



DOING BUSINESS IN THE EUREGIO MEUSE-RHINE
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CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

BICENTENARY 2004

[COM: Maastricht/Aachen, December 19]

The Maastricht and Aachen Chambers also have a shared past. In 2004, it will be 200 years since Napoleon Bonaparte set up the Chambers of Commerce in South Limburg and Aachen. Eupen and Verviers also celebrate their 200th anniversary this year.



The Chambers do not want to let this milestone go unnoticed and so a joint logo has been developed and a number of special events will take place in 2004.

January 7: the Bicentenary speech 2004 by the Chamber of Commerce South Limburg at NedCar in Born;

February 17: Annual General Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Aachen;

April 1: Symposium Euroregion 'Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow' at the Chamber of Commerce in Aachen;

April 8: Presentation of the South Limburg Chamber's jubilee book at Mondo Verde in Landgraaf;

April 27: Location Symposium at the Chamber in Aachen;

May 14: Entrepreneurs' party at the South Limburg Chamber in the MECC, Maastricht;

May 15: The Business Ball in the Lenné Pavilion in Aachen;

July 15: Euroregional youth in Aachen;

September 23: Jubilee celebration at the Euroregional Chambers in the City Hall and Cathedral in Aachen.

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

A VISIT TO CeBIT

[COM: Maastricht, December 19]

Following the successful trip to CeBIT, the world's biggest IT trade fair, last year the chamber is planning a trip this year too. CeBIT 2004 takes place March 18 through 24 in Hanover. The sectors represented are IT equipment and systems; telecommunications and networks; software and services; IT-engineering, security, etc. In 2003, 700,000 people visited the fair. They were received by 6,600 companies from 60 countries in an exhibition area of 250,000 m².

On March 22 and/or March 23, the Meuse-Rhine Chambers will be organizing a one-day trip by chartered aircraft. It will leave Maastricht-Aachen Airport at 07.30 hrs and returning at 20.00 hrs. Costs will be EUR 175. -, including airfare, airport tax, local transport (underground) and the guide. The cost of admission is EUR 32. - and catalogue EUR 25.-.

For more information or to register: phone or mail Ardy Assink, International Affairs manager, on:00 31.43.3506511, e-mail aassink@maastricht.kvk.nl

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

CROSS-BORDER HELP DESKS

[COM: Aachen, November 12]

The Chambers of Commerce in Aachen and South Limburg have opened their first cross border helpdesk in Aachen. Markets, permits, partners and questions that are important to people doing business across borders can be put to the information desk. This means a closer relationship between the Aachen and Maastricht Chambers. The help desk has a portal function with information on business and general information. There will be 6-man team at the locations in Aachen, Heerlen and Maastricht. Starters will be directed to the Aachen Chambers or the Starterscentrum in Heerlen and back office experts will deal with special topics.

<http://www.aachen.ihk.de>

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

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

QUANTA CHOOSES AACHEN

[BIZ: Aachen, November 28]

Quanta Computer Inc. is the world's largest contract maker of notebook computers and Taiwan's fifth-largest listed company with market capitalization of USD 6.96 bn. Its monthly sales have set historical highs for 12 straight months and its Q3 net profit has risen 30 percent year-on-year to USD \$111m. Quanta will be opening its European service center in Aachen in 2004 and is expected to employ between 150 and 170. In addition to servers, Quanta produces LCD monitors/TVs and mobile telephones, but principally notebooks. The business records an annual production of 9.6 million notebooks more than 30% of the world market with a revenue volume of USD 10bn and is consequently the world market leader. The organization's customers include the most important computer manufacturers, such as Hewlett-Packard/Compaq and Dell. One of the two managers of the new QCG Computer GmbH, Mike Hsieh, knows Aachen as he was a student there. In cooperation with the regional development company AGIT he established an IT company in Aachen in 1998 and now there's Quanta.

