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**HEADLINE: EU seeks intellectual momentum** after the 'big bang'

**BYLINE:** By GEORGE PARKER and JOHN THORNHILL

**DATELINE:** BRUSSELS and PARIS

After years of pursuing "big ideas" - the single market, the euro, a common foreign policy, a constitution - the European Union shows signs of intellectual exhaustion.

The combination of big projects and last year's "big bang" enlargement to 25 members has left the club gasping for breath, but now several new think-tanks aim to provide fresh momentum in the policy field.

A lot of the work will be on developing the EU's international role, marking a break from the often inward-looking policy debate inside the Brussels beltway.

Mario Monti, the former EU competition commissioner, is to chair a new international economics think-tank that aims to foster new policies on Europe's role in the world.

In March, the French Institute of International Relations is opening an office in Brussels, reflecting French government concerns that it needs to recapture the intellectual heights of the EU.

French officials have been concerned that Paris has been losing its sway over an increasingly English-speaking EU.

The American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution also plan to open a European version of their joint Centre for Regulatory Studies in association with Sciences Po, France's political science foundation.

Their think-tank, to be based in Paris, will focus initially on regulatory issues in the financial services industry. Its first research reports are due in May. Ivan Mortimer-Schutts, who is helping to establish the centre, said: "There are an enormous number of think-tanks in Europe but very few that are capable of working on a pan-European basis. We aim to produce policy-relevant results."

John Palmer, political director of the European Policy Centre, a Brussels think-tank, said: "We need more think-tanks, especially when you compare the number here with the number in Washington DC."

Mr Monti's think-tank was proposed two years ago by Jacques Chirac, French president, and Gerhard Schroder, German chancellor, who said Europe needed a fresh approach to issues such as trade, open markets, migration and development.

The project, put together by Jean Pisani-Ferry, a former economics adviser to the French socialist government, has financial backing worth Euros 5m (Dollars 6.5m, Pounds 3.5m) from 12 EU member states, including France, Germany and Britain, and 18 big corporations.

Mr Monti said the Brussels European and Global Economic Laboratory - named Bruegel after the 16th century Flemish painter - would try to break out of the often obsessive inward-looking Brussels debate. "There is an important need for fresh thinking," he said. "It is not simply needed on the European construction but on the growing role and responsibility of the EU on the world scene."

Mr Monti said he would ensure the independence of Bruegel's work from its national and corporate sponsors.

The European Commission originally viewed the project with suspicion, fearing a move by France and Germany to cut it out of the policy loop. The appointment of Mr Monti, a former commissioner, and the broad support for the project in Europe, has quelled those concerns.