Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013)

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The Commission presents its response to the report of the expert group(http://ec.europa.eu/research /evaluations)on the interim evaluation of FP7 (Seventh Framework Programme for Research) established by Decision No 1982/2006/EC and to the report by the IEG on the interim evaluation of the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility. The report was submitted on 12 November 2010. This Communication responds to the recommendations in these evaluations by outlining which actions the Commission intends to take or has already taken, but also indicating where no obvious or immediate solution exists. It is clear that a number of the issues raised, in particular regarding the design and content of the Framework Programmes and financial rules which govern their implementation, 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.

The report provides a detailed assessment of the implementation of FP7 so far and presents 10 recommendations for improvements:

Advance the European Research Area and Innovation Union objectives: the Commission states that future EU research programmes must provide a clearer focus on the major research items for science, technological leadership and industrial competitiveness and focus on the large societal challenges. Such an approach needs to be developed within the framework of the European Research Area, identifying areas of common or convergent interest, while ensuring better alignment of research capacities. The Innovation Union sets out how the Europe 2020 objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth can be achieved through a strategic and integrated approach to research and innovation. The Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation fundingwill launch a wide public debate on the key issues to be taken into account in future programmes.

Develop and implement high quality research infrastructures: the Commission recognises that infrastructure funding will be improved through better alignment of the FP, with funding from the European Investment Bank and Structural Funds. Following the Europe 2020 Strategy a work package on innovation could be included in all research infrastructure projects thereby favouring greater involvement of industry. The work programme 2012 will better highlight the possibility for researchers from third countries to benefit from access to European research infrastructures. The development of e-Infrastructures will connect researchers, instruments, data and computation resources throughout Europe, creating a seamless "online ERA". As an integral part of the Digital Agenda flagship initiative, this work will continue in the second half of FP7.

Maintain, at least, the level of funding: the Europe 2020 strategy acknowledges that research and innovation are the key engines of societal progress and economic prosperity. a common strategic framework will ensure a more efficient use of the EU's research and innovation funding by enhancing its EU added value, making it more results oriented, and by leveraging other public and private sources of funding.

Encourage participation from a broad spectrum of small and large enterprises, universities and research and technology organisations through a well-articulated innovation strategy: the Commission agrees with the recommendation which is convergent with the orientations provided in the

Communication on Innovation Union within the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy. While Innovation Union commitments will only be fully implemented in the next generation of spending programmes, the Commission is already investing significant effort in enhancing the innovation impact of the current Framework Programme. This will be achieved in the remaining FP7 work programmes, including through funding for projects which take research results closer to market (e.g. demonstration projects) and additional emphasis on innovation impacts in evaluating proposals. In addition, further funding will be provided for both SME specific projects and topics which are attractive to SMEs or organisations that are 'new comers' to FP7.

Achieve a quantum leap with simplification: the Commission has acknowledged the need for further simplification, and refers to the Communication on simplifying the implementation of the FPs presenting a set of short term and longer term options.

The mix of funding measures in FP7 and successor programmes should strike a different balance between bottom-up and top-down approaches to research: significant parts of FP7 already provide bottom-up approaches to research. These include the Marie Curie Actions for researcher training and mobility and the European Research Council (ERC) for curiosity-driven research. Also noteworthy is the Future and Emerging Technology (FET) scheme which, through top-down thematic calls combined with bottom-up open calls is supporting multidisciplinary exploratory research in ICT. The **move towards more bottom-up funding** is set to continue, with the Commission proposal for further open, challenge-driven calls for proposals in the final years of FP7. Beyond this, the Innovation Union has committed to strengthen the role of the ERC and the issue of bottom-up versus top-down approaches will feature strongly in the orientation debate on the next FP.

Consider a moratorium on new instruments until the existing ones have been sufficiently developed and adequately evaluated: the Commission will examine the current portfolio of instruments to identify areas for simplification, possible redundancy and potential gaps. Novel approaches such as prizes or innovative procurement schemes should also be considered. This work will be supported in a number of ways including discussions within the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) and the forthcoming 'Communication on Partnerships'. The resulting ideas will be reflected in the proposals for the next FP.

Take further steps to increase female participation in FP7: the Commission attaches great importance to this issue although notes, since the FP is only a small part of total European research activity, the limits to what it can achieve on its own. Real progress necessitates a common approach actively supported by funding agencies and researchers across the European Research Area. In this context, the Commission accepts the challenge of taking a leading role. Further to the current activities - notably the 40% target; monitoring, awareness and promotion activities; and successes under the Marie Curie Actions - a series of additional activities are proposed. The Commission will launch new analyses with the support of Member States and research institutions to identify, by end 2011, the cultural and situational factors which help shape female researcher participation, as well as measures to overcome these.

Build connections between the FP and Structural Funds in order to pave the way for increased participation from Member States that are under-represented: a specific example of progress already being made is the Synergies Expert Group (SEG), set up to find synergies between FP7, the Structural Funds and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme. The Europe 2020 flagship initiatives on Innovation Union and the Digital Agenda have significant implications for achieving a better alignment of EU policies and activities, including research, innovation and cohesion funding.

Carry out a review based upon a thorough analysis of the current strategy towards international cooperation: the Commission will carry out a major review of its strategy for international collaboration. This will examine how to build critical mass and specialisation, in areas of European need and comparative advantage.

RSFF: as a positive interim evaluation of the RSFF is a prerequisite for the release of the second tranche of EUR 500 million of FP7 funding to the RSFF for the period from 2011 to 2013, the Commission notes that this release is strongly recommended by both the RSFF IEG and the FP7 Interim Evaluation Expert Group. By voting the EU Budget 2011, the Council and the European Parliament have already provided their agreement on principle to the release of the second tranche (budget of EUR 250 million for 2011). The Commission however invites them to provide a more formal answer later in 2011, on the whole period (2011-2013), if they deemed it appropriate.

The Commission fully endorses the recommendations of the IEG to address the needs of currently underrepresented groups in RSFF (i.e. SMEs, universities/research organisations and research infrastructures). Technical negotiations between the Commission and the EIB are already taking place on finding concrete solutions and new approaches on how to achieve these objectives, including in particular changes of risk-sharing, portfolio approaches, increase of risk levels, and introduction of equity funding. This work will lead to an amendment of the EC/EIB agreement on RSFF implementation already in the first half of 2011.