<http://www.quantatw.com>

EUR 160M FOR AACHEN TALENTS

[BIZ/LOG: Montreal, November 27]

Bombardier Transportation and its consortium partner Elin EBG Traction have received an order from the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) for 60 additional four-car Bombardier* TALENT* electric multiple units (EMUs) to be used for regional and commuter services across Austria. The contract, which follows an initial order for 51 TALENT trains placed in 2001 by ÖBB, has a total value of EUR 215 million, with Bombardier's share accounting for some EUR 160 million. The new trains are scheduled to be delivered between July 2005 and the end of 2006.

Good for the 900 employed by the Talbot plant in Aachen and good for Bombardier. The trains will be built at Bombardier Transportation's site in Aachen, Germany. Elin EBG Traction will supply part of the electrical equipment from Vienna, Austria. Commissioning of the vehicles will be undertaken at ÖBB's Technical Services facility in Vienna.

<http://www.transport.bombardier.com/>

WI-KA IN BAESWEILER (D)

[BIZ: Baesweiler, November 18]

Baesweiler is getting a new local business. Wi-Ka is taking over the PCB GmbH Printed Circuit Company. This involves the take-over of a 1,360 m² hall and 360-m² office building, which was originally a building leased by the development company in May 2000. As PCB is in the same branch, employees and equipment will be taken over by the new company from the old company which has become insolvent.

<http://www.dp-electronics.de/#>

SYNTHETIC CORKS

[BIZ: Thimister-Clermont, November 13]

The leading synthetic cork producer Nomacorc has now officially opened its European headquarters in Thimister-Clermont. The company has invested EUR 5m this year in its new building and equipment. The company had been located in Eupen. In 2003, Nomacorc produced around 600 million artificial corks and next year the target figure is one billion. The Nomacorc product was introduced onto the market by Marc Noël, originally from Eupen, in 1998. The company currently employs 120 in the US and 50 in Belgium.

<http://www.brf.be>

Q-PARK EUR 14M REFIT

[BIZ: Maastricht, November 12]

Saturday November 15 will see an opening ceremony for Q-Park's parking garage under the Vrijthof in Maastricht, preceded by an underground breakfast for 700 guests. The refitted Q-Park has 445 diagonally oriented parking slots, allowing easy access and exit. It also has a public parking area for bicycles with room for 225 bicycles, public lavatories and various automats. Total investment is put at EUR 14m.

The project is a public-private operation based on a contract signed on November 26, 2002, first agreement of this type in the Netherlands, between Q-Park and the City of Maastricht. The contractor was 3W and subcontractor was Van Kan-Jongen, a subsidiary of Bouwbedrijven Jongen BV, who were responsible for the construction work, which was completed within ten months.

Cooperation is ongoing between 3W and Q-Park for new parking garages in the Mosae Forum, the Maastricht market area project. The new garage has two entrances and a lift that services opposite the Theatre on the Vrijthof.

<http://www.q-park.nl>

EUR 42M TONGRES LEISURE PARK

[BIZ/LEI: Tongres, November 10]

A new leisure park is to be built in Tongres with an ancient Roman flavor, as befits Belgium's oldest town, home to the Gallo-Roman Museum. The leisure park will include a hotel and a Roman style swimming facility . The park will cover 22 ha and open in 2006. The project is expected to produce 250 jobs and attract 250,000 visitors annually. Costs of the project are projected at EUR 42m. The Flemish government has promised a grant of EUR 16.5m.

<http://www.hbvl.be>

125 YEARS IN EUPEN

[BIZ: Eupen, November 10]

Hendrichs & Cie, who have been in business in Eupen as a wholesale business in painters and decorators requisites for 125 years, has opened its new Profi Service Center. They opened a new retail hall in Werthplatz to mark their first century. The new premises in the Hochstrasse will include an office building and a warehouse for professional clients. Retail clients will still be able to buy what they want at the Werthplatz in smaller quantities.

<http://www.netecho.info>

SUCCESSORS TO LIEGE STEEL

[BIZ: Liège, November 6]

Galvanized into action by the incipient demise of the hot-rolled steel industry in Liège, the organization, known as *Avenir du pays de Liège*, is marshalling its forces under the leadership of Guy Mathot (formerly tipped to head the new urban agglomeration in the Liège basin), and Michel Foret, the Walloon minister - also tipped to succeed the present governor, although there seemed to be some doubt about his interest.

