

Position paper on the future of the seat of the European Parliament A new spirit for Europe - the European Institute of Technology (EIT) in Strasbourg

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A new narrative for Europe

The negative results of the Dutch and French referenda on the EU constitutional treaty were the big bang for the birth of a European "demos", a sovereign for our European democracy. Although the future of the EU seems rather bleak right now, one should not be too pessimistic! This caesura could also be a catharsis, a breath of fresh air, for the integration process.

And yet the European people have lost sight of the successes of the past. For many, if not most, these achievements are a given and taken for granted. Few remember that the Union has to be thanked for them. Why is this? For the past fifty years Europe was based on coal, steel and agriculture. These three sectors were the pillars of the European integration process, the old narrative so to speak. But this basis is eroded and its spirit is dead! Both the coal and steel sectors have rapidly lost and are still losing importance in our economies, but their costs remain high. Meanwhile agriculture still receives a huge part of the EU budget although it represents a small sector of European activity.

That is why these sectors cannot give a sense of purpose to the Union anymore. A new vision, new foundations to carry the European roof have to be found. The first five years of the new millennium have already past and still the EU seems to be imprisoned in the last century. Research, innovation, high-technology are the keywords which already determine Europe's competitiveness. The new spirit for Europe must have innovation and research at its core. Airbus, Galileo and the European steering competences in the automotive industries are modern success stories which underpin this new spirit. But more have to follow. This will only be possible by concentrating on research and innovation. It is time to create a European lodestone for excellence in research and to bring the Union's political system in line with modern society so that it can respond to its needs.

Why does Europe need a European Institute for Technology (EIT)?

The United States, Canada, China, India and Australia all have national elite-universities specialising in technology and technology-driven applications (e.g. the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the U.S. (MIT)). In the EU, none of the national universities whether in France, Italy, the UK, Germany or in other member states reach a comparative level of excellence, and yet technology is one of the key factors contributing to and guaranteeing Europe's welfare.

To pool our resources and create a spearhead in technology research in the EU, a European Institute for Technology (EIT) should be created to compete with the academic excellence of other world regions and to regain the pole position in the technology field held by the EU at the beginning of the last century. The proposal is not to create a normal university but to draw together a research centre, a postgraduate university and an administrative body¹ to guide and give impetus to European Research under the auspices of the European Community.

¹ The proposal for the 7th framework programme already foresees the establishment of a European Research Council (ERC), whose main objective will be to encourage the dynamism, creativity and excellence of European research at the frontier of knowledge. This is to be done by supporting "investigator-driven" research projects carried out across all fields by individual teams in competition at the European level. Research areas, independent of the thematic orientations of other parts of the Framework Programme, will include engineering, social sciences and the humanities. The ERC would be composed of a scientific governing council and a dedicated implementation structure. The governing council will consist of representatives of the European scientific community at the highest level, acting in their personal capacity, independently of political or other interests, and appointed by the Commission following an independent selection process. This governing council will oversee decisions on the type of research to be funded, develop the annual work programmes, establish the peer review process and monitor the programme's implementation to control quality from a scientific perspective. This Council could become the EIT's administrative body.

A focus for research in Europe is desperately needed at a time when many bright and talented European researchers leave their home country and the Union to find better researching and working conditions abroad. This brain drain is extremely damaging for Europe's competitiveness and economy. The EIT could be the adequate structure, the one presently lacking in Europe, to reverse the tide, to repatriate them and attract foreign scientists.

No need for two seats for the European Parliament

While Europe needs a leading and world-class technology institute, the European Parliament certainly does not need two seats! This peculiarity places a huge financial burden on the European taxpayer. Once a month, the parliamentary travelling circus hits the road, with 732 MEPs travelling to Strasbourg followed by their 2000 assistants, employees of the administration and political groups and huge lorries carrying their 3500 "cantines". The overall costs - including those to maintain the buildings for the time of the month when the MEPs are in Brussels - reach about 200 million Euros per year. All in all the amount spent for one legislature adds up to about 1 billion Euros.

To reduce the movements of the European Council, the Amsterdam Treaty already established its seat in Brussels. Why should the same logic not be applied to the Parliament? The majority of the new MEPs (70% of the entire chamber) is astonished and annoyed by the obstacles to their work resulting from the commuting to Strasbourg. Moreover, as the so-called "Strasbourg week" only lasts 4 days, the agenda is always too full, affecting the quality of the work done. That is why, although Strasbourg is a symbol of the beginning of the European unification and must retain its symbolic character, the EP should no longer convene there for its plenary sessions. Abandoning the EP's seat only making sense financially and symbolically if the facilities can be used for another purpose, the EP should be replaced there by another body or institution. Having this in mind, we suggest that Strasbourg becomes the seat of the European Institute of Technology.

