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I. EU Competitiveness

1. Recession turning into 'social crisis', warns OECD

In short:

As the economy continues to shrink, massive unemployment is expected to spur social and political unrest across the industrialised world, warned the OECD in economic projections presented on 31 March. Meanwhile, the ECB is expected to further slash interest rates at its meeting on Thursday.

Presenting its interim outlook for major world economies, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said the 30-nation bloc's economy will likely contract by 4.3% this year and staying "mostly flat" in 2010.

Weak export markets, falling investment and a continuing credit crunch will hit euro-area activity hard over the coming six months. The recovery will only begin to build momentum by the middle of 2010. GDP is projected to drop 4.1 percent in 2009 and by 0.3 percent next year. Consequently, unemployment will continue to climb in the coming months.

According to the OECD, by the end of 2010, the unemployment rate could be approaching double digit figures in all G8 countries with the sole exception of Japan. In the OECD area as a whole, this would compare with a 5.6% low in 2007. About 25 million workers are expected to lose their jobs, pushing entire families into poverty.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/euro/recession-turning-social-crisis-warns-oecd/article-180825>

2. A 'Green New Deal': Greens launch election manifesto

In short:

The European Greens on 28-29 March adopted their election manifesto for the 2009 European elections, calling for a 'Green New Deal' which they argue will offer generations to come "a future based on stability, sufficiency and sustainability".

Arguing that "the financial crisis and credit crunch have brought the failings of current economic and social policies sharply into focus," the European Green Manifesto for 2009, entitled a 'Green New Deal for Europe', calls for a wholesale transformation of economic and social systems.

- **Stimulus package for 'green collar jobs'**
- **A pan-European, multi-ethnic campaign**

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/green-new-deal-greens-launch-election-manifesto/article-180850>

3. Financial regulation: The EU's agenda

In short:

European Union leaders have agreed a common agenda ahead of the G20 summit in London, pushing for tighter rules to regulate global financial markets including tax havens - EurActiv offers an overview of the state of play.

The repercussions of the global financial crisis on the real economy have been severe, with unemployment increasing across Europe. Some EU member states have been severely affected. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU and the World Bank agreed a \$25.1 billion economic rescue package for Hungary last November.

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Other countries that have been significantly affected include Ireland, where the prime minister, Brian Cowen, predicted that the country will see a "10% drop in living standards over the next two years". Romania recently obtained an international bailout package worth 20 billion euro.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/financial-services/financial-regulation-eu-agenda/article-180851>

4. EIT launches first call for proposal

In short:

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) has invited applications for its first Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs). The move is designed to foster partnerships between business and academia, and should create new business for large companies, SMEs and start-ups.

The EIT said development of new partnerships between the higher education, research and business sectors will bring new technologies to market, and the successful candidates will benefit from a range of EU funding programmes and loans from the European Investment Bank. KICs will also be expected to attract funding from the private sector.

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso first floated the idea of the EIT in February 2005 as part of a revamped Lisbon Agenda, but his initial vision has since been watered down amid wrangling over how to structure the institute. The first KICs will be selected by January 2010 and are expected to bring together researchers in the fields of climate change, energy efficiency and information society.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/eit-launches-call-proposal/article-180946>

5. OECD lashes out at university 'conservatism'

In short:

Traditional university faculties are too conservative and are standing in the way of progress, as Europe's education system struggles to become more innovative, according to the head of the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation.

Dirk Van Damme said the current system of dividing knowledge into faculties should be broken up if Europe is to move to a new education system capable of equipping students with critical skills.

"We should abolish faculties in universities. Faculties are the most conservative bulwarks against change. Europe must move to a radically different trans-disciplinary approach. Most of the interesting things happen on the boundaries of the discipline," he said. Speaking at a European Policy Centre debate entitled 'Beyond chalk and talk: Creativity in the classroom', which is part of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, Van Damme said Europe's economic and social progress is due to the quality of its educational system.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/oecd-lashes-university-conservatism/article-180831>

6. Ireland mulls 'patriot bond' to kick-start economy

In short:

Irish Taoiseach Brian Cowen has endorsed an online campaign to generate innovative ways of rebooting the ailing Irish economy, Aileen O'Toole, director of the Ideas Campaign, told EurActiv in an interview.

Cowen said an action plan to be drawn up by the campaign, which is funded by its founder O'Toole's online consulting firm AMAS, has posted over 4,800 ideas in one month, will be "fast-tracked to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Economic Renewal for assessment and implementation where appropriate".

