

Brussels, 26 November 2001

## **OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 15 November 2001

on the

**Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning 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**

(COM(2001) 94 final – 2001/0053 COD)

### **The Committee of the Regions**

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning 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 (COM(2001) 94 final – 2001/0053 COD);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision taken by the Council of the European Union on 30 April 2001 to consult the Committee of the Regions in accordance with Article 265(1) ECT;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision taken by the CoR president on 22 May 2001 to instruct Commission 5 for Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism to prepare the opinion;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission Communication "Towards a European research area" (COM(2000) 6 final) and the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on this communication (CdR 33/2000 fin<sup>1</sup>);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission Communication "Making a reality of the European Research Area: guidelines for EU research activities (2002-2006)" (COM(2000) 612 final) and the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on this communication (CdR 63/2001 fin<sup>2</sup>);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision of the European summit in Gothenburg to add a sustainability dimension to the Lisbon process and to call expressly upon the research sector to make an effective contribution to this;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission staff working paper "First report on progress towards the European research and innovation area" (SEC(2001) 465);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Proposals for Council decisions concerning the specific programmes implementing the framework programme 2002-2006 of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities, and concerning the specific programmes implementing the framework programme 2002-2006 of the European Atomic Energy Community for research and training activities (COM(2001) 279 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission communication "The framework programme and the European Research Area: application of Article 169 and the networking of national programmes" (COM(2001) 282 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission communication "A mobility strategy for the European Research Area" (COM(2001) 331 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission communication "The international dimension of the European Research Area" (COM(2001) 346 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission staff working paper "Progress report on benchmarking of national research policies" (SEC(2001) 1002);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission staff working paper "How to map excellence in research and technological development in Europe" (SEC(2001) 434);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the conclusions of the Council of 26 June on progress in the discussions on the 6<sup>th</sup> framework programme and the Presidency's conclusions on the orientation debate on the Commission's proposal for the framework programme 2002-2006;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Council resolution of 26 June 2001 on "Science and society and on women in science";

**HAVING REGARD TO** the draft opinion (CdR 283/2001 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 5 on 10 September 2001 (rapporteur **Erwin Teufel** – D/EPP, Prime Minister of the Land of Baden-Württemberg);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the fact that the Commission envisaged the 6<sup>th</sup> framework programme as an instrument for achieving the European Research Area;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the importance attached by the Lisbon European Council to establishing a European Research Area in order to strengthen an economy based on innovation and knowledge with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the fact that the Stockholm European Council confirmed the strategies for the European Research Area, called on the Commission and the Member States to build a knowledge-based society in Europe and laid particular stress on training, the Europe-wide acquisition of IT skills and an in-depth discussion within the Community on the ethical aspects of biotechnology research projects;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the progress already made by the European Community towards a European Research Area;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the fact that the EC's research programmes have become a permanent

fixture in the regional and national promotion of research, and represent more than just the provision and use of additional funds from Community coffers;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the challenges which the European Union has to meet before eastwards enlargement in 2004 (European Charter, institutional reforms, new distribution of competences between European, national and regional decisionmakers and players);

**adopted the following opinion at its 41<sup>st</sup> plenary session on 14/15 November 2001 (meeting of 15 November):**

### **The Committee of the Regions**

#### 1. *Objectives*

1. supports the Commission's intention to use the 6<sup>th</sup> RTD framework programme to reinforce research and technological development and to work towards the creation of a European Research Area dedicated to strengthening the Community's competitiveness. Hence the decisive criteria for the selection of eligible projects must be the scientific excellence, economic relevance and social value of the research concerned;
2. doubts, however, whether the objectives associated with the European Research Area can be achieved through the framework programme 2002-2006, unless the Commission and the Member States agree to accord RTD a higher priority in Community policymaking and provide substantially higher funding than in the past;
3. welcomes the Commission's intention to strengthen the dynamic role of regional and local authorities in the implementation of the programme and to upgrade their contribution to research in Europe;
4. objects to the fact that the Commission wishes to restrict the collaboration of the Member States and regions in the implementation of the 1<sup>st</sup> specific programme to a single programme committee;
5. recommends that, with regard to the proposal for nuclear research, special account be taken of the concerns of the population which are focused on storage sites, the disposal of nuclear waste, radiation protection and nuclear safety;
6. reiterates its demand for gender equality in access to scientific projects and aid;
7. urges that at the latest by the 7<sup>th</sup> research framework programme, the duration of the programme be extended to bring it into line with the Community's education and culture programmes, so as to offer the Member States, regions and all those involved in research greater planning certainty.

