

DOING BUSINESS IN THE EUREGIO MEUSE-RHINE
The newsletter of the Chambers of Commerce of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine

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CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

MEUSE-RHINE: AN INTERNATIONAL HOME MARKET

[COM: Maastricht, May 19]

Meuse-Rhine is an ideal place to start for a business that wants to export. The lines of communications are short and this doesn't only apply to physical distance, but to culture and even language. However, business isn't taking sufficient advantage of this extra home market. According to a report produced by E,t'il for the Chambers of Commerce.

E,t'il concludes that the area is in an international market; that there are differences in taxation and legislation; but that it can also be seen as a smaller home market. Delivery times are good; language and culture do not seem to play a large role across the border and it is an attractive area in which to do business.

Although only 6% of business turnover is Euroregional, it is an important purchasing market and 12% of total purchasing takes place in Meuse-Rhine. Most companies organize their import and export activities in the region themselves. They make more use of intermediaries in exports than in imports.

There is also some pressure on pricing in Meuse-Rhine and this can be beneficial in purchasing. Market information is a major problem, although companies that do business here tend to discount this.

'Meuse-Rhine, as an international home market' should be a central theme in the trade policy of Meuse-Rhine's Chambers. E,t'il makes the following recommendations:

- In the area of communication, the region should be positioned as an international home market.
- Exports and imports, including delivery, should receive attention
- Success stories should be publicized
- Quality, language skills and lobbying are all important
- A Meuse-Rhine chain and cluster structure should be established.

The report is a product of E,t'il research for R&M Matrix. The initiative was taken by the five Chambers and was funded by the Interreg EU III program. The principal report is in English, but in addition to the English summary, has also Dutch, German and French summaries. The sub reports are drawn up in the principal language of the region concerned. For Liège, it is in two languages, in the other sub reports, English, Dutch, German and French reports are included and they are available at the chamber's website.

<http://www.euregiochambers.com>

VISIT TO WTCM-CRIF JUNE 9

[COM: Maastricht, May 1]

WTCM-CRIF is a knowledge center active in R&D and technology transfer to business. With more than 50 years of experience in applied research and services to the metalworking and plastics processing industries; to mechanical engineering, mechatronics and electronics; and to the IT, automotive, aerospace and defense industries. In the area of advanced materials and plastics, various industrial problems encountered by the specialists groups in the sector are dealt with for raw material suppliers, mould makers, injection molders and also end users and clients in the automotive, transport, packaging, electronics, telecommunications and medical sector. WTCM-CRIF plays an important role in the development of plastics and in the move from idea to product. Both in practice and in theory, WTCM-CRIF's technical expertise is developed not just for conventional injection molding, but also for alternative processes, such as gas-supported injection molding, co-injection (sandwich injection), decoration injection IMD, IML. Since 1990, there has also been the development of expertise in the area of rapid prototyping, rapid tooling and rapid manufacturing. These technologies are useful for the increasingly complex products, the enormous range of production and to better ensure time to market.

Program:

14:45 hrs: Reception

15:00 hrs: Welcome:

- Presentation WTCM-CRIF, Seraing
- Presentation of Thixomolding, the injection molding of magnesia
- Presentation of VKC activities (Flemish Plastic Center)
- Visits to various departments
- Drinks

Location: **WTCM-CRIF**

Rue du Bois Saint-Jean 12, B-4102 Seraing

Telephone: 00-32-4-3618700

Website: <http://www.wtcm.be>

The number of visitors is limited; you should register as soon as possible. The costs are EUR 25 per person.

<http://www.maastricht.kvk.nl> - Email : aassink@maastricht.kvk.nl

FOURTH EXPORT DAY IN THORN

[COM: Maastricht, April 27]

The Chambers of Commerce in South Limburg and Belgian Limburg are organizing an International Export Day, which will be held at June 7 at the Kasteelhoeve De Grote Hegge, Waterstraat 9 in Thorn. International business offers entrepreneurs chances of growth and an increase in revenue. International activity guarantees continuity and forms the basis of our prosperity. In addition, there are the aspects of import, investment and cooperation. The day is also being organized by Export Vlaanderen, EVD (Ministry of Economic Affairs) and the Rabobank. The organizers are offering a varied program with information both for businesses that are still hesitating about crossing the border and experienced international companies. The program is made up of compact workshops. It costs EUR 60, including lunch, coffee, lists of participants, handouts and documentation. Register at:

<http://www.kvklimburg.voka.be/dagvanexport>

CROSS-BORDER RETAIL BILLION

[BIZ: Maastricht, February 22]

Consumers in South Limburg (NL) and the border regions spend EUR 1.26bn annually on retail shopping outside of their own regions on goods other than every day staples. Consumers from the Belgian and German border regions spend more in South and Central Limburg (NL) than the Dutch do in their respective regions. The German consumer spends the most outside of his own region and the Dutch consumer the least. Belgians cross the border for markets, Germans for restaurants etc and to visit family and friends.