One idea highlighted by O'Toole is a proposal for a patriot bond, which would allow Irish ex-pats to invest "on the basis of patriotism". O'Toole, who describes the campaign as a grassroots movement, said 20% of the ideas generated to date have come from overseas, with particular interest from the UK and US. The suggestion for a patriot bond came from an Irish citizen living overseas, who believes the global Irish community would be willing to invest in the Irish state in return for a guaranteed profit.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enterprise-jobs/ireland-mulls-patriot-bond-kick-start-economy/article-180791>

7. Obama asked for it and got it: Unity at G20

In short:

The G20 group of developed and developing countries on 3 April showed a united front as it agreed on a \$1.1 trillion deal to combat the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and tighten financial rules to stop it happening again.

US President Barack Obama played down differences at the summit, declaring it a "turning point" for the world economy. "We have agreed on a series of unprecedented steps to restore growth and prevent a crisis like this from happening again," Obama told a news conference. "We've also rejected the protectionism that could deepen this crisis."

Analysts described the G20's decisions as more far-reaching than expected. All parties got at least a slice of what they were expecting, and they all hailed the creation of a "new world order." Developing countries received \$1.1 trillion of additional resources for the world economy, which will be allocated through the International Monetary Fund and other institutions.

More on: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/euro/obama-asked-got-unity-g20/article-180954>

8. BUSINESSEUROPE publishes key report on alleviating financing conditions for European companies

In short:

During a press conference on 27 March 2009, BUSINESSEUROPE presented key recommendations to facilitate companies' access to finance. The report, prepared by a high-level expert group under chairmanship of Jean-Paul Betbèze, Chief Economist of Crédit Agricole, asks EU policy-makers to implement far-reaching measures to alleviate growing financing difficulties for European companies.

According to the report's analysis, there is today a distinct threat of a self-feeding spiral of rising defaults and growing losses in the financial sector leading to a full-blown credit crunch. Recommendations were presented to MEP Poul Nyrup Rasmussen on 1 April.

More on: <http://www.businessseurope.eu/Content/Default.asp?PageID=524&articleid=675>

9. Universities need to adapt their offers to new kind of student

In short:

On 28 March, BUSINESSEUROPE's Director General Philippe de Buck participated in a panel debate on transforming university into a lifelong-learning university, organized by EUCEN in Leuven.

He highlighted the importance of integrating lifelong learning fully into the missions and strategies of universities. Lifelong learning has to be developed in partnership with business organizations which have an in-depth insight into the evolving needs of enterprises concerning employee qualifications.

More on: <http://www.businessseurope.eu/Content/Default.asp?PageID=524&articleid=676>

II. Other

1. More women take seats in corporate Boardrooms worldwide

In short:

As women establish a growing presence on corporate boards worldwide, Women Corporate Directors (WCD)—an organization of influential women executives, including CEOs, COOs and other C-level executives who serve on major corporate boards—is opening new chapters in Brazil, China and Hong Kong this spring, supported by a strategic partnership with Heidrick & Struggles International, Inc.

Deborah L. Wince-Smith, president of the Council of Competitiveness and a board member of WCD, took part in this week's launch event in Brazil. "If you look at any great civilization," says Wince-Smith, "they included women as innovators, as artists, and most leading companies in the United States that are at the forefront of corporate best practices do have more and more women on their boards. In terms of the innovation imperative for our nation, it is important for companies to recognize that bringing more, diverse voices to the table will help them create something of new value."

More on: <http://www.compete.org/news/entry/663/more-women-take-seats-in-corporate-boardrooms-worldwide/>

2. US Competitiveness Council - New York Times article cites Council President on need to accelerate green job creation

In short:

The renewable energy revolution President Obama wants to jump-start with stimulus money might be coming. But it's going to take a while. While Congress and Obama moved quickly to pass the stimulus legislation, corporate planning for the future is more measured. Any increase in green energy must overcome business and regulatory obstacles.

And businesses dominating the renewable energy arena are based outside the United States. Those companies will need to add or expand U.S. manufacturing before incentives in the stimulus package result in jobs for American workers.

"How real are the green jobs? Of course they'll be some, but how real are they?" said David Garman, President George W. Bush's Energy Department undersecretary from 2004 to 2007 and before that assistant secretary for renewables and energy efficiency. "It's something that we're just going to have to learn by doing."

More on: <http://www.compete.org/news/entry/655/article-cites-council-president-on-need-to-accelerate-green-jobs/>

3. Best ideas nominated for Red Tape Reduction Award

In short:

The Red Tape Reduction Award has been suggested by the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens. A jury, jointly co-chaired by European Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen and Dr. Edmund Stoiber, the chairman of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens, has come together to shortlist three candidates out of more than 500 ideas submitted to the Commission and the HLG.

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The submitted ideas have been evaluated according to criteria such as originality, feasibility and overall potential to reduce burdens, notably for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The three candidates are invited to Prague on 13 May 2009, where the award ceremony will take place and the winner will be announced.

More on:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2967&lang=en