In order to provide for greater flexibility in a framework programme with a longer timeframe, account should be taken of Community benchmarking of research and innovation policy, and of the forthcoming mapping of scientific excellence in Europe for research areas in which particularly rapid progress is being achieved on the knowledge front;

#### 2. *Local and regional authorities*<sup>3</sup>

1. confirms the intention of the regions, especially those with legislative powers in respect of research, to make a contribution to setting up the European Research Area and implementing the 6<sup>th</sup> research framework programme;
2. points to the crucial role played by the regions in training the new generation of scientists in universities, in maintaining and expanding public and private research institutions, and in shaping regional research policy and the general conditions under which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate.

The Committee of the Regions would also refer to the experience of regions which have implemented RIS ("Innovation Regions in Europe Network") in cooperation with other EU regions;

3. recognises the need to strengthen cooperation between regions by forming interregional networks for grouping research activities;
4. calls on the Commission to support financially the development of interregional partnerships with the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe;
5. supports the Commission's intention to boost the Community's research effort by networking top-flight scientists and research groups, but urges the Commission also to use the Structural Funds to create research infrastructure in the less favoured regions, thereby qualifying them to participate in outstanding and forward-looking research projects;
6. supports the Commission's intention (a) to influence the future course of R&D in Europe by structuring and coordinating it, (b) to raise the efficiency of European research by exploiting the synergies from related programmes in the Member States, and (c) to encourage the Member States and regions to cooperate to this end. This policy must, however, adhere strictly to the principle of subsidiarity;

### 3. *Bodies responsible, including in the regions*

1. stresses that universities are centres for training young scientists and - together with regional research establishments - for undertaking basic and applied research and that their appropriate involvement in the projects covered by the 6<sup>th</sup> framework programme must be ensured;
2. therefore expressly calls on the Commission to maintain the current additional costs arrangements for universities and non-university research establishments, in order to ensure the participation of these establishments in the implementation of the 6<sup>th</sup> framework programme;
3. reiterates that SMEs play an important role in European enterprise and innovation policy and that the 6<sup>th</sup> framework programme should create an adequate environment for them. The Committee therefore advocates maintaining a horizontal programme for innovation and SME involvement;
4. welcomes the clear reinforcement of the SME-specific instruments (cooperative research and collective research), but thinks that these instruments should be made more user-friendly. This would include in particular opening them up to enterprises with their own research departments, the inclusion of preliminary costs in the eligible

project costs and maintaining the exploratory awards;

5. endorses the Commission's intention of earmarking about 15% of the framework programme's funds for assisting SMEs, but would advocate looking at the quality of the projects and the Europe-wide use and dissemination of their findings as key conditions for the award of the funds;

#### 4. *Themes*

1. expects the Commission to pursue the problem-oriented approach introduced in the 5<sup>th</sup> framework programme (especially consideration of the impact of the new technologies on people) and not to give the priority themes an exclusively technological slant;
2. states that from the point of view of the regions, the Commission's proposal has major shortcomings. On environmental and economic grounds, and with reference to the objectives of the European Research Area, the Committee of the Regions considers it essential that projects also be promoted in the fields of agricultural, marine, energy and transport research. In addition, there must be a sound balance between scientific and technical research and sociological research. The socio-economic and ethical aspects should be incorporated as an overriding requirement in all projects in the priority areas;