The grand plan is to increase the gross domestic product per head of the population and to reduce unemployment to close to the European average in an area which has a population of some 600,000. First moves are expected in 2004. There will be various bodies guiding the new plan and the focus will be on existing business, downstream steel, new technologies, microtechnology, aerospace, life sciences and water management. The whole range of multimodal logistics with a reference to the importance of value added logistics is another focus. Major construction projects include the new Palace of Justice, the water purification stations, the 4th lock at Lanaye and an ambitious project for the refurbishment of Seraing. Services industries too will center on health, education and culture in the broadest sense of the word.

<http://www.lesoir.be>

BOSE EUR 5M IN TONGRES

[BIZ: Tongres, November 6]

Sound system producer Bose has invested EUR 5m in its European distribution center in Tongres. There are currently 7,800 m² of storage space and 1,100 m² of office space for 46 people. On completion of the work next year there will be room for a staff of 80. Bose in Tongres distributes products to Western Europe and can also provide goods for importers in Eastern Europe, Africa, India, Vietnam and the Middle East. The company recorded revenues of EUR 13.2m last year. (Source: Dagblad de Limburger)

<http://www.limburger.nl>

SUNDAY SHOPPING SUCCESS

[BIZ: Aachen, November 3]

Additional Sunday shopping sessions are planned, following the success of the most recent one in Aachen. The chairman of the Retail Trade Association, Manfred Piana, spoke of shopping Sundays at the beginning of May 2004 and in October, also to celebrate the opening of Aachen's new pedestrian zone.

<http://www.brf.be>

BRIMBERG INVESTS EUR 10M

[BIZ: Aachen, November 2]

The Aachen printer and publisher, M.Brimberg, is to invest EUR 10m in a new 1,000 m² machine plant which will be able to process up to 10% more paper and ensure the future of the location, which employs 400 and prints newspapers for publishers throughout Germany. Currently it uses 75 tons of paper daily. The company offers consulting pre-press/ctp printing web offset finishing folding and shipping.

[Source: IHK]

<http://www.brimberg.de>

IPTE TAKES OVER PRODEL

[BIZ: Genk, November 2]

IPTE, a market leader in the supply of production equipment for the electronics industry, which develops turnkey automation systems and is a contract manufacturer of printed circuit boards and assembly, employing 1200 in Europe and the US, is taking over the Prodel Group, which supplies flexible assembly systems and solutions to various industries. This company has been active in France for 45 years and now employs 80 in Paris, Dallas, Texas and Frankfurt. Sales for 2002 were EUR 8m.

<http://www.ipte.com>

EUR 13M FOR GRENSLANDHALLEN

[BIZ: Hasselt, November 2]

The Grenslandhallen, the trade fair and conference center in Hasselt, is going to build a new event center, which will create 400 direct and indirect jobs, and provide space for 16,000 music lovers including 10,500 seats. The investment is worth EUR 13m and will be partly subsidized by the Limburg development company LRM's, subsidiary Lisom NV.

<http://www.grenslandhallen.be>

MACTAC BUYS MULTIFIX

[BIZ: Genk, October 31]

MACTac Europe has entered into an agreement with Multi-fix nv to purchase its business and manufacturing facility located in Genk. Multi-fix nv founded in 1949 is a manufacturer of pressure sensitive materials mainly specialized in marking and decorative products. With global sales of EUR 15m, the Company is recognized in the visual communication market for the quality of its products.

The combined Companies will take advantage of complementary production capacities and develop synergies in terms of product development in their core graphic product ranges, that is marking films, laminating films and digital products. This transaction will enable both companies to further develop their capacity to launching new products.

They will continue to build upon their strong base in a market where they are recognized as major innovative and creative players.

MACtac and Multif-fix will continue to operate as separate entities. The association of the two Companies will create an even stronger basis in terms of technological and R&D capabilities.

