

Brussels, 18 July 2002

OPINION
of the
Economic and Social Committee
on the
**Amended proposal for a Council Decision concerning the rules for the participation of
undertakings, research centres and universities in the implementation of the framework
programme 2002-2006 of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)**
(COM(2001) 823 final/2 - 2001/0327 (CNS))

On 28 May 2002 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 7 in conjunction with Article 3 of the Euratom Treaty, on the

Amended proposal for a Council Decision concerning the rules for the participation of undertakings, research centres and universities in the implementation of the framework programme 2002-2006 of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)
(COM(2001) 823 final/2 – 2001/0327 (CNS)).

The Economic and Social Committee decided to instruct the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption to prepare the Committee's work on the subject, and to appoint **Mr Malosse** as rapporteur-general.

At its 392nd plenary session (meeting of 18 July 2002), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Introduction

1.1 The delay in making the referral is regrettable, the EESC having exclusive powers regarding consultation on Euratom Treaty matters. The EESC attaches great importance to these powers, in view of the controversial nature of nuclear energy within society and the need for proper information and consultation.

1.2 Atomic energy raises serious public involvement issues, on account of the need to exploit new, non-polluting sources of energy and the major risks and waste processing problems inherent in the nuclear sector. The EESC calls for a clear statement of intent to strengthen performance and safety/security evaluation models in this area by means of permanent information, consultation and training structures. The aim is to launch a process of better governance with a view to identifying the best strategic options, and to addressing public concerns about the use of nuclear energy and its long-term impact.

2. Rules for participation in the 6th RTD framework programme (Euratom)

2.1 On 21 February 2002 the EESC issued an opinion on participation and dissemination rules for the implementation of the European Community framework programme¹.

2.2 In its opinion, the EESC made practical proposals, one of their aims being to bring about simplification, greater transparency and more consistency with the European Union's objectives. All other things being equal, the comments made then remain relevant and apply to the rules for the Euratom programme. The Committee would draw special attention to the need for more thorough simplification of the arrangements for presenting proposals. Arrangements for the participation of

¹ EESC opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the rules for the participation of undertakings, research centres and universities and for the dissemination of research results for the implementation of the European Community framework programme 2002-2006 (rapporteur: **Mr Malosse** – CES 185/2202).

small and medium-sized entities (businesses, universities, etc.) should also be made clearer, since the joint and several liability requirement placed upon participants may represent a serious obstacle for them. A substantial proportion of Euratom sector research activities could well be allocated to small and medium-sized entities too.

2.3 The EESC also repeats its warning regarding the ability consortia would henceforth have to arrange their own competitive calls for some work or to extend activities. The Committee strongly urges *that they act within the framework defined by the Commission in order to ensure transparency, equal treatment and consistency with the programme's objectives*².

2.4 The EESC draws attention to the importance of bringing together all the financial provisions, including relevant checks, under a single dedicated heading of the proposal, in the interests of greater clarity.

2.5 Participation rules for Euratom programmes differ from those concerning European Community programmes in three essential areas:

2.5.1 access for third countries is more limited (only associated candidate countries are mentioned);

2.5.2 the absence of dissemination rules, on the grounds of the sector's highly sensitive nature;

2.5.3 the existence of specific rules under the priority thematic area "fusion energy research", providing for contracts of association with Member States, Associated States or legal entities established in those states.

3. Specific comments

3.1 The rules for the participation of undertakings, research centres and universities must evidently take account of the great sensitivity inherent to atomic energy, involving scientific, industrial and political factors; they must therefore be tighter and more closely checked. However, these rules must be looked at afresh in a spirit of openness to and support for all the actors concerned, first and foremost the candidate countries, who face the same problems regarding energy research, waste management, radioactivity protection, and nuclear safety and security. Subject to all the usual safeguards, cooperation should be established with countries which have developed advanced technologies (Canada, Japan, USA) or which face comparable problems (e.g. Russia vis-à-vis certain candidate countries such as Bulgaria or Lithuania).

3.2 In spite of the absence of rules on dissemination, and for the same precautionary reasons, the EESC must point to the equally significant danger that would result from inadequate dissemination of the sector's scientific and technical information. Some restrictions should be laid

² Opinion CES 185/2002, point 3.3.5.

down, but the doors must be kept open. This means drawing up a highly specific technical protocol for dissemination content and methods, reflecting safety and security requirements while maintaining the highest possible level of transparency.

3.3 The EESC would emphasise the relevance of a *safety/security* approach in training for personnel and the general public. Atomic energy is universally regarded – sometimes in simplistic and vague terms – as being a high-risk area. Two lines of action in particular are to be preferred:

3.3.1 robust, finely-tuned instruments and procedures to develop reliable, trustworthy models for evaluating atomic energy safety and security;

3.3.2 training and information for the general public and qualified personnel.

3.4 Regarding content, the EESC formulated a number of proposals in its opinion on the specific programmes³, which would enable the overall direction of research to be aligned with citizens' concerns (especially concerning waste processing). Research on nuclear safety/security was one of the priority issues discussed in the opinion.

Brussels, 18 July 2002.

The President
of the
Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Göke Frerichs

Patrick Venturini

³

Opinion CES 693/2002 (rapporteur: **Mr Bernabei**).