

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

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WORKING GROUP ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Comments by the EEA EFTA States on horizontal issues in the Commission's proposal for the multiannual framework programme 2002-2006 of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities aimed at contributing towards the creation of the European Research Area

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EEA-EFTA States have through CREST participated in parts of the preparations for the Framework Programme on RTD 2002-2006 (FP6). According to well-established practice the EEA EFTA States have submitted national position papers, and in this document they address in particular horizontal issues.

The EEA EFTA States welcome the new design for the Framework Programme and its long-term strategy with appropriate emphasis on excellence in research of both fundamental and strategic nature. The eight priorities are welcomed with adequate emphasis on what serves European added value, reflecting excellence and needs of the participating States.

The EEA EFTA States suggest a further elaboration of the new instruments envisaged to implement the FP6. They recommend that some degree of continuity be maintained regarding the existing instruments in order to minimise transition problems for the research community and contributing to a more flexible programme, whereby also reflecting the differences in project and network set-ups.

The EEA EFTA States, on their behalf, intend to speed up all measures with a view to full participation in the FP6. They also expect continued involvement in the preparatory work of the Framework Programme, in line with the provision of the EEA-Agreement.

I INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission adopted on 21 February 2001 a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the multiannual framework programme 2002-2006¹. The aim of the new Framework Programme (FP6) is to help to make a reality of the European Research Area with a view to stepping up innovation in Europe, in conjunction with all the efforts made to this end at national, regional and European level.

2. In accordance with well established practice, national position papers on the Framework Programme have been submitted to the Commission by both EU and EEA EFTA Member States, addressing all aspects of the Commission proposal. This paper focuses only on horizontal issues that are of common interest to the EEA EFTA States

II GENERAL REMARKS

(i) A new design for the Framework Programme

3. The EEA EFTA States welcome the vision presented as the “European Research Area”. It represents an important new conceptual basis for the development of scientific and technological co-operation in Europe. We welcome the long-term strategy it implies with appropriate emphasis on excellence in research of both fundamental and strategic nature. The increased interaction envisaged between national, regional and European level actions is likely to create new synergies within the scientific communities of Europe. Adequately linked to scientific training through mobility, search for excellence, and to innovation and transfer of results, it will certainly contribute to the increasing competitiveness of Europe.

4. We support the idea of redesigning the Framework Programme to meet the vision of ERA. In particular we support the objective of increasing the impact of the FP6 on the innovation process in Europe and reinforcing its contribution to the integration of European research in conjunction with efforts at national, regional and European levels. We accept the need to concentrate on a number of priority areas and support largely those already selected. We also particularly welcome the increased emphasis on Human Resources and Mobility and the support for networks of excellence and research infrastructures.

(ii) Focusing efforts

5. The need for focusing the limited resources of the FP6 in relation to the total European effort is unquestionable. The proposal to do this both by giving priority to seven thematic areas plus the support to EU other policy areas and the use of three specific instruments of intervention is reasonable. We recognise the need for the Commission to improve the efficiency of the management of the actions under the FP6 through simplifying and streamlining implementation arrangements. We also

¹ [COM \(2001\) 94 final](#)

commend the efforts that are presently being made in that direction at the administrative levels of the Commission.

III DETAILED COMMENTS

(i) *The new instruments*

6. The 7 thematic areas have been assigned 3 main mechanisms for implementation: Networks of excellence, Integrated projects and the Participation of the EU in the national programmes. All of these are untested instruments at the European level. More autonomy to the proposed integrated projects (e.g. the possibility to launch separate calls) would require the development of new and robust guidelines with regard to responsibility, quality control, transparency and objectivity.

7. We would suggest, in the further elaboration of actions and mechanisms that one seeks to maintain some degree of continuity in order to keep the momentum of existing activities and minimise the transitional problems for the research community.

8. We would recommend that the new instruments be introduced gradually in close co-operation with national organisations for research planning and financing. The European scientific community will need time to adapt to the new funding mechanisms. The changes in mechanisms used must be understandable and logical to the science and technology community.