The German consumer spends the most outside its own region at EUR 119. Belgians spend EUR 113 and the thrifty Dutch EUR 98. The center of Maastricht attracts more Belgians than Germans; outside their own regions, Belgians focus on ambience and the Dutch on fashion articles.

Those commissioning the report pointed, in their response, to the importance of the results. They have gained better insight into the position of South Limburg (NL) in Meuse-Rhine's retail world and the opportunities that this brings with it. The results were also important in characterizing the cities in the South Limburg Tripolar city network context. An insight into purchasing patterns helps shape the retail sector at provincial and regional levels. Research also showed how important access by car and public transport were for the most important areas. This information will be used to improve access to the region from across the borders. Further information can be had from Marc van Tilburg, Chamber of Commerce South Limburg, 00-31-43-3506532.

<http://www.maastricht.kvk.nl/>

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

BIOMED BOOSTER

[BIZ/LIFE-SCI: Maastricht, March 30]

Representatives of the University of Maastricht, the University Hospital (AZM) and LIOF, the Limburg development company, met at the LIOF building at Maastricht, March 29, to sign an undertaking that would lead to the establishment of a private company (BV), known as Biomed Booster, designed to foster bright ideas in the life-sciences and turn them into patents, products and business. Target funding would be EUR 5m and Biomed Booster would be located at the new Biopartner building, close to the hospital and university.

Fred Bollen, the interim director of the new Biomed Booster, explained how the new company would resolve the paradox and lead from ideas to new business and business development. Scouts would be on the lookout for ideas. Support would be given to proposals likely to lead to patents. Capital would be provided to develop business plans, make patent applications and develop a business. Accompanying the whole process would be a business manager. Biomed Booster would accordingly have resources in business development, patent application, financing and licensing. The range of its support would also cover feasibility studies, a business plan, cooperative programs and startup funding. The idea would be to establish two to three new start-ups each year; five new start-ups in later years, targeting five to ten patent applications annually.

Initially, 26% of the company would be owned by the university, a further 26% by AZM and LIOF would hold 48%. Initial capital would be EUR 2.5m. Additional subsidies from the province and the Ministry of Economic Affairs were also possible, contributing to the target figure. Biomed Booster would generate income from license fees and stakeholding activities.

<http://www.liof.nl>

AMOS UNIT FOR NEW ARCEO LINE

[IND: Yvoz-Ramet, March 24]

Amos delivered a 110-ton unit for the new pilot cold rolled steel line at Arcéo, part of Arcelor, in Yvoz-Ramet. The new plant at Yvoz-Ramet is starting a new production line for the vacuum plasma coating of steel, which allows for sustainable development and the recoating of steel, using a wide range of materials, metals or alloys. It also prepares future surfaces in a move towards self-cleaning anti-bacterial products.

<http://www.rtc.be>

VEBEGO AND LICOM TOGETHER

[BIZ: Heerlen, March 23]

Vebego International BV, in the shape of its subsidiary Tènce!, a temporary employment bureau, will be signing an agreement, effective April 1, with Licom Wiring systems for the use of flexible workers. Licom is a sheltered employment company that finds work for people who are far from the labor market. It assists their reintegration in the work process.

<http://www.licom.nl>

RUSSIANS SELECT LIEGE STAR

[BIZ: Liège, March 16]

Star Informatic announced in February that the "Kartografija" Mapping Production Association (MPA Kartografija) of the Russian Federation had chosen to implement Mercator in its cartographic production process. MPA Kartografija is currently the largest cartographic publisher in the region. It was founded in 1938 by the world famous Roskartografija Institute (the Russian Federal Agency for Geodesy and Cartography). MPA Kartografija combines the roles of the author-creator and publisher of a wide range of cartographic works. More than 200 highly skilled specialists, state-of-the art equipment, the latest digital technologies and many years' experience assure the development and publication of a range of high quality cartographic products.

