

Strauss: Europe 'wasting billions' by duplicating research

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The European Union is wasting billions by investing in new research projects which have already been done by other European scientists, Roland Strauss of Knowledge4Innovation told EurActiv in an interview. Improved communication between research institutes and better use of existing patents could lead to sizeable savings, he said.

Roland Strauss is executive director of Knowledge4Innovation, a forum for best-practice exchange on knowledge and innovation policies.

[To read a shortened version of this interview, please click here.](#)

To get full value out of the innovations that Europe produces, do we need to do more to protect intellectual property on a global scale?

Yes, but first of all, we have to get it right in Europe, and there is still work to do on that. Internationally, enforcement is quite a challenge – especially for smaller companies. For big companies, it's much easier, but for SMEs, the cost of filing and enforcement with all the translation costs and the other issues connected to the Community patent need to be improved.

What can be done to avoid duplication of research and wasting money by spending it twice?

There are two opportunities: one is to use existing information that can come from patent offices, from sleeping patents and, on the other side, better communication among research actors themselves. One can see a duplication of efforts in many instances throughout the 27 member states. Billions of euro could be saved if knowledge that is already available was not created a second or third time. Patent offices have databases that are accessible but with regard to research results, it could make sense to have a database for research results for Europe.

How can ICT enable innovation in smaller companies?

There has been so much said about this important role. Obviously ICT, as an innovative sector on its own, has a very important role to play, but more importantly, provides supporting technology to all sectors. This is true for small and large companies, but for SMEs, [in terms of] productivity efficiency gains and in terms of speed, in reducing the time it takes to bring products to market, ICT plays a key role.

Do we have the skills needed to embrace ICT?

It's about skills in using technology, but more broadly, it's about preparing for the next generation of talent that will be able to respond to the demands of the labour market in a dramatically changing economy, especially if we agree that the knowledge and innovation economy and society are the future of Europe. We say knowledge and innovation is the major resource; skills and people are really the raw materials we need. We need new concepts in education and new types of curricula that prepare for this change in industry, economy and society.

Does this mean introducing entrepreneurship onto primary school curricula or fostering closer links between business and university?

Both. We have to start at primary school if we want to change something about the spirit and culture of risk-taking. We should have innovation days at school. The image and the awareness of innovation are not good and must be raised. This is where communication plays an important role. Communication and raising

awareness is necessary to really make a change in the culture of risk-taking, in the people who will drive our economy in the future.

Are there any dangers in allowing business to influence the curriculum of universities?

Well, if you use the term 'influence', well, maybe that's a little bit negative, but as the requirements come from industry and industry knows best what the skills needs are, I think closer cooperation between industry and those responsible for the educational systems can only be of help.

In terms of human capital, does Europe need to advance mobility of researchers and engineers?

The question is not whether we should or should not do it. We are already in a global competition for scientific workforce, for the best researchers. I think they will go where they can find the most attractive workplaces and the most attractive environment. They will go where their families can live and their kids can go to school. We have already entered this global competition.

Is this where the Blue Card scheme comes in?

It certainly plays a role. The competition will be global.

In the future, will we increasingly rely on importing scientists rather than producing home-grown researchers?

There is the demographic issue, and then there is the question of raising awareness at school level about science, technologies and mathematics. This will serve the individual throughout their professional life. There is a need to raise awareness at primary and secondary school level. And industry should also play a role there.

How can the European Year of Creativity and Innovation contribute to this?

We do not need one year of innovation – every year from now on has to be a year of innovation and creativity. This year could help kick off this spirit of an innovation era. I don't think that the initiative from the Commission will make a big difference, unless it becomes a continued effort over the years to come.

In the future, what areas do you see as areas with major potential for innovation and growth?

There is a great deal of attention [being paid] to ICT and green issues as drivers of future development.

Are there others?

First of all, innovation can happen everywhere – in every sector at every level. It's not just about technology; it can happen in business methods and processes. I would distinguish between innovations that are badly needed to cope with the big challenges we are all facing, like climate change, the environment, demographic issues and water shortages – there are many issues of public interest where innovation is needed and the public side plays an important role. In other domains, like gaming or in sports, there is perhaps a need for Europe just to create the right environment.

People talk a lot about the threat from emerging markets like China and India. Do you expect these countries to embrace innovation just as Europe is trying to do so and, if so, can we compete?

I think our opportunity is to stay one step ahead and create knowledge, turn more of the knowledge that we have into innovations. We will certainly not be able to compete in certain areas, but in areas such as energy, environment and green technologies, we will be able to compete if we get the environment right. Europe has to focus on a number of areas and put its efforts there. I think the knowledge of knowledge and innovation

communities (KICs) as part of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology gives an indication of where the future innovative areas for Europe are.

What are the goals of your own organisation, K4I?

The main objective is to put the issues of knowledge and innovation on top of Europe's agenda. Knowledge and innovation are the most important resources for Europe's future like oil for the OPEC countries, knowledge and innovation are what will help sustain Europe in the long term in a global competitive environment. K4I seeks to bridge the gap between local level, where innovation is taking place, and the higher EU level, such as the Lisbon strategy.

What projects are already under way?

The K4I brings together innovation stakeholders from the public, private and academic sectors. Our main, and for the time being, only, product is a structured policy dialogue in the form of the Lisbon Forum, which we established in the European Parliament. We're organising debates bringing together MEPs, the Commission and other decision-makers. The innovation directorates from DG Enterprise and DG Education and Culture are very important. We will organise debates throughout the year in the European Parliament.