Euratom Framework Programme 2012-2013: nuclear research and training activities

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The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy adopted the report by Jan BREZINA (EPP, CZ) on the proposal for a Council decision concerning the Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for nuclear research and training activities (2012-2013).

It recommended that the European Parliament made some amendments to the Commission proposal. The committee considers that the prime reference amount set in the legislative proposal is not compatible with the ceiling of Heading 1a of the current Multiannual Financial Framework 2007- 2013 (MFF). It takes note of the Commission proposal to revise the current MFF in order to accommodate the additional unforeseen funding for ITER for the years 2012-2013, and it is willing to enter into negotiations with the other arm of the budgetary authority with a view to reaching a swift agreement on the financing of the Euratom research programme by the end of 2011. Members recall their opposition to any form of redeployment from the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013) as proposed in the Commission proposal.

The main amendments to the proposal are as follows:

Nuclear safety: the report states that the improvement of nuclear safety and, where relevant, security aspects, should be prioritised given the possible cross-border impact of nuclear incidents. In view of the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan resulting from the earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011, additional research work in the field of nuclear fission safety is necessary in order to reassure Union citizens that the safety of nuclear facilities based in the Union continues to meet the highest international standards. Such additional work requires an increase in the budget allocation for nuclear fission.

Additional funding of ITER: an agreement on additional funding of ITER solely through transfers of unused 2011 margins of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and without redeployments from the Seventh EU Framework Programme (2007-2013) to the Framework Programme (2012-2013) would allow for swift adoption of the programme in 2011.

A recital states that to accommodate the Framework Programme (2012-2013) in the MFF for the years 2012 and 2013, it will be necessary to amend the MFF by increasing the ceiling of Heading 1a. If no other 2011 MFF margins are available to be transferred in 2012 and 2013, the Flexibility Instrument, as provided for in point 27 of the IIA, should be mobilised.

For the 2014-2020 MFF, the financial resources dedicated to the ITER project should be fixed for the whole programming period so that any over-running of the costs beyond the EU share of EUR 6.6 billion for the ITER construction period, currently planned to be finalised in 2020, should be financed outside the MFF ceilings ('ring fencing').

Framework Programme: the report stresses the need to place particular emphasis on nuclear safety, security and radiation protection.

It adds that the Framework Programme (2012-2013) shall contribute to implementing the SET-plan. Its actions should take into account the Strategic Research Agenda of the three existing European technology platforms on nuclear energy: SNETP, IGDTP and MELODI. Members consider that more emphasis could be put on the need for coherence between the research and training activities to be pursued in 2012-2013 and the strategic research agendas of three major European cooperative initiatives which have been launched under the 7th Euratom framework program: the European Sustainable Nuclear Industrial Initiative under SET-Plan (encompassing the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform – SNETP - and the Implementing Geological Disposal Technology Platform - IGDTP) and the Multidisciplinary European Low-Dose Initiative (MELODI).

Funding: the maximum amount for the implementation of the Framework Programme (2012-2013) shall be EUR 2 100270 000 (rather than EUR 2 560270 000). This amount shall be distributed as follows:

- fusion energy research EUR 1 748 809 000;
- nuclear fission, especially safety, improving the management of nuclear waste and radiation protection EUR 118 245 000;
- nuclear activities of the JRC relating to nuclear safety, environmental protection and decommissioning EUR 233 216 000.

Special attention shall be paid to the development of contractual arrangements that reduce the risk of failure to perform as well as the reallocation of risks and costs over time.

Monitoring, assessment and review: Member States and the Commission shall establish a review of professional qualifications, training and skills in the nuclear field in the Union, which gives an overall picture of the current situation and enable appropriate solutions to be identified and implemented.

Annex: on nuclear fission and radiation protection, the report states that special attention should be given to long-lived nuclear waste when decommissioning outdated systems. It stresses continued support for the retention and development of qualified personnel required to maintain the nuclear independence of the Union and consistently ensure, and improve the level of, nuclear safety. It is crucial to keep nuclear expertise in the Union, as regards radioprotection and the dismantling of nuclear facilities, as nuclear energy will play a key role in the Union's energy mix, including decommissioning and long-life waste-management activities.

Lastly, the committee states that the management of European research funding should be more trust-based and risk-tolerant towards participants at all stages of the projects, while ensuring accountability, with flexible Union rules to improve alignment, where possible, with existing different national regulations and recognised accounting practices. It adds that it is necessary to strike a balance between trust and control – between risk taking and the dangers that risk involves – in ensuring the sound financial management of Union research funds.