. In light of the ‘brain drain’ problem faced by many developing countries, such capacity development approaches may be a more effective instrument in revitalizing local research and business talent to stay in the country’s best knowledge

locations, whilst tackling the structural weaknesses within the national innovation systems in these countries.

The full text of the study: **Assessment of the Feasibility and Possible Impact of the Establishment of a European Institute of Technology** can be downloaded at:
http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/docs/200704_EIT.pdf

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About UNU-MERIT

(United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and social Research and training Centre on Innovation and Technology)

[UNU-MERIT](#) is a joint research and training centre of United Nations University, based in Tokyo, Japan, and the University of Maastricht in The Netherlands. It integrates the former UNU-Institute for New Technologies (UNU-INTECH) and the Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT).

UNU-MERIT provides insights into the social, political and economic contexts within which innovation and technological change is created, adapted, selected, diffused, and improved upon. The Institute's research and training programmes address a broad range of relevant policy questions dealing with the national and international governance of innovation, intellectual property protection, and knowledge creation and diffusion.

[United Nations University](#) (UNU) is an international community of scholars engaged in research, postgraduate training and the dissemination of knowledge aimed at resolving the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Established in 1976, [Universiteit Maastricht](#) (Maastricht University) is the youngest university in the Netherlands. It has gained a reputation at home and abroad for its unique "Problem-based learning" approach. Approximately 12,000 students and 3,250 staff currently study and work within the University's seven faculties.