Fundamental works, such as the Russian National Atlas, the Atlas of the World, the geographical map of Russia on a scale of 1:2 500 000; Geological and Geophysical Atlases of the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Seismographic and Tectonic Maps of Russia are examples of its work.

<http://www.star.be>

ETHIAS EUPAROS PROJECT

[BIZ: Liège, March 16]

The major Interreg III project on insurance and protection against accidents at work in government in the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion was discussed at a seminar at the Palais de Congrès in Liège by the lead partners: Ethias, the Liège insurance giant and now positioned as the second largest insurer operating in Belgium; the Rheinischer GUVV, the municipal insurance association from Düsseldorf; the Southern Region of the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Labor Inspectorate from Roermond. Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Prime Minister of Belgium's German-speaking region was also in attendance.

The organizations entered into a partnership to cover the interests of victims of industrial accidents who fall into the cross-border category, which has grown since the dismantling of the EU's internal borders. The objective is to provide a uniform system of insurance protection for employees in the public sector, unpaid employees, voluntary assistants, staff in private households, children and schoolchildren and students and to improve accident insurance, rehabilitation, the payment of allowances and more rapid implementation.

The project has included reciprocal internships, visits to rehabilitation clinics, interviews with experts from Belgium and Germany, research into the literature and processing of interviews by external experts in a comparison of the system. In view of the complexity of the project, many details are not correctly handled.

<http://www.ethias.be>

BILZEN BUSINESS WEBSITE

[BIZ: Bilzen, March 16]

The municipal administration of Bilzen is providing traders and business people with a platform, which will allow them to introduce themselves. They can put their information on the site without charge, including promotional data etc. The plan is to build up a site that will provide a platform for 1,800 independent businesses and for the liberal professions and companies from the greater Bilzen area, where they can also post their own mini-websites. The idea is not just to provide a facility for business, but also to help local people to find their way around, so that they know what is generally available. Take a look. There are also sites for the smaller municipalities.

<http://www.handelsgids.bilzen.be>

SAPPI EUR 60M FOR MAASTRICHT

[BIZ: Maastricht, March 15]

According to an article by Rob van Well in Dagblad de Limburger, the Sappi paper company is going to invest between EUR 50m and EUR 60m over the coming six years in its Maastricht paper plant. Sappi CEO De Vries recently got the go-ahead for a EUR 5.3m investment to expand the capacity of the two paper machines. Paper machine 6, the biggest in the world, for 200-400 grams of wood-free paper, will be closed down for 1.5 weeks and parts of the machine will be replaced, which will allow an increase of production capacity from the current 290,000 to 350,000 tons per annum. The second major investment will be a computerized shipping/logistics department, which can receive and dispatch raw materials and paper that are currently largely supplied by truck. The province of Limburg (NL), the municipality of Maastricht and the Belgian government are going to invest EUR 33m in the upgrading of the rail line between Maastricht and Lanaken and Sappi wants to connect its computerized shipping terminal to this line in 2007. This will cost the company around EUR 5.5m, reducing the number of trucks from 70 to 20. In addition, EUR 7m to 8m will be needed annually to upgrade production facilities.

<http://www.limburger.nl>

LRM BACKS WELTEN START-UP

[BIZ: Hasselt, March 15]

The Welten Group is an organization concerned with training and project management in the bank and insurance business. By rapid response to new developments, the Group has developed into a professional training and secondment organization with 650 staff in its branches in the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. It started business in Belgium and Germany in 2004. It looks forward to the placement of interim professionals and to project coordination in the future. LRM, the Limburg investment company, is now going to back the Belgium/Luxembourg start-up of the group. Welten has been looking for a local partner interested in both the financial and operational side. Welten is also supported by GOM-Limburg.

<http://www.lrm.be>

TRIANEL CUSTOMIZED RISK MANAGEMENT

[BIZ: Aachen, March 14]

Trianel European Trading GmbH is going to offer its customers a customized service in risk management for municipal energy providers and industrial clients. Trianel provides professional support for the entire process of the risk management cycle, with optimal guidance and monitoring of trade and business risk. This makes it the first business in the market to offer an all-encompassing risk management product.