<http://www.mactac-europe.com/en/index.html>

PARSYTEC: EUR 2.2M KOREAN ORDER

[IND: Aachen, October 30]

Aachen-based, Parsytec AG – the world's leading supplier of surface inspection systems for strip products such as steel, aluminum and paper – has received an order from the world's most profitable steel maker, POSCO in Korea. The order value is EUR 2.2m for two inspection systems for the #1 ACL and #2 CAL production lines in Pohang, and software upgrades for further 4 Parsytec inspection systems already installed in Pohang. Since releasing its HTx 4.2 Series in summer 2001, Parsytec now has sold licenses to more than 150 sites worldwide. This makes the HTx 4.2 Series the most successful steel and paper inspection product ever.

This follows an order from Aluminum Norf GmbH to equip the Hot Strip Mill No. 2 with Parsytec's leading inspection technology. After pioneering surface inspection of hot rolled aluminum last year, this order from the world's largest hot rolling mill underlines Parsytec's momentum in the aluminum market.

<http://www.parsytec.de>

WINNING GERMAN PACKAGE

[BIZ: Linnich, October]

SIG Combibloc has won the German Packaging Competition 2003 with the machine concept of the combishape packaging system . The Deutsches Verpackungsinstitut e.V. (German Packaging Institute) awarded the prize for the 26th time this year. Each year this prize honors outstanding achievements and developments. The aim is to highlight exemplary and future-oriented approaches in the packaging jungle for consumers and industry.

The official prize ceremony for the award-winning CSA F10, a filling machine for multi-shape, aseptic beverage cartons, took place on October 7, 2003 in the course of the FachPack trade fair for packaging and marking technology in Nuremberg. The patron of the competition is Wolfgang Clement, Federal Minister for Economics and Labor. By winning the German Packaging Competition, SIG Combibloc has automatically qualified for the international packaging competition WorldStar held by the World Packaging Organization.

The SIG Combibloc Group is one of the world's leading systems suppliers of aseptic beverage cartons and filling machines. Employing approx. 3,700 people, the company recorded a turnover of EUR 939m in 2002. The largest regional company SIG Combibloc GmbH, which is based in Linnich, recorded a turnover of around EUR 584m with a workforce of 1,700 employees. SIG Combibloc is a division of SIG Holding AG, Neuhausen am Rheinfall.

<http://www.sigcombibloc.com>

LOGISTICS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

BELGIAN LOGISTICAL TERMS

[LOG: Brussels, November 28]

There is now, for the first time, an official document in Belgium that gives a synthesis of the general terms and conditions applicable to logistical contract performance. This has existed in the Netherlands for some time and has been set up by Belotra, the logistical arm of Febetra –the Belgian carriers association - See the link below. The text has received the approval of the leading transport authorities in Belgium, including SAV, UPTR and CBE (the Federation of Belgian Forwarders). In concrete terms, the general terms and conditions are primarily concerned with storage. The responsibilities and obligations of the service providers and clients are set forth. A large number of possible sources of damage (loss of goods and damage) are specified and possible solutions are presented.

<http://www.febetra.be>

TGV LIEGE-MAASTRICHT

[INFRA: Liège, November 25]

The cities of Liège and Maastricht signed a Declaration of Intent, at a meeting in Liège on November 25, to develop a Liège-Maastricht TGV connection. The recitals in the preamble included support for rail connections by the EU; the fact that Liège wants to be a logistical hub; the fact that Belgian railways are a determining factor; and that the length of time it takes to travel the 30 km from Maastricht to Liège is too long.

Further, the link would be a major economic factor in developing tourism, commercial services and transfrontier activities. There needs to be a list of the financial implications as there has not been a transfrontier study of this issue for more than a decade.

Such a link would be in the common interest of the Walloon country and the Netherlands. Both Aachen and Heerlen are also working on TGV connections. The municipality of Sittard/Geleen has given its support in principle. Support has also come from Maastricht University, the Chamber of Commerce for South Limburg, the Tourist Authority, the MECC and LIOF.

