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Euro research area agreement

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Europe took a step forward in developing a [European Research Area](#) on Monday (October 27) when the [European Commission](#) and seven international scientific organizations said they would sign an agreement that sets out a program of collaboration, exchange of experts, and other bilateral arrangements.

The commission said the statement of intent would be signed by Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin with the directors-general of the European Fusion Development Agreement, the European Southern Observatory, Institut Laue-Langevin, European Space Agency, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, Centre Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, and the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility.

The groups who put their name to the new pact are members of the [EIROforum](#), set up in 2002 to strengthen links between them.

"This 'statement of intent' marks a new step towards the creation of the European Research Area," Busquin said in a [statement](#). "With Europe's best scientists working together in world-class research infrastructures to spearhead Europe's performance in priority areas such as space applications, nuclear research, and biology, EIROforum organizations, in collaboration with the European Commission, will play a decisive role in promoting the quality and consistency of European research."

"This is a concrete example of the European Research Area in action, for a more competitive EU and better quality of life for our citizens," Busquin said.

The European Research Area project was launched at the European Council at Lisbon in March 2000 in an effort to strengthen the competitiveness of Europe's knowledge-based economy by creating a research analogue for the "common market" that exists for goods and services in the European Union.

[Last year](#), the European Council meeting in Barcelona set the goal of attaining a level of 3% of gross domestic product for research and development investment in the European Union by 2010, to achieve the objectives set out at Lisbon.

[Euroscience](#), an association that aims to influence science and technology policy, welcomed the announcement with some reservations.

"This is an excellent idea," said Jean-Patrick Connerade, president of Euroscience. "In principle, what it does is open up the Commission to organizations which are external to it, and therefore it is a welcome development because it achieves a greater integration of the European scientific community."

But in line with Euroscience's grassroots perspective, he noted that the statement focuses on integrating institutional, "top-down" research.

"Many of us feel that bottom-up research, or blue sky research, at the European level is still not really very well organized," he told us.

"Some of Europe's best scientists are in the organizations listed, but not all of them. What we're concerned about is to make sure we do not forget individual scientists of very high quality pursuing projects which perhaps are not within such institutional structures," Connerade said.

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