<http://www.trianel.com>

SOLLAND IN SPRING

[BIZ: Avantis, March 10]

On the year's first spring day, the sun shone on Solland and on Avantis, the cross-border science and business park that unites Germany and the Netherlands. The foundation stone was laid for the EUR 20m investment in the Solland plant, scheduled to come on stream in September and produce 5 million ECN solar cells per annum. This is enough to cover 200,000m² and to provide power to 4,000 households.

The world solar cell market reached 927 MW in 2004, representing growth of 62% over 2003. Germany led with a startling 152% growth and has taken over market leadership from Japan. The combined Japanese, German and United States markets accounted for 78% of the world market, with Germany and Japan accounting for 69% in 2004.

Clearly Solland is in the right place at the right time. It is expected to provide an initial 150-200 jobs, possibly rising to 400 in the longer term. The reception/ceremony was an upbeat affair, which included representatives from the Dutch and NRW ministries concerned. Mayor Gresel of Heerlen was present and the Limburg Executive's Martin Eurlings gave a rousing speech, saying that the time had come to stop talking and start doing. Action was needed.

<http://www.sollandsolar.com>

LIEGE BUSINESS SCHOOL

[BIZ/EDU: Liège, March 4]

The Liège Business School, a combined HEC and University department, started off officially with a concert in the superb setting of the gold-tiered theater of the Philharmonic Hall on the Boulevard Piercot in Liège with a program of Mozart and César Franck, who had local roots.

The Minister herself, Marie-Dominique Simonet, initiated the proceedings and was followed by the president of the university, Baron Willy Legros. The School's directors are Yves Crama and Marc Dubru and the founding partners are leading businesses: NMC, Ethias, the Herstal Group, Magotteaux and Arcelor. Honorary Doctorates will be awarded to Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank (ECB), and Gabriel Hawawini, Dean of INSEAD, the Paris (Fontainebleau) Business School March 24. See the website for further information.

<http://hec.ulg.ac.be>

MERCEDES GOES IONIC

[BIZ: Liège/ Maastricht, March 2]

IONIC Software has recently been awarded a contract with the DaimlerChrysler Customer Assistance Center (CAC) to spatially enable their service center based in Maastricht. The CAC provides support to customers in over 13 countries for eight different brands of vehicles, including Mercedes-Benz.

IONIC will deploy state-of-the-art geospatial web applications based on its RedSpider LOBOS (Location Based OGC Solution) product, offering location services and efficient business solutions integrated with DCCAC's Siebel-based CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.

These applications will enable Mercedes customer service representatives to select the most appropriate dealer to assist its customers with a breakdown and maintenance needs by determining service center proximity, competence, and availability. The same IONIC services will also help manage available technicians on duty and dispatch the best assistance depending on the request. This enterprise offering will enable a much faster response and a better quality of service.

<http://www.ionicsoft.com>

EUR 9.3M L1 RADIO-TV BUILDING

[BIZ/MEDIA: Maastricht, March 1]

L1 Radio-TV moved to a new building, at the end of February, in the Maastricht district of Amby. The building, including technology and furnishings cost a total of EUR 9.3m. This brings L1 from three to two locations; the advertising department, currently in Geleen, will move to Maastricht. The Venlo location (with the editorial and technology departments) will remain in use. Currently, around 100 people work in the new building. It was designed by Satijn Architects/Engineers from Maastricht, developed by 3W Vastgoed and Trans Form architects completed the design of the equipment. The project was completed within one year. Servaas Huys, the chairman of the Limburg Broadcasting Trust (Stichting Omroep Limburg) said: "We receive government subsidies and have carefully monitored the costs. We were able to complete the building with a subsidy of EUR 2.5m from the province; the rest was financed by the receipts from the sale of the old building and a bank loan". The new telephone number is: 00-31-43-8506000.

<http://www.l1.nl>

EUROFOOD IN HASSELT

[BIZ: Hasselt, February 26]

Eurofood Belgium, the producer of nutritional supplements, is building a new branch at the Research Campus in Hasselt. This represents an investment of EUR 3m and should be operational in mid 2006. It will have its own lab and testing center to investigate special food supplements, including those for athletes. Currently the company supplies raw materials primarily amino acids to the food and pharmaceutical industries. Ten additional staff will be employed, in addition to the 15 working for the company already, and annual revenues will be around EUR 10m.