9. The proposed instrument of networks of excellence will integrate and pool research capacities. This mechanism is likely to be most readily accepted by scientists in government labs and university research units but less by scientists in companies. Involving companies could however be stimulating and realistic in some of the priority areas outlined. The principal uncertainty about this new instrument relates to the questions of the method used to generate the networks. This uncertainty prompts a rather serious question of transparency and equal and fair access to all if the responsibility of preparing and announcing calls for proposals is transferred from the Commission to a limited core group of partners. Great care must be taken to preserve the bottom-up open access developed in the previous Framework Programmes.

10. The idea of EC involvement in member states programmes, including financial incentives, is an interesting proposal that merits further elaboration. Adaptations of national systems may have to occur before this could become a realistic and effective tool. That, however, should not preclude working toward the use of this instrument. The benefits will accrue over time if it is successful. The EEA EFTA States support forging ahead with this idea. The mutual opening-up of national programmes is a positive initiative, which we endorse. It is important that the co-operation already existing between national programmes is given due regard in this process. Lessons may be learned as to the type of programmes, which can most preferably be opened up.

11. The introduction of "large integrated projects" with unprecedented resources and autonomy in the context of the Framework Programme calls for rigorous and

encompassing definitions and guidance for the participants. A number of countries have drawn the attention to issues that need careful explanations.

- The management framework needed to co-ordinate many partners (public, private and also culturally different) may prove stifling and reduce trust and creativity within such a project organisation. This could in particular apply to innovative high-tech companies, especially of the SME type who depend on working in light and flat management structures
- The issue of transparency and equal and fair access to all member and associate member country research entities becomes a major issue under this particular mechanism of implementation.

12. The optimal project size differs between sectors and areas (this goes for the networks as well). Some degree of continuity of the established RTD-project schemes would contribute to a more flexible Framework Programme. The project financing on the basis of open calls should not be abandoned.

13. The SMEs will participate in the FP6 mainly in the context of the research carried out under the integrated projects. According to the proposal “there will be specific measures to encourage SME participation”, but these need further articulation. To be successful, these measures should address new and fast growing enterprises with niche competences that could sharpen the competitive edge of the integrated project. To attract these companies, it will be even more important to continue the simplification of procedures.

14. These are amongst the issues that need to be addressed in the development of this new instrument. The above objection does, however, by no means preclude the possibility of addressing certain major research areas and topics with complementary and inter-linked projects, co-ordinated under an appropriate umbrella organisation, - and giving such investment a high profile. Nor does this exclude the possibility of entertaining large projects in European level actions when the nature of the problem calls for such an investment.

(ii) *Structuring the European Research Area*

15. We support the actions listed under this heading as important elements in realising the vision of ERA. In particular welcome is the emphasis placed on “Human Resources” and “Researcher Mobility”. We approve of the new initiatives to stimulate mobility within national or regional programmes that are open for scientists from other European countries, and to give community support to groups of exceptional excellence.

16. The experience from FP5 shows that Community support for European research infrastructures has a positive effect on making these accessible for researchers across European borders. A continued – and strengthened - support through the FP6 will help providing Europe with new forefront research infrastructures, hopefully attracting top scientists from around the world.

17. The social and human sciences should be clearly included in the definition of research infrastructures.

(iii) *Strengthening the foundations of the European Research Area*

18. The proposals concerning co-ordination of EU and national research funding raise a series of issues new to the FP6 and European science policy, especially concerning the management of joint initiatives and organised contact between the European and the national level. The EEA EFTA States warmly support the enhanced use in the FP6 of networking by scientific or problem areas, which aims to achieve co-ordination and synergy between national (and regional) initiatives at European level. EU funding to cover overheads in terms of planning and networking costs could be instrumental in stimulating such activities.

19. This is also a question of how European research councils and funding agencies cooperate and interact at the European level. This and the proposed initiatives could be given further consideration, including the Framework Programme's relations to established structures in European research co-operation, i.e. COST, EUREKA, ESF, ESA and CERN. In this context mechanisms to support innovation within the FP6 should be given a prominent position. We would suggest that the EUREKA initiative could play a more prominent role, linked to the priority areas of the FP6. Strong interaction with firms in the rising venture capital market in Europe is recommended.

