

News release: 2 March, 2005

Europe-wide dialogue launched on benefits, risks and social, ethical and legal implications of nanotechnology

A new European Commission-funded project, **Nanologue** (www.nanologue.net), is launched this week, bringing together leading researchers from across Europe to facilitate an international dialogue on the social, ethical and legal benefits and potential impacts of nanoscience and nanotechnologies.

In the aftermath of the controversy and debate on genetically modified organisms it has become abundantly clear that in order to harness new technologies for economic and social benefit, governments and businesses will have to address a wide range of social, ethical and regulatory concerns. **Nanologue** will bring together current leading research on the social, ethical and legal implications of nanotechnology, facilitate dialogue and produce guidance for stakeholders, developers of nanotechnology in particular, on how to address the issues uncovered to the wider benefit of both society and the economy.

This 6th Framework Programme project is led by Wuppertal Institute in Germany and features consortium partners EMPA (the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Testing and Research) in Switzerland, Forum for the Future in the UK and triple innova of Germany. The project will last 18 months.

Volker Türk of Wuppertal Institute says:

“As nanotechnologies are still at an early stage of development, by facilitating a dialogue we are providing a unique opportunity to involve marketers and developers as well as users and representatives from the civil society in the process of shaping the course of the technology. Providing a neutral ground for discussion will help creating a transparent and trust-based processes for nanotechnology research in the near future.”

Hans Kastenholz of EMPA says:

“Consumer acceptance will be key for nanotechnology’s future development and thus key for financial markets and venture capitalists. Engaging society in a dialogue about the opportunities and potential risks will address and help to mitigate some of these uncertainties surrounding the issue.”

Tim Aldrich of Forum for the Future says:

“Research into nanotechnology and nanoscience in the EU is currently worth over €250m per year¹. It is very important that representatives of all stakeholders

¹ European Commission data.

engage in dialogue to ensure that development of this critical area of research is in their wider interests. ”

Michael Kuhndt of triple innova says:

“Nanotechnology could have a radical impact across many fields, from drug delivery to textile manufacture, environmental monitoring to microprocessing. With potential social and economic benefits will come responsibilities for ensuring social, ethical and legal concerns are met while enabling competitive advantage for European business.”

Specifically **Nanologue** will:

1. Draw from international scientific expertise, to identify benefits and potential ethical, legal and social impacts of nanotechnology applications and processes likely to be rolled out by 2010;
2. Promote a dialogue between researchers, businesses and the civil society based upon the potential of nanoscience and nanotechnology applications to improve the quality of life, create wealth through novel knowledge-based and sustainable processes, and their potential societal impacts;
3. Produce a comprehensive communication and dissemination strategy on the above mentioned benefits and potential impacts, targeting a wide range of actors including researchers, educational institutions, businesses, public institutions and regulatory agencies, civil society (including consumer and religious groups), financial markets, and the media;
4. Disseminate **Nanologue**'s findings by means of media workshops, publicity materials, news articles accompanied by press releases to media closely related to nanotechnology articles, foresight studies, conferences and the cooperation with a major existing internet-platform on nanotechnology;
5. Support public research funds, researchers and businesses with an interactive tool to consider the short- and long-term ethical, legal and social aspects of their activities during the proposal, research and development phases, thus addressing societal preferences and stimulating innovation;
6. Ultimately, facilitate the translation of civil society's ethical, legal and social requirements on nanotechnology research into a real competitive advantage for the European industry.

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Forum for the Future



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Notes to editors:

1. Project definitions:

Nanoscience is a convergence of physics, chemistry, materials science and biology, which deals with the manipulation and characterisation of matter on length scales between the molecular and the micron size (scale of 0.1 nm to 100 nm).

Nanotechnology is an emerging engineering discipline that applies methods from nanoscience to create products and control processes on the nanometre scale.

2. The **Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy**, (www.wupperinst.org) founded in 1991, is committed to application-oriented sustainability research and has long-term experience in **assessing opportunities and challenges of technologies**. Based on interdisciplinary research results and scientists' professional know-how, the institute possesses large experience in developing methods and shaping new research fields in networks and across disciplines and institutions. By researching for politics, economy and society the institute plays a wide reaching meditative role. As member of the interdisciplinary Science Centre North Rhine-Westphalia, including the Institute for Work and Technology it is part of a larger international network of institutes focusing on the (sustainability) assessment of technologies.
3. EMPA (www.empa.ch) is the ETH (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology) domain's institution for multidisciplinary research into sustainable materials and systems engineering. As an independent, neutral research institution, EMPA solves selected tasks and problems of a scientific and technical nature. EMPA is most **active in nanotechnology** and is generating new knowledge, new materials and new applications and is transferring this know-how to potential users. Nanotechnological reliability factors play a major part in EMPA's research.
4. Founded in 1996 the UK's **Forum for the Future** (www.forumforthefuture.org.uk) is a sustainable development charity working to accelerate the transition to a sustainable way of life through a positive-solutions orientated approach. The Forum works through partnerships with leading companies, local authorities, regional bodies and universities, to deliver a shared commitment to sustainability.
5. **triple Innova** (www.triple-innova.de) founded in 2002, is a Pan-European applied research and training organisation on triple bottom line (TBL) tools, methods and innovation concepts for enhanced global product network management. It works on awareness raising about the importance of an integrated understanding of social, cultural, environmental and related legal aspects among decision maker in business, academia and politics. It develops solution-oriented concepts to investigate in technical and organisational TBL improvement opportunities in a single organisation and in a network of organisations. It helps to facilitate communication and information sharing in interdisciplinary and intercultural networks.