<http://www.hbvl.be>

DELTA PLAST IN FLANDERS

[BIZ: Brussels, February 25]

Delta Plast, a Swedish business specializing in master batches for the coloring of thermoplastics, has launched operations in Flanders, citing the availability of multilingual staff and the closeness of suppliers and customers among the reasons for its move into the region. The company's EUR 3m investment in a new plant at Opglabbeek near Genk is its third attempt to establish a base in Western Europe, following a five-year operation in the UK and a three-year operation at Liège.

With growth of its Flemish operation reaching around 50% this year, Delta Plast is now earmarking an additional EUR 3m for further investment at Opglabbeek, following on from its initial EUR 1m investment. It plans to grow staff in the region from 10 to 25 and is looking to add a research facility and European sales office. While the company's home operation in Sweden currently accounts for 75% of total production, the expansion plans for Opglabbeek are aimed at growing Flemish production up to the level of Sweden.

Delta Plast was established in 1986 as a family owned business and is based at Åstorp in Sweden. It has operations in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium. With some 34,000 colors in its portfolio and more being added at a rate of 25 a day, the company's annual turnover reached EUR 12.7m in 2003 based on production levels of more than 3,500 tons of material. Its mobile laboratory and on-site operations enable Delta Plast to match the colors required by customers exactly and supply the appropriate master batches for use in the thermo-plastics production process. (Source: BELGA) <http://www.deltaplast.com>

AACHEN ENGINEERING CENTER

[IND: Eching/Aachen, February 24]

DENSO Automotive Deutschland GmbH (DNDE), a subsidiary of Japan-based DENSO Corporation, announced today that it will be investing approximately EUR 13m in the construction of the Aachen Engineering Center, a new engineering center for diesel engine components. The center, located in Wegberg, Germany, will carry out application design work for diesel engine fuel injection systems.

This is DENSO's first overseas engineering center for diesel engine components. It was attracted to Wegberg by the efforts of several development companies including AGIT, GFW NRW, the Heinsberg District and the Wegberg-Wildenrath EWW.

EQUESTRIAN GAMES: EUR 230M

[BIZ/LEI: Aachen, February 22]

The Aachen World Equestrian Games in 2006, which should bring EUR 230m in to the city's coffers, are getting closer. The Aachener Zeitung interviewed the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein e.V. (ALRV) business manager, Frank Kemperman to see how things were getting on. He was asked whether there was any comparison between these world games and the competition that takes place every year in Aachen and was told that 2006 would last for two weeks instead of one and that people would have more time available, which meant a major accompanying program for the city and district.

On being asked about the pay-off for regional business, Kemperman said that he could give no guarantees, but he was convinced that it would be beneficial. The suggestion is that retail outlets should stay open later in the evenings in order to profit from the extra shoppers. Hotels, entertainment and construction would also benefit.

Mr Kemperman was then asked whether the regional economy was represented at the organizational level. The answer was yes, because business was put out to public tender and the companies from the city and district had been involved in construction. If workers come from outside, then the hotels would profit again.

<http://www.aachener-zeitung.com>

SAINT-GOBAIN EUR 36M

[BIZ: Herzogenrath, February 18]

The automotive glass producer in Herzogenrath, Saint-Gobain, has completed its most modern float glass plant in the world. This is replacing the melting plant and will be producing the Venus glass, which is used for tinted car windows. The company employs 190 and produces 195,000 tons annually.

<http://www.Aachener-zeitung.de>

EUR 10M DEPARTMENT STORE

[BIZ: Jülich, February 18]

Kaufland is to build a new department store in Jülich, which will cost EUR 10m and should employ 100. The Jülich building committee has approved the plans for a 4,000m² site on a former industrial site.

<http://www.wdr.de>

EUR 10M FOR BIOENERGY

[BIZ: Lommel, February 17]

The Limburg (B) Machiels Group, specialists in waste processing and the Lommel Farm Frites [French or freedom fries] are going to invest EUR 10m in BioEnergy. This company will focus on processing potato waste products from Farm Frites into green energy: electricity, purified water and organic fertilizer for agriculture. A new plant will start up this Fall at the Maatheide business park in Lommel and employ 15 in the first instance. The annual revenue forecast for BioEnergy is EUR 3m. BioEnergy will not only recover energy from the waste delivered by Farm Frites as electricity and water, but it will also save 100,000m³ of water annually.

Potato peel and starch will be transported 250 meters from Farm Frites in Lommel to Matheide by pipeline. The annual amount of industrial organic byproduct will be 100,000 tons and, additionally, 50,000 tons of vegetable biomass will come from the Flemish food sector. BioEnergy in Lommel will not only contribute to the secure establishment of Farm Frites in Lommel, but will also reduce truck transport by 2,500 to 3,000 units per year.

