

Launch of a joint research group Kaneka - Eurogentec - UCLouvain

University of Louvain bacteria research appeals to Japan

IN SUMMARY:

- Kaneka and its Walloon subsidiary, Kaneka Eurogentec S.A., enter into a partnership with Pr Jean-François Collet's laboratory by funding a **new joint research group** at the de Duve Institute of University of Louvain (UCLouvain). The group will consist of up to 15 people.
- This mixed university-company group will develop **optimised bacterial strains** for the production of biomedicines.
- The use of biomedicines is **disrupting current medicine** by offering new perspectives for treating cancer, infectious diseases, diabetes and genetic illnesses.



Professor Collet's team of researchers has been welcoming Japanese colleagues since mid-October. From left to right: Alexandre Marbaix, Michael Deghelt, Hiroyuki Kanamaru and Carla Aspite

A game of musical chairs at the de Duve Institute: since 15 October, Professor Jean-François Collet's department is in the process of a comprehensive reorganisation. The aim? To make room for new researchers, including some coming from Japan, at the initiative of Kaneka.

*“I've been doing basic research on bacteria for 15 years”, summarises **Jean-François Collet, Professor at the de Duve Institute of UCLouvain and Welbio researcher.** “Since a few days, I have been setting up a second laboratory which is more geared towards applied research in the context of collaboration with Kaneka and its Walloon subsidiary, Eurogentec. A new life is beginning!”*



Pr Jean-François Collet and Lieven Janssens, CEO of Eurogentec

The partnership is innovative: it does not 'simply' consist of funding researchers while waiting to reap the fruits of their work. It is a genuinely mixed group of academic and industrial researchers. *“Together, we aim to optimise the production of biomedicines to improve treatment of cancers, infectious diseases, diabetes, genetic illnesses, etc.”*, explains **Hitoshi Yahara, Managing Executive Officer, Kaneka Corporation.**

The collaboration is established for 3 years, extendible, related to 3 sites: the de Duve Institute of University of Louvain (UCLouvain) in Brussels, the Eurogentec production and research centre in Seraing, and the Kaneka biotechnology research laboratories in Japan.

RESEARCHERS, FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

The use of biomedicines is disrupting current medicine and offers new prospects for the treatment of diseases. Unlike chemical molecules, biomedicines must be produced by living cells. Bacteria are among the organisms of choice for producing biomedicines.

Eurogentec is specifically one of the world leaders in the production of biomedicines. For his part, Professor Collet's team has been accumulating in-depth knowledge about bacteria for 15 years, which has led to important discoveries. His discoveries in bacteriology, published in "Nature" in 2014, have, in particular, made him known to the general public. As for Kaneka, its 50 years of experience in the development of biotechnologies have enabled it to develop its business in fields as varied as food supplements, pharmaceuticals and biodegradable polymers.

*"The meeting between our three teams makes a lot of sense for the industrial group to which we belong", confirms **Lieven Janssens, CEO of Eurogentec**. "It should enable us to extend our expertise in the microbial production of biomedicines and remain the world leader in the field of DNA vaccine production."*

"One could compare Eurogentec to a Formula 1 team", Pr Collet continues. "It already has very good cars, and these have to stay at the top of their game. It is here that the team of engineers, that is to say my team, comes into play: thanks to the expertise accumulated over the last 15 years, we are able to optimise the performance of these cars."

SEARCHING FOR 80 COLLABORATORS

The development of optimised strains should make it easier to produce more proteins and DNA vaccines in the field, in large quantities and rapidly; enough to participate in the strategic objectives of Eurogentec.

The fast-growing Liège-based entity recently made major investments. In particular, it commissioned a **new state-of-the-art facility**, which will enable the large-scale production of **new-generation medicines**. To support the planned production of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines, Eurogentec is recruiting. More than 80 positions are or will be open for a wide variety of profiles of technicians, logisticians, researchers, and project managers.

THE WEALTH OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Willy BORSUS, Minister for Research : « Through WELBIO, Wallonia invests in strategic fundamental research in life sciences. This investment is paying off. I am very pleased by such a brilliant example of technology transfer. Each of its players is a winner: the investigator, his laboratory and his university, the company as well as the regional economy. Today, we see evidence that supporting research can lead to major industrial innovation (production of biomedicines in this case) and to job opportunities in Wallonia. I'd like to congratulate UCLouvain and Kaneka Eurogentec for their work. We can be proud of it."

*"This partnership is further proof of the vitality of the ecosystem built around chemicals and pharmaceuticals in Wallonia", rejoices **Pierre Van Renterghem, General Manager of Welbio**, an inter-university research institute in the field of life sciences, which played a*

crucial role in the dawning of this collaboration by supporting the research of J.F. Collet's team since 2011, subsidised by Wallonia.

“We are delighted to build bridges between academic research and the industry with the help of Welbio. In this way, we respond to major societal challenges through strong partnerships between Pr Collet and his team, and an industrial group the size of Kaneka. It's a great example of ‘win-win’ technology transfer, both for the researcher and his laboratory, for the company, and the regional economy”, pinpoints **Philippe Durieux, CEO of Sopartec, the technology transfer and investment company of UCLouvain.**

ROYALTY-FREE PHOTOS are available at <https://uclouvain-eurogentec.prezly.com/#>

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