Research: towards a European area

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The Council proceeded to an in-depth debate on the European Research Area (ERA). This debate was held in light of these conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23/24 March 2000, the Commission communication on ERA as well as of a Commission document entitled "First steps towards a European Research Area". The Ministers warmly welcomed the Commission's initiatves in this respect and the plans which were outlined by Commissioner BUSQUIN on how the Commission intends to bring the work forwards, with particular regard to the preliminary work on the 6th RTD Framework Programme. Following the debate the Council adopted a resolution which: 1) encourages the networking of national and joint research programmes on a voluntary basis, around freely chosen objectives, in order to take greater advantage of the concerted resources devoted to research and technological development in the Member States. To this end: - Member States will cooperate, in association with the Commission, in devising a simple means for improved information exchange, wherever possible using existing mechanisms, on research activities of strategic importance on the European level; - Member States will bring forward work already underway with a view to developing mechanisms for opening progressively their national research programmes, including where appropriate the participation of non-national experts in evaluation panels. In additon, the Council welcomes the initial work undertaken by the Commission with a view to developing an open method of coordination for benchmarking national research policies in relation to the following themes for benchmarking indicators aiming to assess the development of European research policies in relation to the development of research in the rest of the world: - human resources in RTD; - public and private investment in RTD; - scientific and technological productivity; - impact of RTD on economic competitiveness and employment. Furthermore, the Council invites the Member States and the Commission to take the necessary steps towards: - increasing the participation of women in science by accelerating the implementation of the action plan "Women in Science"; - working closely with the European Investment Bank, to support the development of a globally competitive economy based upon a thriving SME and start-up sector through the exchange of best practices on technology transfer and innovation measures in respect of, inter alia, venture capital funds, incubators, promotion of high-tec start-ups, etc. In conclusion, the Council considers it necessary to review regularly European Science and Technology policies and assess progress made towards achieving a European Research Area. To this end, invited the Commision to present a regular report on the state of RTD in Europe to the Council and the European Parliament and thereafter forwarded annually to the Spring European Council.