<http://www.hbvl.be>

AGIT LOOKS AT 2004

[BIZ: Aachen, February 16]

AGIT was able to look back at 2004 as a year in which it had assisted 26 tech-based businesses on the road to independence. These companies should produce 160 jobs for the region in the first year. This increases the number of start-ups assisted by AGIT since the year 2000. Key industries have been service provision, consultancy and IT.

At the press presentation on February 14, an example of the type of new companies AGIT has been able to help was presented in the form of SimpaTec Simulation & Technology Consulting GmbH, which started up in 2004. Their director Dr. Reinhard Haag gave an interesting assessment of the process and pointed to the assistance in the business plan as being vital.

The briefing also looked at the new Business Angels network, coordinated by AGIT, which last year introduced 12 private investors from the Euroregion to six businesses. In 2004, the number of foreign and German companies, supported by AGIT, rose to seven, including three in the Life Sciences. Of the 46 investor queries the Life Sciences were the investments most often sought. 50% of the requests were generated by AGIT's own marketing and acquisition strategy. The extensive marketing activity of AGIT in Life Sciences is bearing fruit.

In automobile technology progress was also being achieved and cooperation with car e.V. was being intensified, particularly in respect to cross border cooperation. Assistance from special funding from AGIT partners allowed AGIT to begin with the construction of the automotive innovation center Aachen (aic). The partners in this are six institutes of Aachen's RWTH University, the Applied Science University, FEV Engine Technology and the Research departments for automotive engineering. In 2004, there were five workshops involving aic and the German automotive suppliers.

<http://www.agit.de>

LOGISTICS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ESSERS TAKE OVER CENTRUM

[BIZ/LOG: Genk, March 4]

The Essers Group, a Genk-based family business, is taking over the Dutch logistic service provider Centrum Transport & Logistics. The Genk group had taken over 51% in CTL in November; but now the take-over is complete. The two family businesses are strengthening their position in the Western and Eastern European logistical market.

Centrum Transport is strong in Eastern Europe and has had an office in Oradea, Romania since 1992, where two major logistical centers have been established. The extra funding that Essers was providing to CTL will be used to expand CTL's logistical platforms in Rumania. The strength of the new business resides in the fact that it now has its own platforms in ten countries in Western and Eastern Europe. The Essers-Centrum combine now has 465,000m² of warehousing, 950 tractors and 2,000 trailers and employs 1,750. Its consolidated revenue for 2005 will exceed EUR 200m. (Source: Zi-Biz)

<http://www.essers.com>

EASYJET AT MAA

[BIZ/LOG: Maastricht, February 24]

Maastricht/Aachen Airport has announced that EasyJet will start flying from MAA on April 13. It will start with two flights daily to Berlin Schönefeld. The EasyJet operations are meeting the need that MAA has expressed to play a role as a low-cost airport in Meuse-Rhine and within the borders of North-Rhine Westphalia, Southeast Netherlands, Belgian Limburg and the Eastern Walloon area. It should also benefit the tourist economy [it is to be hoped that the marketing for this new route will also be done in Germany. Ed].

<http://www.maa.nl>

EUROREGION FOR ALL

[INFRA/GOV: Maastricht, March 26]

A major project involving seven partners reached official approval pre-signatory stage in Maastricht this month. It concerns access to facilities by the handicapped. The partners involved are the Aachen region, the Rhineland Palatinate, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Province of Liège, the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the Province of Limburg (B), and the Province of Limburg (NL). The point of departure is that each partner region has the knowledge, experience, and organizational strength as regards the integration of the handicapped and that a structured and active Euroregional exchange of this information would lead to improvement.

The project is concerned, on the one hand, with official management, civil servants, cities and advisory organizations and providers of services; and, on the other hand, with groups of organizations for the handicapped and for the elderly, such as: municipal platforms for the handicapped and councils for the elderly. In order to achieve the objective required, products have been developed. They included a catalogue, providing examples from the seven regions involved; an exchange of information via educational meetings and symposia; paying attention to the current status of legislation in the seven regions; an environment without barriers; active participation of the handicapped in the decision-making process; integration into the labor market and the empowerment of people with handicaps.