#### 5. *Programme structure*

1. considers the scope of the 1<sup>st</sup> specific programme as proposed by the Commission far too vast and its organisation too unwieldy for a single programme committee to supervise;
2. calls on the Commission to maintain the distinction between vertical areas and horizontal measures, which proved its worth in the Fifth Framework Programme, and thus to structure the Framework Programme more clearly, as follows:
  1. by incorporating all vertical areas into the first specific programme as actions, each with its own programme committee, and thus drawing clear demarcation lines between different areas. The Committee suggests establishing a total of six actions, namely:
    - Genomics and biotechnology for health, in conjunction with food safety and health risks,
    - Information society technologies,
    - Nanotechnologies, materials and production,
    - Aeronautics and space,
    - Sustainable development and global change, and
    - Politically orientated research, citizens and governance in the knowledge-based society and science/society;
  2. by bringing together in a second specific programme all horizontal measures as separate actions, each with its own programme committee, in the interests of a clearer structure. To this end the Committee suggests a total of four actions, namely:

- Human resources and mobility,
  - Coherent development and coordination of Community and national research policies and infrastructures,
  - International cooperation, and
  - Research, innovation and SME-specific measures;
3. recommends that the Commission incorporate the proposed planning reserve into the above vertical actions, and in addition retain 5% of total Framework Programme funding for unforeseen developments, allowing the programme committee for Coherent development and coordination of Community and national research policies and infrastructures to decide how the funds are deployed;

#### 6. *New instruments*

1. considers that, in the interests of continuity and in order to ensure a seamless transition from the Fifth to the Sixth Research Framework Programme, those instruments which have proved their worth in the Fourth and Fifth Framework Programmes should in principle be retained, so that smaller institutions supported by the regions and SMEs can continue to participate in the Sixth Framework Programme, thus allowing their innovative power to be harnessed for the purposes of development;
2. also recognises, however, that it is both possible and necessary to combine research capacity and to achieve outstanding results in order to strengthen the Community's competitiveness, but asks that any large projects planned comply with the following conditions:
  1. projects must remain manageable. It must be ensured that participating researchers make the agreed contributions and that the direct internal and external exchange of findings and experience is maintained and encouraged;
  2. minimum project size should not be a precondition for funding eligibility;
  3. when assessing the suitability of, and need for, new instruments, the critical mass and European added value achievable should be evaluated on the basis of objective standards;
  4. universities, smaller regional institutions and enterprises must be able to participate, provide appropriate initiatives and secure their users' rights when new instruments are to be established;
3. considers five years a suitable lifespan for the networks of excellence;
4. calls for a clear definition of the responsibilities of integrated project coordinators, the demarcation of technical and administrative responsibility and 100% financing of coordination costs;
5. as this is the first Commission proposal to invoke Article 169 ECT, stresses that more than 80% of public-sector research work is carried out under regional or national research programmes and that a significant proportion thereof already has a European dimension (e.g. EUREKA, COST, European Science Foundation).

The Committee therefore calls on the Commission, when invoking Article 169 ECT, to comply with

the following conditions;

1. the approach should be as flexible as possible, with account being taken of bottom-up initiatives, in order to stimulate cooperation between the regions of different Member States or between different states in the same European region<sup>4</sup>;
2. initially the "simpler" instruments (e.g. information exchange, opening up of programmes on a reciprocal basis, joint actions etc.) should be tried out before the Community implementation of regional or national programmes is considered. This would make it easier to improve coordination between the research framework programmes, regional Structural Funds programmes and other initiatives which are included in the Lisbon agreements;
3. in view of coordination difficulties, the administrative burden involved and the need to protect intellectual property rights, the Community implementation of regional and national research programmes should be restricted to a few pilot projects with a global dimension and undisputed relevance to the protection of human health, the environment and world peace;
4. the existing provisions for funding research at regional and Member State level should be observed. The EU co-financing criteria should be laid down, with due regard to aid and WTO rules, in order to ensure that participants do not encounter legal or financial problems as a result of duplication of funding;