There has been an Interreg application relating to Maastricht's candidacy for participation in a high-speed train platform and a request for 50% European funding in the cost of a feasibility and market study. The cities represented by their respective mayors have accordingly resolved to establish cooperation between the interested parties to:

1. List all the investment required for a Maastricht-Liège TGV connection with a whole range of options, each being presented with its costs and running implications;
2. undertake market research based on an estimate of the number of travelers both in the short-term and the long-term;
3. Where possible a project destined to assess the viability of such a connection should entail the establishment of such a connection during the 2005 TEFAF in Maastricht.

<http://www.liege.be>

STAWAG TAKES ON DRAINS

[INFRA: Aachen, November 25]

The Aachen sewer system, which is worth several hundred million of Euros, is going to be outsourced following the Krefeld model. A dedicated sewerage company is going to be established and will be managed by Stawag, the city's power utility. This will allow synergy effects, which, in the words of the Aachener Zeitung, mean that if Stawag wants to lay cables then they have already got the drains there to provide them with a pathway. City employees, responsible for this utility, will be employed by Stawag. The financial advantage for city funds will be in the tens of millions, according to the newspaper.

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

MORE FREQUENT POLAR FLIGHTS

[LOG: Liège/Purchase, N.Y., November 12]

Polar Air Cargo has announced that it is increasing the frequency of its flights between Liège, Belgium; Taipei, Taiwan, and Seoul, South Korea, providing its customers with daily departures Monday through Saturday. The new flights will begin November 18. The service began operating August 20, 2003 at an initial level of 3 flights per week using Boeing 747-400 freighters. From its Asian hub in Seoul and its European hub in Liège, Polar will provide connections for onward, connecting service to multiple destination in Europe, Asia, and the United States.

<http://www.polaraircargo.com>

EUR 10M WEISWEILLER BYPASS

[INFRA: Weiswiller, November 9]

A EUR 10m bypass, which, in future, will link the Eschweiler district of Dürwiss to the no.4 highway, has just started construction. The first thing to be built is a 150m bridge over the Inde, which will cost EUR 2m. The bridge is expected to be completed at the beginning of 2005.

<http://www.wdr.de>

SCHENKER LOOKS SOUTH

[LOG: Liege, October 31]

Schenker, the logistics service provider, is negotiating with three Walloon companies on a possible take-over. The company wants to develop its presence in the Walloon country. It opened its first office in Liège at the beginning of October, where four are employed for Schenker's French-speaking clients in Belgium.

<http://www.truck-business.com/>

CARIM AND ORGANON

[LIFE-SCI: Oss & Maastricht, November 26]

A unique collaborative association between the Cardiovascular Research Institute Maastricht (CARIM) at Maastricht University and Organon the largest Dutch pharmaceutical company started recently. The objective is to identify new targets for innovative drugs to prevent and treat atherosclerosis. This joint project is being subsidized by Senter (Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs).

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the Western world; atherosclerosis is frequently the underlying cause. The therapies currently available for inhibiting the process of atherosclerosis and therefore the risk of cardiovascular disease only have a limited effectiveness. Consequently, there is a great need for new therapeutic approaches.

The joint research program of CARIM and Organon will provide new potential targets for the treatment of the various stages of atherosclerosis. These targets will be evaluated for potential drug research. If proven suitable they will be included for follow-up research and development in Organon's cardiovascular research program.

Organon is enthusiastic about the collaboration with CARIM. Dr Ton Rijnders, Director of Research at Organon Oss: "The combination of industrial technology and academic expertise in the field of atherosclerosis is unique and essential for Organon in maintaining a competitive position with truly innovative drugs in the field of cardiovascular disease." "We consider this collaboration highly important," says Prof. Dr Harry Struijker Boudier, Scientific Director of CARIM. "The joint research program on the genomics of atherosclerosis enables us to effectively assess the value of new targets and to use them for the further development of therapeutic drugs."