These exchanges are to lead to concrete agreements and results. A competition was opened for municipalities in the region to submit projects for improvements and easy access for a prize. Continuation of the high level group as an official organ of cross-border cooperation to promote activities was also advocated. In concrete terms, symposia will be held in the seven regions. Each region will organize an educational meeting in which the above-mentioned topics are central. Luxembourg is already far advanced in removing obstacles to the participation of the handicapped in social life and Limburg can learn something from them. Particular attention is being paid to organizational training for the handicapped and the elderly, so that they can be better equipped to influence policy and play a more active role.

This part of the project is very important to Dutch Limburg in the context of the WMO to develop an environment for the handicapped without obstacles. The provision of the catalogue will be in the form of a toolbox in which practical information on projects, construction plans, examples of municipal regulations that qualify as best practice will be given.

The establishment of the Euroregional competition for the seven regions gives extra encouragement to thinking about an approach to removing obstacles to social participation by the handicapped. The award of the prize for the most encouraging best practice will also received public attention. The prize will be awarded by the Minister at a final meeting in North-Rhine Westphalia. The high level group will continue to direct the project and provide new ideas.

The total costs of the project are budgeted at EUR 598,028 and there will be an Interreg contribution of 50%, EUR 299,014. As the Grand Duchy and Rhineland Palatinate belong in part to DeLux Euroregion, this Euroregion as well as Meuse-Rhine will provide a contribution of EUR 78,519 and EUR 220,495. The other half of the costs will be borne by the partner regions. Limburg (NL) will contribute EUR 49,526. The final decision has to be taken at the executive level.

<http://www.limburg.nl>

SUPERCOMPUTER CROSSES BORDER

[SCI-TECH: Maastricht, March 2]

A high level meeting between the Netherlands and North-Rhine Westphalia was held at the computer center in the Jülich Research center, where a decision was taken to make the Jülich supercomputer available to parties in Limburg. This involves the University of Maastricht, the Jülich Research Center, the Limburg University Center (to be the University of Hasselt), DSM and Philips Research in Eindhoven and Aachen in a cooperative IT infrastructure and toolbox for research and innovation at the highest level. The connection fee of EUR 700,000 has been raised through by a EU-funded Interreg project. The project will be assessed at a later date to determine whether the Netherlands, as a whole, should be linked in to it.

The supercomputer was delivered by IBM on February 2004 and is Europe's largest. A 1312 processor cluster based on 41 of the company's P690 servers gives users access to 60 terabytes of data capacity, the equivalent of 60 trillion bytes, or roughly 16 million 1,000-page books. Jülich will be capable of a peak performance of 8.9 teraflops, the equivalent of 8.9 trillion operations per second, according to IBM. Maastricht, Aachen, Liège and Diepenbeek have started regional financing with grid computing in the life sciences.

<http://www.limburg.nl>

ONCOMETHYLOME-VERIDEX

[LIFE-SCI: Liège/Durham, NC, March 1]

OncoMethylome Sciences, a company developing advanced molecular diagnostic solutions for individualized cancer treatment and early detection of cancer, announced January 19 a license agreement with Veridex LLC, a Johnson & Johnson company. Under the agreement, Veridex receives an exclusive global license from OncoMethylome Sciences to molecular prostate cancer assays. In addition, both parties have agreed on a development program and an option to license additional assays in the prostate cancer field.

OncoMethylome Sciences will receive an upfront payment, R&D payments, technology milestone payments, several sales milestone payments and royalties on Veridex' sales of the assays. Financial details of the agreement have not been disclosed.

DNA methylation is a normal, naturally occurring process in regulating gene expression, but OncoMethylome Sciences' assays measure DNA hyper-methylation of specific gene regions that are associated with different stages of cancer. The technology was originally developed at Johns Hopkins University, where oncologists demonstrated that assays sensitive to the methylation status of the GST-Pi promoter gene region provide diagnostic sensitivity and specificity for the detection of prostate cancer. OncoMethylome Science's R&D staff has completed the initial development of the assay and has initiated prospective clinical trials for its validation in various leading cancer centers in the USA.

In scientific publications, the GST-Pi gene is cited as the most common methylation based alteration occurring in human prostate cancer. In these studies, more than 1,150 cancer cases and 230 non-cancer controls have been tested for GST-Pi methylation. In each of the studies, sensitivity and specificity results validated the potential of methylated GST-Pi as a marker of choice for early detection of prostate cancer.

