

European research area: activities within the scope of the EC framework programme 2002-2006

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This paper is the Commission's 2006 Annual Report on research and technological development activities in the EU. The report is accompanied by a Commission Staff Working Document, which provides more detailed reporting and statistics.

Political achievements: The report finds that the Community's overall research policy objectives for 2006 have been met namely, completion of the 6th Framework Programme and the launching of the 7th Framework Programme. This is a major achievement for European research. It follows four years of preparation and intense negotiations. Collaborative research remains a core activity and most thematic priorities are solidly founded on the experience gained through previous FPs. The themes identified reflect the key fields of knowledge and technology in which research excellence is particularly important for Europe's to address the social, economic, public health, environmental and industrial challenges of the future, New concepts such as the European Research Council, the Joint Technology Initiatives and large infrastructure investments are of particular interest – together with continuous efforts to fight the “brain drain” and favour the “brain gain” in Europe. Other new elements include exploiting research excellence in convergence regions and risk sharing finance facilities to increase the availability of EIB loans. CORDIS services were fully migrated to the new EUROPA website and revamped to reflect the launching of the 7th Framework Programme.

Implementation of the 6th Framework Programme: Most calls for proposals have been published as planned. The most successful schemes include the Marie Curie fellowships and the ERA-NET scheme. In the domain of Life science, Genomics and Biotechnology, major actions are continuing in the European & Developing Countries' Clinical Trials Partnership in the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. On food quality and safety, most activities relate to the foundations for the implementation of the Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE). Following the Communication “Towards a European Strategy for Nanotechnology”, the implementation of the Action Plan towards the responsible development of nanosciences and nanotechnologies has advanced. The platform on European manufacturing based on high added-value research and innovation is expected to speed up the rate of industrial transformation in Europe. The implementation of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan is continuing with the development of policy activities notably on sustainable production and consumption. Research on global change and ecosystems, sustainable energy and transport systems has continued to make a significant contribution to the reinvigoration of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

The capacity to respond to emerging challenges has been demonstrated by the emergency Call for Proposals in response to the avian influenza crisis and work on pandemic flu. This policy oriented research is being implemented successfully through direct actions performed by the JRC and through SSP (Scientific support to policies) projects related to a wide range of EU policy areas such as environment, sustainability, health, agriculture and fisheries. The full implementation of New and Emerging Science and Technology (NEST) has generated broad recognition of the quality and innovation of the trans-disciplinary agenda, in fields such as synthetic biology and measuring the impossible.

Research and the revised Lisbon agenda: In 2005 the Lisbon strategy was re-launched and has resulted in renewed commitments to actively pursue a positive economic reform agenda. In 2006 the Member States, for the first time, implemented their National Reform Programmes (NRPs). Although most

Member States have shown true commitment to the implementation of NRPS a certain number of Member States require further policy initiatives. The renewed impetus given to the Lisbon strategy offers a real opportunity but to achieve this a stronger commitment and a speedier implementation will be needed.

Progress towards the 3% objective: In 2005, the EU's R&D intensity amounted to 1.84% of GDP, showing no signs of recovery after its stagnation in 2001-2002. The Commission points out, however, that the latest available information still predates the renewed commitments made by Member States in the context of the re-launched Lisbon strategy. In terms of R&D intensity, three distinct groups of countries can be identified. The first includes countries with an R&D intensity above 2.4% (GDP (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Austria). These countries have already made important progress towards becoming knowledge based economies. A second group is made up of countries having an intensity close to the EU average with values between 1.5 and 2.1% of GDP (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, UK and Luxembourg) indicating that the economies of these countries are transforming, but that the pace of development should be increased. A third and larger group consists of countries with an R&D intensity below 1.5% of GDP (although differences within this group are large).

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC): The overall view emerging is that Member States have subscribed to a number of similar objectives and challenges. Explicitly or implicitly, therefore, taking guidance from discussion at a European level – such as the OMC. The Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST) affirmed that the OMC can continue to play an important role in strengthening and aligning Member States' policies to meet the challenge of achieving the Lisbon and Barcelona objectives.

Future Outlook: The achievements of 2006 helped pave the way for the implementation of the 7th Framework Programme. A Green Paper on “The European Research Area: New Perspectives” was adopted in April 2007, which will form the basis for a wide-ranging debate and public consultation. Building on the results of the Green Paper the Commission is expect to present new initiatives in 2008.