(iv) *Efficient and streamlined implementation*

20. The simplifying procedures and improving flexibility within the programme is to be accomplished by entrusting the operation and administration of large portions of the FP6 to the participants themselves and/or to other external organisations operating under the Commissions responsibility. The EEA EFTA States would warmly endorse reducing the detailed monitoring of projects by the Commission and giving the project participants greater flexibility in accomplishing their objectives and entrusting the post project evaluation to outside agencies. However, a large-scale decentralisation of responsibilities for implementing whole areas of research activities may raise questions of transparency and equal opportunity for research entities within the Framework Programme.

(v) *International co-operation activities*

21. We would welcome a further strengthening of the international dimension of FP6. This will not only benefit the European scientific society; it will also provide information about challenges and market needs outside the EU. Co-operation with other industrial regions should be an important feature of the Framework Programme.

22. Similarly RTD co-operation with developing countries to promote economic growth and social and political stability is an increasingly important element that should be given appropriate prominence across the specific programmes.

23. The co-operation with the NIS has been successfully organised through INTAS and the experiences and networks could serve also in FP6.

(vi) *Innovation and knowledge transfer*

24. To secure competitiveness for Europe the conditions for innovation and transfer of knowledge to society and the economy are of high importance. In particular the conditions under which traditional SME as well as the very innovative high-tech start-ups can find their way into the FP6 remain unclear. Thousands of SMEs have found their way into the Framework Programme and are an important engine behind the implementation of new technology.

25. Collective research is introduced as a new concept as research undertaken by technical research centres for industrial sectors. The instrument of co-operative research activities will, as we understand the proposal, be more SME targeted both in scope and participation. This will enable SMEs to target projects to their specific needs. The relationship between these two instruments, however, needs to be further clarified.

26. There has been an important improvement in the venture capital markets of Europe in recent years but there still are many cultural and structural hindrances that need to be overcome. These are both of conceptual and legal nature. As an example the dismal state of the nationally fragmented patent system in Europe is a major weakness in face of global competition. Regulatory environment and government support for start-up companies is another sphere. The socio-legal barriers (education, family and social benefits etc.) to the movement of human talent within Europe is yet another area of concern.

27. We support the "Specific Measures for SMEs" of the FP5 and the continuation of the NCP networking scheme to enhance co-operative projects between research units and SMEs. We emphasise the need for flexibility and short response time in all actions relates to SMEs. The CRAFT scheme is well known among SMEs with low in-house research capacity. The scheme is valuable for these groups and should be continued, preferably with simplified procedures.

(vii) *Public confidence in science and technology*

28. The apparently rising public distrust in European countries of science, technology and public handling of health and food safety issues may drastically affect the environment for European enterprises to innovate, particularly on the basis of scientific advances in life science and biotechnology, - notably genomics. There is a real danger in European industry losing out on opportunities due to the socio-political views prevalent inside Europe.

These issues must be seriously tackled to provide favourable conditions for the exploitation of the results of scientific research within the European Research Area of the future.

(viii) *Anticipating the EU's scientific and technical needs*

29. The EEA EFTA States recognise that actions under this heading are intended to underpin the policy needs of the Community and of the Union in various policy areas. We share the interest of the EC in the outcomes of such actions and have participated actively in research that corresponds to this heading. We recognise the need to have reserve funding to be able to respond to policy needs and address upcoming issues. However, there is a need for clarification of objectives and the interrelationship of this theme in relation with the 7 already defined priority themes.

IV EEA EFTA INVOLVEMENT IN THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE FP6

30. The EEA EFTA States have bilaterally declared their intention to amend Protocol 31 of the EEA-Agreement with a view to full participation in the FP6. On the EEA EFTA side all measures will be taken to speed the national decision-making process as well as that of the EEA EFTA structure in order to ensure full participation from the start-up of the programme.

31. In the case too little time is provided for the conclusion of the EEA decision-making procedures, flexible and pragmatic solutions should be found to ensure continuity from FP5 to FP6, as expressed by the EEA Council and following the practice established for other programmes.

32. The EEA EFTA States also expect continued involvement in the preparatory work of the Framework Programme, in line with the provision of the EEA-Agreement.

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