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Press release | 28.12.2011

Rare Earths

EU needs an innovation offensive for rare earths

Commenting on China's announced cuts in its export quotas for rare earths for the first half year of 2012, **Reinhard Bütikofer**, spokesperson on industrial affairs for the Greens/EFA Group and Rapporteur on raw materials for the European Parliament, said:

"China continues to revise its export quotas for rare earths downwards. No relief on this front is expected any time soon. In this vein, it is all the more relevant for the European Union to get its act together and push for an innovation offensive based on the pillars of efficiency, recycling and substitution. My proposal for the establishment of a European Rare Earths Competency Network (ERECON) in 2012, which would pool and advance research efforts in this field, can make a valuable contribution in this context.(1)

Rather than seeing China's rare earths restrictions only as an obstacle, the European Union should see it as an opportunity to promote innovation as indeed Japan is doing with its target of reducing rare earths imports by one-third.

The European Commission and its Member States must also pay particular attention to Europe's small and medium-sized enterprises. The simple fact is that while larger companies, such as Rhodia or Siemens, are able to form strategic partnerships with Chinese and Australian suppliers, SMEs are not. In this context, the upcoming German "Resource Alliance", launched by the Federation of German Industries (BDI), should make sure that the interests of SMEs are adequately included in this new initiative."

Note to editors:

1) This proposal was passed by the European Parliament in its Budget 2012 negotiations. Spiegel Online reported on this proposal prior to the successful passing of this bill here: http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/technik/0,1518,788598,00.html

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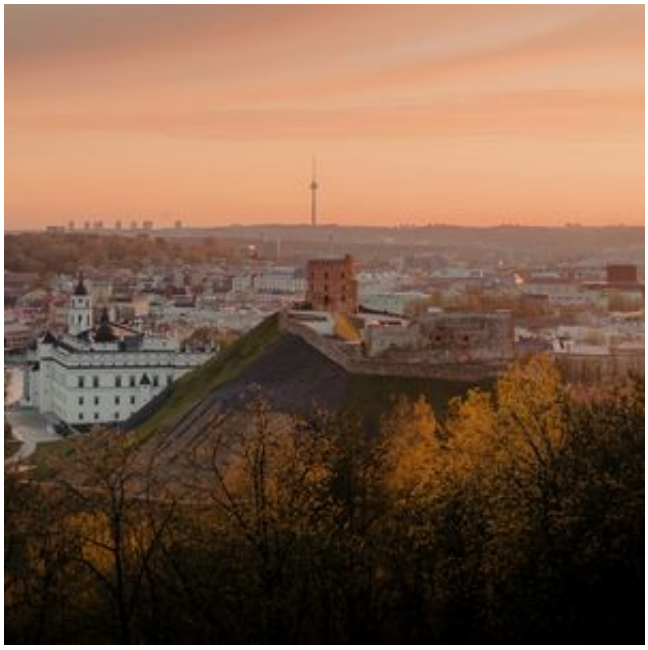
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Reinhard Bütikofer

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