Research Fund for Coal and Steel: research programme and multiannual technical guidelines

2020/0141(NLE) - 19/05/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 529 votes to 148, with 14 abstentions, a legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council decision amending Decision 2008/376/EC on the adoption of the Research Programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel and on the multiannual technical guidelines for this programme.

Parliament approved the Commission's proposal subject to amendments.

According to Members, the research programme should pay particular attention to research on raw materials deriving from coal wastes.

The research programme should be consistent with the EU's political, social, economic, climate, environmental, scientific and technological objectives and should be complementary to actions carried out in the Member States and under existing EU research programmes, including the Horizon Europe framework programme for research and innovation. It should be consistent with the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Aims of the programme

Parliament considers that the research programme should:

- provide support to all relevant stakeholders, including SMEs, for collaborative research in the coal and steel sectors;

- support advanced clean steel technologies leading to zero-carbon steel production projects, as well as research projects, including large-scale industrial research projects, to manage a just transition of formerly mined or closing coal mines and related infrastructure;

- support research activities, including demonstration projects, that bring technologies closer to the market.

Research objectives for coal

Research projects should contribute to the achievement of the EU's 2030 climate targets and support the transition of the industrial sector to a climate-neutral EU economy by 2050. The aim would be to support the phasing out of fossil fuels, to develop alternative activities for former mining or coal-fired power plant sites and to avoid or restore environmental damage of coal mines in the process of closure, formerly operating coal mines and their surroundings.

Projects should focus in particular on the following:

- development and analysis of carbon capture, utilisation and storage technologies related to coal use, including recycling of carbon in fuels and materials, with a view to promoting the circular economy

- development of clean energy in former mining sites, with a focus on energy efficiency and security of supply, including exploitation of geothermal resources, energy storage, e-fuels and hydrogen from renewable sources

- conversion of coal-fired heating and cooling infrastructure, such as district heating and cooling networks and industrial processes, to alternative heating and cooling systems from renewable sources, such as geothermal energy;

- assessment of the impact on employment in local communities and regions affected by the phasing out of coal and development of a regional concept for economic development, job creation and effective retraining programmes for the affected workforce in these regions;

- mining-related diseases, especially those caused by air pollution.

Preventing and minimising the environmental impacts of the coal sector in transition

Preference should be given to projects that are based on innovative technologies or an innovative combination of technologies and that include

- the management and reuse of mining waste from coal mines and coal power plants in the process of closing or were previously in operation;

- the development of a regional concept for the diversification of economic activities for local development and the creation of green and quality jobs.

Research objectives for steel

Substantially reducing emissions, energy consumption, the carbon footprint and other environmental impacts, through objectively verifiable tools, parameters and data, as well as conserving resources, should form an integral part of the activities sought.

Projects should place particular emphasis on recycled steel, prolonging service life, enabling design for circularity, resistance of steels, reuse of obsolete steel and reuse of secondary raw materials, residues and by-products from other industries, such as biomass, for steel production and alloying.

Workforce management should be improved through predictive models for labour demand and reallocation.