Research RTD, 6th EC Framework-programme 2002-2006: strengthening the European Research Area

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This paper concerns the response to the reports of the Expert Groups on the ex-post evaluation of the Sixth Framework Programmes.

To recall, the major objectives of the Sixth Research Framework Programmes (20022006) and their Specific Programmes were to integrate strengthen and structure the European Research Area, with a budget of EUR 19.235 billion.

The Commission recently received the report of the Expert Group on the ex-post evaluation of the Sixth Framework Programmes. The aim of this Communication is to respond to the issues raised in the report in an open and transparent manner, outlining which actions the Commission intends to take or has already taken to alleviate the problem, but also discussing issues where no obvious or immediate solution exists. A number of the issues raised in the evaluation report cannot be addressed by the Commission alone but will need the engagement of a wider group of actors, including the Member States, the Council and the European Parliament working together.

Commission's response to recommendations: the Commission:

- notes that the preparation and design of the FP8 proposal will be preceded by extensive, open and transparent consultation with stakeholders. A detailed analysis of its rationale will be set out in the Impact Assessment accompanying the FP8 proposal;
- is in broad agreement with the need to better align and coordinate Community and national research efforts in order to strengthen and structure the ERA;
- acknowledges that, even though the term "third country" might have some disadvantages, it has not been an obstacle to more targeted and nuanced thinking on strategic research partnerships. To replace the term using further classification would not necessarily be in the interests of clarity or simplification;
- agrees with the need to provide a clearer focus to research collaboration with "third countries";
- is very supportive of the need to see an increase in the level of funding going to research partnerships with developed countries;
- accepts that more attention may be necessary to ensure that the combination of instruments to promote frontier research, both by individual teams and cross-European partnerships, works effectively across the range of FP research;
- feels that the participation of SMEs in the Framework Programmes, including within the thematic priorities should be encouraged. The 15 % target is a reflection of the importance the co-legislators attached to the issue and was never intended to be an end in itself;
- will continue to support the activities in the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). This should be complemented by development of national roadmaps by Member States, and by increased coordination of research infrastructures at the global level;
- supports the need for a better gender balance amongst European researchers. However, it is cautious with the direction proposed by the Expert Group ((re)introducing specific gender equality actions after quality criteria as a condition of funding in large instruments);

- agrees with the need to attract young people to make a career in science and technology. Solutions will need to be found at Member States and Community level, involving actions from different policy fields and including a wide range of stakeholders;
- is aware of the importance of administration and simplification. A Commission Communication on simplification is planned for 2010, which would be the occasion for reflecting on these issues;
- recognises the need to undertake more research on the longer-term and structural impacts of the FP (on institutions, industry, Member States etc.) and has already taken steps to ensure such work is carried out.

This response to the FP6 evaluation is part of a renewed and strengthened commitment made by the Commission to report on the implementation, progress and achievements of the Framework Programmes. The FP6 ex post evaluation report and the Commission response will be key elements feeding into the FP7 interim evaluation. This will help to ensure not only better continuity and a deeper understanding of the issues being examined but also a stronger engagement between evaluation and processes for policy and decision making.