#### 7. *Flanking measures*

1. welcomes the Commission's proposal to develop with the Member States a reliable, objective and transparent method for the geographic mapping of outstanding achievements in research and technological development. As this is a long-term process which is to be continually optimised and progressively extended beyond the disciplines initially selected (biosciences, nanotechnologies and economics), this task should be entrusted to a programme committee under the Decision on Committee Procedure;
2. assumes that, when developing benchmarking indicators, the Commission will in future continue to work closely with the Member States and regions, in order to ensure that only indicators will be used which can be compiled without substantial additional work and whose application will produce usable results;
3. acknowledges the Commission's desire to develop a strategy for promoting mobility in the European research area, but regrets that the Commission has got no further than outlining the overall problems. The Committee welcomes the increase in funding for the promotion of mobility, supports the extension of the Marie Curie programme and notes without satisfaction that the promotion of doctoral research is to be another priority;
4. welcomes the decision of the Council to deepen the debate on the role of science in society to give the issues a higher public profile and to strengthen links between research policies and the needs of society<sup>5</sup>, but calls on the Commission to give as much freedom as possible to the regional players in the dialogue between the scientific community and society at large;

5. notes the Commission's intention to give the European research area a more international dimension, and expects it to develop further the planned measures for international cooperation, and the integration of the applicant countries and to designate a specific contact point for this purpose;
6. applauds the Commission's plan to establish a forum for international scientific and technical relations in order to secure the necessary coordination between participants. Representatives of the Committee of the Regions should also be involved in this;

## 8. *Management*

1. welcomes the Commission's intention to tighten up, simplify and at the same time enhance the efficiency of the Sixth Research Framework Programme, and calls on the Commission to adopt appropriate measures. These would include the general introduction of a two-stage application procedure on the basis of a brief project sketch, 100% financing of the costs of transferring management to the coordinators of networks and integrated projects, separation of administrative and technical responsibility among integrated project coordinators and instead of avoiding setting up new bureaucratic structures, using existing regional and national structures for the management of support and the administration of funding;
2. calls on the Commission to retain the bulk of the participation rules and implementing provisions newly negotiated in the Fifth Framework Programme and to develop these further for the Sixth Framework Programme, so that the regional players are not required to provide excessive initial funding, coordinators are not burdened with unacceptable liability risks and the ongoing concerns of scientists, universities, research institutions and firms in respect of the protection of intellectual property rights are allayed;
3. expects the Commission to submit its proposals for the participation rules and implementing provisions at an early date<sup>6</sup> and to convene the programme committee established under Article 167 ECT as soon as possible;
4. asks the Commission to improve coordination of actions to support SMEs, cooperation between the relevant DGs, and cooperation between bodies providing services to SMEs (e.g. Innovation Relay Centres) and the national contact points;

## 9. *Financing*

1. points out that successful implementation of the Sixth Research Framework Programme's priorities depends on the allocation of appropriate funding;
2. points out that, although the Community decided as far back as 1985 that 6% of the overall budget should be earmarked for the Framework Programme, this has so far not been achieved;
3. regrets that the bulk of the increased funding for the Sixth Research Framework Programme proposed by the Commission is allocated to coordination tasks in the European research area and to the Community policies, and that funding for individual research areas is hardly to be increased at all, or even cut;
4. points out that the ambitious sustainability targets of the Gothenburg Summit cannot be achieved if funding for traffic and energy research is not on a par with that available



under the Fifth Framework Programme. The necessary funding of some EUR 1,100 million would have to be obtained from economies or additional financing (e.g. at the expense of an increase for research infrastructure and coordinating measures);

5. finally, points out that additional funding will have to be provided for the administration of the new instruments which is financially equivalent to the savings which the Commission intends to make by slimming down its bureaucracy and delegating tasks. Otherwise, contrary to the Commission's political guidelines, research funding would actually be reduced by this amount, compared with the Fifth Framework Programme.

Brussels, 15 November 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Jos Chabert**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

<sup>1</sup> OJ C 226 of 8.8.2001, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Adopted on 13.6.2001, not yet published.

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity's sake "regions" should be understood to cover both regional and local authorities in this opinion.

<sup>4</sup> Communication from the Commission on the application of Article 169, COM(2001) 282 final.

<sup>5</sup> Council Resolution on making a reality of the European area of research and innovation: guidelines for the European Union's research activities (2002-2006), 28.12.2000, OJ C 374.

<sup>6</sup> The first clause should be deleted if the European Commission has already submitted the participation rules and implementing provisions by the time this draft is discussed by CoR Commission 5.

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