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## Busquin reflects on achievements and challenges as he bids farewell to the European Commission

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As Philippe Busquin prepares to leave what he calls 'the best job in my life so far', he has been reflecting on his last five years as EU Research Commissioner. He spoke to CORDIS News of what he considers to be his biggest accomplishments, and of his plans for the future as a new Member of the European Parliament.



Ironically, Mr Busquin will finish his job in the same way that he started - talking about women and science. He will be in Tallinn on 10 September to attend an ENWISE (enlarge women in science to the East) meeting.

From 13 September Mr Busquin will be representing the Belgian Socialist Party in the European Parliament. The territory will not be completely unfamiliar to the Commissioner, having served briefly as an MEP between June and September 1999. He left abruptly following his nomination as Commissioner from the Belgian government.

Asked about his greatest achievements as EU Research Commissioner, Mr Busquin immediately names three issues: the European Research Area (ERA), the pledge by all EU Heads of State and Government to increase research spending so that it is as close as possible to three per cent of GDP by 2010, and the emergence of a European research policy.

'The concept of a European Research Area that I launched is a reality. It has really become a point of reference in all the Member States, within the scientific community and in industry. That's not bad for starters!' He added that the three per cent plan has also become a point of reference, as well as a mode of comparison and a stimulant for increasing research and innovation in the EU Member States.

Finally, the consequence of the above, is that research and innovation are on the political agenda, according to Mr Busquin, both at European level and in many Member States. 'When I arrived, the Commission had a framework programme. It now has a research policy and the framework programme is the instrument for realising this research policy. And of course the research policy is much larger than the framework programme.'

Mr Busquin is also confident that the concept of the ERA will outlive his term as Commissioner. Europe's renowned scientific institutions have recognised that there needs to be a European dimension to research, he said, and the necessary structure is being put in place. 'Of course we have to keep supporting it. The Seventh Framework Programme [FP7] will continue to help build it,' he added.

One has the impression that the Commissioner is disappointed to be leaving at such an interesting point in the evolution of European research. He admits that he has not achieved everything that he would have liked to achieve. In particular he would have liked to contribute more to the establishment of the European Research Council (ERC) and Technology Platforms.

He also concedes that he would have liked to 'close the file' on ITER, the international thermonuclear experimental reactor. It appears that a solution may, however, be in sight. After months of wrangling over whether the reactor should be based in Europe or Japan, there has been some movement on the part of the Japanese, according to Mr Busquin. It is now likely that the reactor itself will be based in France, while materials research will be conducted in Japan. Mr Busquin will present a paper to his colleagues in the Commission outlining the situation on 8 September.

Mr Busquin will, however, continue to contribute to European research, this time from his seat in the European Parliament. 'It's my passion,' he said, seemingly surprised that anyone would question his priorities as an MEP. He will be a member of the Parliament's Industry, Research and Energy Committee, and will use this position to press for the doubling of the EU research budget, as outlined in the Commission's Financial Perspectives proposal. He also hopes for a pivotal role the Parliament's Scientific Technology Options Assessment (STOA) committee.

While supporting European research will be his principal activity, he also intends to contribute to debates on the health economy. He is particularly interested in how Europe can create a market for services, in particular health, while maintaining a philosophy that is typically European. A European health market would allow more solidarity in Europe, he believes.

Although disappointed to be leaving the Commission, Mr Busquin says he is looking forward to 'continuing in a new role', in a building that he can already see from his current office window.

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