Organon - headquartered in Roseland, NJ, USA - creates and markets prescription medicines that improve the health and quality of human life. Organon strives to be one of the top global pharmaceutical companies in each of its core therapeutic fields: gynecology, central nervous system, cardiovascular disease and anesthesiology. Organon products are sold in over 100 countries, of which more than 60 have an Organon subsidiary. Organon is the human health care business unit of Akzo Nobel.

CARIM is a research institute of Maastricht University. The institute trains researchers from the Netherlands and abroad. Its 300 CARIM staff members conduct fundamental research in the field of cardiovascular disease and translate the research findings to human health applications. CARIM research focuses on three main areas: thrombosis/hemostasis, heart function/heart failure and vascular biology/atherosclerosis.

<http://www.organon.com>

SPINE MOVER WINS THE PRIZE

[LIFE-SCI: Aachen/Langerwehe/November 26]

A seat with 3-dimensional mobility for people with a mobility handicap, developed by the inventor Gisela Schon from Langerwehe near Aachen, together with doctors and engineers from the universities of Ilmenau, Jena and Saarbrücken, has won the EUR 173,000 innovation prize from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research at this December's Medica 2003 fair held in Düsseldorf.

The prize, which is valid for two years, is for developments in medical technology/devices. The seat is for those who have a mobility handicap, but also for people like truck drivers and locomotive engineers, or office workers whose work does not allow them sufficient movement, making them susceptible to lower back complaints. The group will be working on a chair, where the seat moves cyclically in all three spatial dimensions. In this way the normal pattern of the movement of the pelvis in walking will be transmitted to the trunk and back. The objective is to lessen lower back pain and prevent it by means of this movement. People, who have a disability, profit from this spine mover. The first issue to be resolved is whether an individual's hip movement can be derived from the dimensions of the body and other biometric data, because it is impossible to determine the natural gait of those who are already handicapped. Measurements have to be taken of the individual gait of 100 female and 100 male healthy subjects. This development will offer prospects to a wide range of the population. Gisela Schon has received considerable help from AGIT in her work.

<http://www.agit.de>

THE MODULAR HOSPITAL

[LIFE-SCI: Aachen/Maastricht November 30]

European healthcare systems are on the threshold of major change. In Germany too, at the beginning of 2004, healthcare will be financed on the basis of treatment (care-driven/demand) instead of on the basis of bed capacity (supply). The result will be a smaller budget. Together with LogicaCMG, the University Hospital, the Klinikum in Aachen (UKA) has started to develop a modular hospital to conform to government requirements.

Modular means making an attempt will be made to carry out care activities, like intensive care (IC) or intermediate care (IMC) on a joint basis. Currently each medical discipline has its own IC department. By creating a joint IC department, where each medical discipline can bring its patients, there will be a great deal more flexibility, a better level of bed occupancy and lower costs. The new organizational structure is patient-oriented with equal treatment or nursing intensity in one treatment unit.

In addition to clustering modules, cooperation between modules will be largely structured and organized. Where patients cross boundaries between medical clusters, the quality of the treatment will be improved by optimizing interdisciplinary cooperation. Further on in this direction, the connection between extramural care will be improved, so that the care chain functions better. A good example of this in Aachen is the Disease Management Program (DMP) for women with breast cancer, where the whole chain from the GP or large-scale research via medical treatment (operation, plastic surgery) to rehabilitation and aftercare are organized on an integrated basis.

In addition to improved care for the patient, there is the objective of increasing the satisfaction of hospital staff and operating on a more effective and more efficient basis. This is achieved by making costs transparent and implementing the system on the basis of internal accounting between the departments that supply services to one another. For Aachen with 1500 beds and 6,000 staff, the financing plans mean, in addition to a smaller budget within two years, an attempt to reduce the length of bed stays and a reduction of the number of beds within three to five years. In an early stage the UKA saw that its change to a modular hospital could not be achieved alone and looked for a partner and found LogicaCMG as the partner.

In May 2003 a start was made on the development of the UKA concept. The modular hospital concept that is going to be marketed by UKA and LogicaCMG together is interesting for hospitals in countries where financing on the basis of Diagnostic Related Groups (DRGs) has been implemented, because of its cost transparency. In addition to the modular hospital concept, LogicaCMG will ensure that there are products in the form of implementation support (project management and consultancy) in areas that include organization, processes and tools, such as software extensions to SAP, Siemens Soarian, SAS Datawarehouses and that reports can be supplied.