<http://www.oncomethylome.com>

FIGHTING ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

[LIFE-SCI: Liège, February 28]

The EUR-INTAFAR network is a project within FP6, the European Community Framework Program for Research etc, receiving EUR 11,000,000 EU funding and involving 16 EU labs coordinated by the Center for Protein Engineering at the University of Liège, led by Professor Jean-Marie Frère. It holds its first plenary session on the 'Inhibition of New Targets for Fighting Antibiotic Resistance', in Liège on February 28.

Although antibiotics have drastically reduced illness and death from infectious diseases, bacteria have exhibited a remarkable capacity to quickly become resistant to one or several classes of antibiotics. Up to 40% of the infections were caused by bacteria resistant to at least one and 15% to 3 or more antibiotics.

The increase in antibiotic resistance is thus a global problem, both for nosocomial as well as community-acquired infections. In addition, over the past ten years the pharmaceutical industry has progressively diminished its investment in antibiotic research. A return to the "pre-antibiotic" era has even been forecasted. Hence the problem of resistance can only be solved by a multidisciplinary and international approach, which will require a better understanding of the fundamental aspects of bacterial physiology, growth and multiplication mechanisms, areas which have been relatively neglected in the recent past when compared to eukaryotic systems.
<http://www.ulg.ac.be/cingprot/intafar.html>

REPROGRAMMING STEM CELLS

[LIFE-SCI: Aachen, February 23]

Professor Albrecht Müller from the University of Würzburg and Professor Martin Zenke from the RWTH Aachen have succeeded, with cooperation from colleagues in Heidelberg in showing that it is possible to reprogram adult stem cells. The researchers will be publishing their results in the next edition of the EMBO Journal, showing that the chromatin structure of neural stem cells from the brain can be influenced by special substances that can turn them into blood cells. This supports the theory that modification of the chromatin structure can lead to an increase in the development options of tissue stem cells. It will be interesting to see whether bone marrow stem cells that are easier to access and are used routinely in transplantation can be reprogrammed into nerve cells. These cells could then be used for therapy in neurological diseases.

<http://www.rwth-aachen.de>

MOLECULAR MEDICINE 2

[LIFE-SCI: Eindhoven, February 16]

Philips Research, Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e), Maastricht University and Academic Hospital Maastricht have signed a letter of intent to found a Center for Molecular Medicine (CMM). The parties involved want to establish a top European institute to develop path-breaking research and innovation in healthcare. The CMM business plan for will be presented to the partners in mid-March as part of the decision process. The High Tech Campus Eindhoven is intended to be the main location of the CMM.

Molecular medicine stands for a revolution in healthcare. Increasing insights in genetics, molecular biology and biochemistry, in combination with new technologies, generate new, revolutionary applications.

In the CMM, research will be done in the fields of molecular imaging techniques as well as of molecular diagnostics, with an impact on molecular therapy. As a result of the special nature of this new institute, research will soon lead to innovations. The main office of the CMM, which will be located at the High Tech Campus Eindhoven, will receive scientific support from Eindhoven University of Technology (biomedical technological research) and from Maastricht University and the Academic Hospital Maastricht; Maastricht will be the main site for clinical and fundamental biological and biomedical research, while Eindhoven will be the center for technology. The partners in the consortium are already cooperating in the field of cardiovascular disease, in the 'Molecular Imaging of Ischemic Heart Disease' project, which started recently. The plan is to establish a major European institute. This joint effort will allow the Center for Molecular Medicine to play a leading role in the competitive, international, field of biomedical research. The full potential of translational molecular biology enabled research in medicine, which provides the basis of molecular medicine, can only be exploited optimally by close cooperation in a wide range of areas of expertise, such as biomedical technology, molecular biology, bio-informatics, chemistry, physics, electronics, engineering, mathematics, pharmacology, and clinical medicine.

Philips Research, Eindhoven University of Technology, Maastricht University and the University Hospital Maastricht (AZM) together have much of the required expertise at their disposal. In addition, through close collaboration with Philips Medical Systems, hardware options and applications can be developed. In order to acquire complementary expertise, the CMM will also work closely with other Dutch universities, and with the Forschungszentrum Jülich and the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH) in Aachen (Germany). Additionally, cooperation is being sought with leading institutes in the United States and China. [Strange that they don't mention Liège, which has a good track record in the molecular business. DSM is not mentioned either. Ed]
<http://www.unimaas.nl>

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