Seventh EU programme for research, technological development and demonstration

2011/2043(INI) - 09/03/2011

The Council adopted the conclusions on the interim evaluation of the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research activities (2007-2013), including the risk-sharing finance facility, and it puts forward the following considerations:

European Research Area (ERA) and Innovation Union objectives: FP7 should help integrate the research base by overcoming fragmentation while simultaneously encouraging the development of scientific capacities across Europe. A balanced division of labour between what is done at EU, national and regional levels is needed. European research and innovation efforts must concentrate on those areas and activities where critical mass is vital for success and where breakthroughs require cross-border solutions, while also allocating sufficient resources to R&D topics which promise radical breakthroughs and promoting favourable conditions for innovation. Addressing the grand challenges confronting Europe and increasing global industrial competition should be an essential part of EU research and innovation policy. The Innovation Union, including the European Innovation Partnerships, should lead to a strategic approach to research and innovation and, taking into account the ERA-Initiatives, also contribute to a simpler European research and innovation landscape.

Research infrastructures (RIs): these are amongst the main pillars of ERA. Greater synergy is needed between the strategic aims of RI funding provided by FP7 and the Member States, taking into account the specific goals of the related policies, such as Cohesion policy and the Joint Programming Initiatives. A more integrated approach is needed to boost RIs during the coming stages of FP7. In addition, there should be a focus on promoting their impact by establishing synergies between training instruments and utilisation of RIs and by further stimulating access of European researchers to RIs.

Research and innovation strategy: a well articulated strategy needs to ensure that instruments and priorities encourage the participation from a broad spectrum of enterprises, universities and research and technology organisations. Such strategy also has to take into account the need to support European enterprises’ efforts to integrate in global innovation networks. The Council encourages the Commission to continue enhancing the innovation impact of FP7 and notes the Commission's intention to fund projects which take research results closer to the market, and to put additional emphasis on innovation impact when evaluating proposals, as appropriate. Full use should be made of the open, international character of FP7. In the context of the exit strategy from the financial crisis support should be channelled for research and innovation in areas of crucial importance for European competitiveness, such as key technologies. Innovation also requires more attention to the distinctive needs of industry, among which reductions in administrative burdens are vital.

Simplification: the Council agrees with the need for a "quantum leap" in simplification. It recalls its conclusions of 12 October 2010 requesting removal of the requirement to open interest-bearing bank accounts for pre-financing and notes the proposals made by the Commission in this respect and on an appropriate tolerable risk of error. It encourages the Commission to continue its efforts to follow-up other aspects raised in previous Council conclusions, including the urgent need to reduce time-to-grant period as well as the need to accept the usual accounting practice of beneficiaries. Coherence of procedures and approaches across Commission services and the Executive Agencies responsible for administering FP7 is of crucial importance. The Commission is invited to utilise the present revision of the Financial

Regulation as an opportunity to contribute to a common strategic framework with harmonised conditions for research, including Joint Technology Initiatives. The Council calls on the Commission to continue looking into possibilities to switch to a more trust-based and risk-tolerant approach as soon as possible.

Funding: the mix of funding measures in FP7 should strike a right balance between bottom-up and top-down approaches to research. In the Cooperation" Specific Programme, greater emphasis should be put on bottom-up open calls. It is also important to focus on education and advanced training as part of the Knowledge Triangle, ensuring that linkages between research and innovation are adequately complemented by research training, building also on the development of and experience from the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the EIT.

Instruments: the Council takes note of the Expert Group's call to consider a moratorium on new instruments and notes that the set of FP7 instruments as set out in the FP7 Decision will remain unchanged until the end of the current programme (2013). The Council calls on the Commission to assess carefully the experience gained from the FP7 instruments, taking into account the opinion of ERAC, with a view to developing a coherent and streamlined portfolio of instruments to be proposed for the future programme. This should provide more European added value, stronger impact and enhanced leverage effects, both in terms of science and innovation, while keeping the good practices and lessons from the past. New instruments and mechanisms should only be introduced when fully justified;

Female participation: further steps to encourage female participation and the involvement of early-stage researchers should be taken in the current FP7 by all relevant stake holders. Female participation should be boosted throughout project lifecycles, paying particular attention to overcoming gender-specific obstacles which women face. Positive measures for the training of female scientists should be considered. A quantitative target (40%) for female participation in relevant Committees should continue to be strived for;

Low participation: the Council acknowledges the findings of the Expert Group regarding the low participation from some Member States in FP7. The Council recalls that raising the competitiveness of European research requires that the potential across the whole European Research Area is fully unlocked. Synergies between the Structural Funds and the FP should be further improved. The work of the ERAC ad-hoc working group on Synergies should be taken into consideration. The Commission is invited to analyse the reasons of low participation rates from certain Member States and report back to the Council as soon as possible but before the end of 2011, and put forward appropriate actions in this regard.

International cooperation: the opening of FP7 to international cooperation has been of great value. As other regions rapidly strengthen their research and innovation capacities, the ability of European research and innovation to link up with other regions, markets, and research and innovation agendas and to cooperate on innovative solutions becomes increasingly important. Efficiency and added value of EU activities in this field require a strategy based on a constant analytical work. A review based upon a thorough analysis of the current approach towards international cooperation is needed, with the involvement of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), and European strategy should be reinforced. The Council recalls its conclusions of 26 November 2010 in which it stated that the external dimension must be

duly taken into account in the design of EU research and innovation policies, with the aim of ensuring open and competitive markets in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit, and attracting investments, researchers and creative talent and also that special attention should be given to the management and protection of IPR.

Risk-Sharing Finance Facility: the Council welcomes the finding of the Independent Experts Group (IEG) that RSFF has been a success, both in quantitative and qualitative terms and that very considerable results on an EU-wide scale have been achieved since its launch. The Council therefore agrees with the

recommendation of the IEG, also supported by the Commission, to release an additional EU contribution of up to EUR 500 million (including EUR 250 million for RSFF in the 2011 EU budget) for the period 2011-2013 under the conditions provided in the FP7 Decision. The Council calls on the Commission, in liaison with the European Investment Bank, urgently to examine ways to improve the take-up by currently underrepresented target groups, in particular SMEs, universities and research infrastructures with a view to achieving significant progress in 2012. A specific SME lending mechanism within the current facility is being designed by the Commission, the European Investment Fund and the EIB in this respect. The Council is looking forward to the Commission proposals called for by the European

Council for scaling up the RSFF.

Future EU support of research and innovation (2014 -): the Council welcomes the Commission's intention to put forward its proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and future programmes in a common strategic framework in order to improve the efficiency of EU's research and innovation funding and to contribute to reaching the objectives of the Innovation Union and the Europe 2020 strategy.