Why Strasbourg would be an ideal seat for the EIT

Although the buildings of the EP are too small for the parliamentary work of 25 member states, they would meet the needs of a research institute. In fact, they are even comparable with those of the MIT, as they are well equipped with meeting rooms, amphitheatres and offices, all adapted to a multilingual working environment.

Geographically and politically located at the heart of the EU, and with fast connections to major cities in France, Germany, Italy and the other member states, Strasbourg is - without doubt - a real European city. Moreover, the name of Strasbourg is already well known outside Europe, and a positive image could be quickly established.

The neighbouring Upper Rhine Valley also presents considerable assets: Strasbourg is surrounded by technology-driven institutes, which could - from the beginning onwards - be very helpful in creating the EIT. The Upper Rhine Valley encompasses some of the most thriving regions within France, Germany and Switzerland. The economy of the area is based on scientific and engineering skills with companies active in life sciences, IT, nanotechnology and microsystems technology. The Upper Rhine is even part of a dense European research complex called the "Golden Triangle of Research and Innovation".

All in all the EIT would perfectly fit in the buildings, city and region and would enrich the existing research landscape. Yet no matter how many assets the city and region have to offer, the project will amount to little more than wishful thinking without proper funding.

How would the EIT be financed?

A brief examination of the budget of the MIT might give us a good estimation of the costs to be expected for an EIT. In the year 2004 the operating expenditures of the American institute were 1,839.9 million US-\$. Half of this amount was spent on research, about 26% on general administration (482.8\$) and 22% on instruction and non-sponsored research (406.7\$). With an operating income of 1 832.4 million \$ (excluding research directly financed by the industry) the United States has created the leading technology research institute in the world.

To start with, the EIT could function with a much smaller budget, yet the money still has to be found. The MIT can rely on several income sources: research revenues (about 50 %), investment return on operating funds (15.7%), tuition fees (9.6%) and research sponsored through partnerships (e.g.: Microsoft 25 mio\$, Hewlett Packard 25mio\$ for a 5 year term project) as well as gifts (from individuals, corporations and foundations). The EIT could also benefit from various financial sources. First of all, the 200 million Euros which could be saved by vacating the second parliamentary seat should be fully invested in the creation and development of the EIT. Another 250 million € could be earmarked for the institute in the 7th Research Framework Programme budget, in return for the management of some administrative tasks of the Technology Platforms for example. The member states could also finance another 100 million €. This amount would be largely sufficient in the first years of the EIT's existence. The Commission also foresees a budget of 11.8 billion euro over a seven years period for the European Research Council, i.e. over 1.6 billion euro available each year. If the ERC was to become an integral part of the EIT, its budget would consolidate that of the EIT's budget with its own. Finally, with the industry financing related research (an estimated 400 million €), the EIT would have a sound financial basis.

Furthermore one should not overlook the economic impact on the institute's surroundings: the Greater Boston's eight research universities - magnets for talent and billions of dollars in investment - played a key role in the region's economic recovery. The MIT continually develops knowledge and technology that in turn create new industries and jobs, as was recently illustrated in a study. Today the 2000 strong academic staff employed by the MIT and the further 10000 employees all boost the regional economy. Similar results could be expected in Strasbourg and in its surroundings. Spin-off effects could even reach Karlsruhe, Basel, Freiburg, Stuttgart, Nancy, Saarbrücken etc.

When could the EIT start?

The launch of EIT has to be carefully planned in order to obtain funds from the European Commission, the member states and the industry. The institute could already be opened in 2008. In any case, it should be running no later than in 2009 to coincide with the new legislative period of the European Parliament. Much however will depend on when the heads of states and government will agree on the new financial perspectives for the Union that will cover the years 2007-2013. That is why the issue of establishing the EIT in Strasbourg should be on the next EU Summit's agenda.

Conclusion

To a large extent, the high living standards of modern societies rely on the continual development of superior technology. While Europe was at the forefront of industrialisation with high innovation rates and a world leader in technology development in the 19th century, the USA and Japan caught up in the 20th century. In the 21st century, other regions of the world seem to have overtaken it. This evolution can still be reversed but Europe must react now! It must strive to conserve its steering competences in numerous technology fields and regain it in many others. The EIT is part of the answer. Although it could and should never be a copy of the famous MIT, the comparison of some basic facts and figures, as summarised in the table below, demonstrates the huge potential (including in financial terms) already available in Strasbourg for the creation of a leading and thriving institute.

	MIT	EIT
Funding	\$ 1 832,4 million	€ 1 800 million (€ 200 million: savings from vacating the second parliamentary seat € 1 300 million from the Research Council € 200 million from the FP 7 budget € 100 million from the Member States)

Space	large campus, grown structure	concentrated, new building
Leading personnel	983²	732³

With the EIT in Strasbourg we want to send a clear signal that a new spirit animates the EU. Our motto from now on should be:

Strasbourg is the symbol of European technology excellence in the world

2 Professors, Associate professors, Assistant professors

3 MEPs