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

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This paper concerns the ex-post evaluation of the ‘Information Society Technologies (IST)’ Thematic Priority in the Sixth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration (RTD).

It highlights the findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the ‘Information Society Technologies (IST)’ Thematic Priority in the Sixth Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration (RTD), in the context of the i2010 Strategy. It sets out the Commission’s initial reactions and the measures already taken or planned. The evaluation, carried out from May 2007 to May 2008, responds to the requirements of the Financial Regulation, its Implementing Rules, and the provisions for evaluation for the Seventh Framework Programme.

The objectives of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) were to strengthen the European Research Area and the scientific and technological bases of European industry and encourage its international competitiveness, and to promote research activities in support of other EU policies.

In FP6, implemented from 2003 until 2006, the major investment was in a number of thematic priorities intended to focus and integrate Community research: EUR 3 984 million was invested in the ‘IST Thematic Priority’ and an additional EUR 216 million was invested in high-speed networks to connect research institutions in Europe with others in the world. The budget for the ‘Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Theme under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) is EUR 9 050 million for the period 20072013.

The key findings and recommendations from the evaluation report are as follows, inter alia:

- efforts should be made to continue to consolidate public-private partnerships of a more permanent nature, such as JTIs, from the 7th Framework Programme;
- the effort to ensure that support for SMEs and for large firms is not “compartmentalised” into different measures or tools must continue;
- a platform should be created within the scope of the 7th Framework Programme for new and high-growth companies to meet venture capital investors;
- participation from both developing and industrialised non-European countries in projects should be encouraged;
- the e-infrastructures approach should be expanded to more application-oriented and user-oriented platforms in other sectors;
- accounting control in JTIs should be carried out by Member States and participating companies, with a minimum of intervention at the Community level;
- a more trustbased approach towards participants should be developed at all stages;
- at the application stage, it is recommended to require shorter proposals with fewer details of work packages and a focus on the appropriateness of partnerships;
- at the evaluation of proposals stage, it is recommended: (i) that more complete and helpful feedback is made available to proposers whose ideas are not funded; (ii) to test a new approach whereby proposals are not fully evaluated initially (all applications passing a few basic checks should be given a small amount of "seed funding" for an exploratory phase); (iii) to explore expanding the

two-step evaluation procedure from the Open part of the "future and emerging technology" area to other parts of the programme;

- it is recommended to: (i) optimise reporting and allow the participants to report when there is something to report; (ii) allow the refocusing of the research on different priorities if this becomes necessary during implementation; (iii) allow more flexibility in the composition of partnerships during the project;
- the Commission should take new initiatives to allow public authorities to procure the development of innovative goods and services;
- the European single market needs to be made more effective for business angels and venture capitalists, and European investment funds need to be more effectively utilised to pull through innovations from the Framework Programmes;
- there is a need for a more strategic approach to standardisation at the European level, when this cannot be left to market forces, focused on interoperability and development of standards;
- interconnection of large regional and national eInfrastructures should be further developed.

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to take note of the findings and recommendations of the evaluation Panel, and to reflect on how best to take them forward. In particular, the Commission recognises that further reduction of red tape remains a significant challenge. It shares the Panel's view of the need to develop a risktolerant implementation of the rules on research funding. It believes that the European Parliament and the Council also have a role to play in enabling such a trustbased environment, and invites them to take this into account in future discussions of the FP Rules of Participation and the Financial Regulation.

The Commission will consult on the findings and recommendations with the aim to increase flexibility, cut red tape and to respond to the call for a greater strategic impact from EU level research. To this end, the Commission is launching an on-line public consultation on broader and longer-term policy implications alongside the present evaluation report, the results of which will be summarised in a Communication on ICT research and innovation in early 2009.

The interim evaluation of ICT RTD in the FP7 will also allow the effectiveness of new measures to be assessed. It will be available in late 2009 as a basis for further reflection.