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## **FP6 Grid projects target a return on Europe's research investment**

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Although the technology is still in the early stages of development, high powered distributed computing networks, known as Grids, have already become a strategic objective within the EU's information society technologies (IST) programme.

The EU first funded grid research in 2000, channelling 58 million euro under the Fifth Framework Programme towards developments in the underlying technology and application pilot projects. The key results of this investment have been the development of a strong Grid research community in Europe, the contribution of Europe to the global standardisation effort, and validation of the Grid concept in a number of pilot applications.

So far, however, only the first few steps have been taken towards developing mature Grid technologies for use in industry and commerce, and as Thierry Priol of INRIA (the French research institute for computer science and control) and ECRIM (the European research consortium for informatics and mathematics) points out: 'The visibility of the European Grid research community doesn't currently match the level of European investments in Grid technologies. Our activities are dispersed, uncoordinated and fragmented.'

In light of the strategic importance that European policy makers attach to Grids, the transition to FP6 saw a twofold increase in the EU research budget for the technology to 120 million euro. At an event held in Brussels on 15 September to launch the first 12 FP6 Grid projects under FP6, Wolfgang Boch, head of the recently created Grid technologies unit within DG Research, said: 'Our mandate [under FP6] is to move Grids from the research labs towards applications in business and lay the basis for the next generation of Grids.'

Of the 12 newly launched projects, representing a combined 52 million euro investment, the majority of the resources are being spent on four large scale initiatives based on the new FP6 instruments. These are complemented by seven targeted research projects and one specific support action.

The largest initiative established under the first call for proposals is NextGRID, an Integrated Project focused on the development of architectural components that will form the basis of the next generation of commercial Grids.

David Snelling of Fujitsu Laboratories Europe, one of the project participants, told CORDIS News that before trying to design a next generation Grid architecture, the consortium of 21 partners had to define those key elements that would drive the Grid of the future. 'We identified security as a critical requirement for commercialisation. Sustainability in terms of a self-funding and adaptable Grid is also essential, although more difficult to measure [...]. Finally, we need to bring the individual into the next generation of Grid which will require the provision of individual privacy,' explained Dr Snelling.

With these requirements in mind, the team will set about designing and building the architectural components, before applying and testing them in a business



environment through the industrial partners in the consortium. As project coordinator Mark Parsons of the University of Edinburgh explained, the team will take the current state of the art in Grids as its starting point: 'We don't need to reinvent the wheel - we'll start with the best current technology and build on that, taking account of business and commercial needs. We will not favour one technology over another and will use open standards.'

Dr Parsons said that the types of applications that will be developed for deployment in business environments could include a system for the finance industry for calculating risk in the management of large investment portfolios, and a Grid based data mining system for managing legal documents within law firms.

'NextGRID will deliver proven architecture design documents, components of the next generation Grid that have been validated in business scenarios, proposals for standardisation and, I hope, European leadership. There is no other project to my knowledge in the world whose core objective is Grid architecture,' Dr Parsons concluded.

Asked how he rated Europe's chances of gaining leadership in the commercial Grid market, Dr Snelling said: 'Europe's current position is very good. Inaction is the one risk that worries me, as we do not have a great record of 'jumping in' and taking a chance on new technology. I would like to see industry taking more risks and using specially developed Grid services in the short term.'

Having expressed his concern at the fragmentation and lack of coordination within the European Grid research community, INRIA's Thierry Priol now has the chance to do something about it as the coordinator of the CoreGRID Network of Excellence. In effect, the project aims to create a virtual European laboratory in Grid research, with a focus on the design of Grid 'middleware' and peer to peer technologies.

'Our chief priority is excellence, which we will achieve by gathering a critical mass of Grid researchers to compete with the US and Japan. We aim to reinforce collaboration between researchers by including a specific mobility programme in the network, and increase the impact of their work by liaising and cooperating with industry and business,' said Dr Priol.

The network covers 42 partner organisations in 18 countries, representing a total of 118 researchers and 163 PhD students, and Dr Priol hopes it will act as a 'Grid lighthouse' that is immediately visible to the rest of the world. The Commission estimates that up to 60 per cent of Europe's total capability in Grid research is covered in this one large-scale network.

In the words of Enterprise and Information Society Commissioner Olli Rehn: 'These projects will accelerate Europe's drive to turn its sustainable Grid research investment into tangible economic benefits. Greater use of Grid tools is key for mobilising Europe's scientific and technological capital to deliver greater competitiveness and better products.'

With the majority of the Grid projects under FP6 focused on moving the Grid from the laboratory into the commercial sphere, the Commission is now beginning to look for an economic return on its investment in Grid research.

**Contact person:**

For further information, please consult the following web addresses:

<http://www.cordis.lu/ist/grids/index.htm>

<http://www.nextgrid.org/>

<http://www.irisa.fr/CoreGRID/>

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