Participation in a research and development programme: enhancing the quality of life of older people through the use of new ICT

2007/0116(COD) - 13/03/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 431 votes in favour to 10 against with 8 abstentions, a legislative resolution amending the proposal on the participation by the Community in a research and development programme aimed at enhancing the quality of life of older people through the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), undertaken by several Member States.

The report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Neena **GILL** (PES, UK) on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy.

The principal amendments - adopted under the codecision procedure – are the result of an agreement made with Council and are as follows:

-the AAL Joint Programme is undertaken jointly by Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland , Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom as well as Israel, Norway and Switzerland;

-one of the conditions of Community financial contribution is ensuring a high level of scientific excellence and observance of ethical principles in accordance with the general principles of the Seventh Framework Programme, of gender mainstreaming and gender equality and of sustainable development;

-the granting of financial support shall be subject to the principles of equal treatment and transparency, predictability for applicants and independent evaluation. The financial support to third parties shall be granted on the basis of scientific excellence, socio-economic impact at European level and relevance to the overall objectives of the programme;

-if the AAL Joint Programme is not implemented or is implemented inadequately, partially or late, the Community shall reduce, withhold or terminate its financial contribution in line with the actual implementation of the AAL Joint Programme. If the participating Member States, Israel, Norway and Switzerland do not contribute or contribute only partially or late to the financing of the AAL Joint Programme, the Community may reduce its financial contribution in line with the actual amount of public funding allocated by the participating Member States, Israel, Norway and Switzerland on the terms laid down in the agreement to be concluded between the Commission and the dedicated implementation structure;

-an interim evaluation will be carried out by the Commission two years after the start of the Programme, but in any case no later than 2010. If deemed necessary after the first interim review, further interim evaluations may be undertaken. Such evaluation shall cover progress towards the objectives set out in Annex I of the AAL Joint Programme, including recommendations on the most appropriate ways to further enhance integration, the quality and efficiency of the implementation, including scientific, management and financial integration, as well as the appropriate level of financial contribution of Participants in view of potential demand from the various national research communities. Experience from other joint programmes carried out under Article 169 of the Treaty shall also be taken into account.

Parliament also made several amendments to the Annex :

Specific aims: the results of the AAL Joint programme could also be used by other groups of people, namely people with disabilities. Through its activities, the AAL Joint Programme shall contribute to the achievement of the renewed Lisbon Strategy objectives and the knowledge based society, "while avoiding that the use of new technologies will lead to exclusion". In this context, the development of cost effective solutions that can help to ensure equitable and simplified access to relevant ICT-based products and services, shall be promoted, including access to services through a choice of different channels that respect the privacy and dignity of the elderly across all regions of Europe, including rural and peripheral areas. Moreover, the AAL Joint programme should promote innovation and co-financing by the private sector, in particular SMEs, for market related projects and the adaptation of technology and solutions to be developed by projects to the needs of the elderly in view of their increased social participation. Wherever possible, complementarity and synergies between the AAL Joint Programme and other programmes at Community, national and regional level shall be ensured.

Activities: the main activity in the AAL Joint Programme consists of research, development and innovation activities. In addition, brokerage, programme promotion and networking activities may be implemented through dedicated events or in combination with existing events. The AAL Joint Programme should also take into account demographic trends and demographic research in the different European countries in order to provide solutions that reflect the social and economic situation across Member States.

Call for proposals: after the closure of a call for proposals, a central eligibility check shall be carried out by the dedicated implementation structure in cooperation with the national programme management agencies. The check shall be done on the basis of the common programme eligibility criteria of the AAL Joint Programme published with the annual work programme. Common eligibility criteria shall include at least the following: timely, complete and electronic submission of proposal, and obligations concerning the composition of consortia. In addition, the dedicated implementation structure with the assistance of the national programme management agencies shall make a check against national eligibility criteria that are published with the annual work programme. These national eligibility criteria, mentioned in the respective calls, shall only relate to the legal and financial status of individual participants and not to the content of the proposal. The text sets out these eligibility criteria categories concerning individual participants. National eligibility criteria strictly related to the legal and financial status of individual participants as well as the national administrative principles shall be applied. Where, at the contracting stage, a participant fails to meet one of the national eligibility criteria, the AAL Joint Programme shall safeguard scientific excellence. For this purpose an additional central independent evaluation of the proposal concerned may be carried out with the assistance of independent experts, at the decision of the Executive Board, in order to evaluate the proposal without the participation of the participant in question or, if suggested by the project consortium, with a replacement participant

Funding: a maximum of 6% of the Community financial contribution shall be used to contribute to the overall operational costs of the AAL Joint Programme. The participating Member States, Israel, Norway and Switzerland shall also contribute to ensure the effective operation of the AAL Joint Programme.

Lastly, the AAL Executive Board will consist at least of a President, a vice-President and a treasurer.