TA News from Europe – the latest headlines from European Technology Assessment organisations.

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ITA (Austria)

Help us shape Europe's future! Healthy food? Clean energy? Take part in this online consultation and tell us what you expect for your future: This is your chance to communicate your ideas and needs to EU decision makers. We want to know what matters, in order to forward those recommendations to Europe's largest research program, Horizon 2020. Please follow the link to take part in the survey.

Neuro-Enhancement – What is really possible? In August, the ITA finished a three-year project on neuro-enhancement. Do we know enough about the brain to chemically or electrically improve its function? In more than 100 events taking place in 19 countries, the EU-funded NERRI project tried to answer this and other questions. Formats ranged from science cafes to student and teacher workshops. An online consultation explored the acceptability of chemical or technical methods among citizens. Main outputs were the stirring of the European debate, insights into individual hopes and fears concerning neuro-enhancement and new perspectives on actual technical possibilities and limitations. Detailed results will be published shortly, for updates go to www.oeaw.ac.at/ita.

ITAS (Germany)

Two years ago, the **Final Storage Commission** appointed by the German Bundestag made a new start on the search for a final storage site for highly radioactive waste material in Germany. Among representatives from politics, society, and science was ITAS director Armin Grunwald as co-chairman of the work group "Societal and Technical-scientific Decision Criteria and Criteria for Error Corrections". Following the hand-over of the final report in July 2016, Grunwald stressed that "the commission fulfilled its mandate to forge a societal consensus on both a procedure and criteria for the search for a final storage for highly radioactive waste in Germany." The tools provided would enable the government to start with the search for a waste site within the coming months. "If we implement new technologies and release them into society, we are obliged to think things through to the end. The commission did this subsequently for nuclear energy in Germany."
Read more or watch a Video-Interview (German) with Armin Grunwald.

NBT (Norway)

CRISPR is a recently developed method for making targeted changes in the genetic material DNA. It functions as a pair of "genetic scissors" which can remove, replace or add specific segments of DNA in humans, animals and plants, and has the potential to radically change the way we produce food and medicine. The Norwegian Board of Technology, in cooperation with the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board, has written a policy brief which outlines five upcoming debates we need to address. Questions discussed at a meeting in the Norwegian Parliament were: Should we regulate CRISPR as GMO? Must we modify animals in order to stay competitive? Should we alter the human lineage? Should we use it for treatment or artificial enhancement? Do we need more or less control?

POST (UK)

In the UK, there are almost 3 million users of e-cigarettes and their popularity is rising. POST did a briefing on e-cigarettes in January 2014: at that point many of the questions around the safety and quality of devices, the role of e-cigarettes in reducing or stopping smoking and health risks were still being researched. POST has now completed a new briefing building on the 2014 publication and incorporating the latest evidence.

The key points are: A growing body of evidence shows that e-cigarettes are much less harmful than tobacco and could help smokers quit tobacco. Further evidence suggests that e-cigarettes do not encourage tobacco smoking among non-smokers or children. The public perception, however, is shifting: 25 percent think that e-cigarettes present a risk of harm similar to that of tobacco smoking, compared with seven percent in 2013. Read the full POST briefing on e-cigarettes.