<http://www.logiacmg.nl>

BIORIVER DECLARATION SIGNED

[LIFE-SCI: Aachen, November 13]

Cities, Chambers and Institutions throughout the Rhineland have signed the BioRiver declaration. The Aachen Economic region, representatives of the University, the President of the Chamber, Michael Wirtz, and 17 mayors have also signed it. The declaration states that Biotechnology and the Life Sciences are part of the future of the state of North Rhine Westphalia. Most of Life Science businesses are located in the Rhineland between Aachen, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Krefeld, Cologne and Wuppertal and BioRiver wants to make a name for itself in the national and international competition for key locations. The idea is that people should work together on this for their shared benefits.

<http://www.aachen.ihk.de>

CRYSTALIZING PROTEINS

[LIFE-SCI: Aachen, November 4]

Dr Kurt Hoffmann of the Bioanalysis Department at the Institute for Molecular Biotechnology at Aachen has developed a new process for protein crystallization by measurement parameters and has registered a patent. This will be submitted, as a project, to the Berlin Federal Ministry of Economics and further developed and programmed in cooperation with five other companies and the Fraunhofer Institute for Laser Technology.

Virtually all sickness can be traced back to protein malfunction: which is why researchers construct computer models to reveal the complex 3D structures of these large biological molecules. To determine a protein's structure, crystallographers have to first crystallize the protein and analyze the result in crystals by a process called X-ray diffraction. Precise measurements of thousands diffracted intensities from each crystal help the scientist map the proper position of atoms within each molecule. This is the most difficult part in determining the structure of protein - the target crystal is only a tenth of a millimeter in size and it can be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Crystallography allows scientists studying protein crystals to determine the 3D molecular structure of proteins, other large molecules and some viruses. With improved understanding of molecular structures and the interaction of proteins, drug designers may be able to develop new drug treatments that target specific human, animal and plant diseases. (Source: Ute Steinbusch)

<http://www.agit.de>

SOFT MATTER COMPOSITES

[SCI-TEC/LIFE-SCI, Jülich, November 4]

An international soft matter composites network of excellence, established by the Jülich Research Center, is to receive funding from the EU's Sixth Framework Program (FP6). Thus far, only 17 of the 430 applications for European networks in materials science are to receive FP6 funding. Jülich's proposal is one of them and the only one from non-university research centers in Germany.

Networks of excellence are a new development tool for the EU, which not only allows the concentration of top-level research, but also integrated European research in particular areas. SoftComp, as it is known, was approved in October. It is headed by Professor Dr. Dieter Richter of the Institute of Materials Science in Jülich. It includes six research institutes, among them the Weizmann-Institut from Israel and the Institut Curie from Paris. There are 15 university groups from seven countries and seven industrial operations. They want to research soft matter from automotive tires to the cell membrane, which includes a great part of our world, not the least human beings themselves; we are made of such substances, neither as hard as steel nor as yielding as gas or simple fluids.

"This is the first time in our history of science and technology that we are in the position to discover organizational principles of biology in the development of functional materials", says Dr. Richter. These materials are interesting from an economic and scientific point of view, particular because of their self-organizing capacity. Often completely new characteristics emerge when different molecules combine, as in the case of lipids and proteins in biological membranes.

Technical applications for molecular combinations are possible with the addition of polymers (long molecule chains) to diesel fuel, keeping it fluid at low temperatures. Another polymer increases the efficiency of Tensides in washing powder. Less washing powder is needed, but these developments are still at an early stage. SoftComp has selected five areas of specialization: composite colloids, self-organizing surface systems with additives, complex membranes, complex systems made of polymers – like jelly and glass from composite material. The network is organizing summer schools, workshops and exchanges and training for young scholars, including a Eurothesis program, which allows PhD students to stay at partner institutes.

<http://www.fz-juelich.de>