European research area: research and training activities, framework programme EURATOM 2002-2006

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The Council had a first orientation debate on the Commission's proposals for Framework Programmes on Research for 2002-2006 (EC and Euratom). On the basis of preparatory work by the Council bodies and the Presidency, the Ministers had an exchange of views on a broad range of issues relating to the framework programmes, in particular on the seven thematic priorities proposed for the EC. The 8th priority on anticipating the EU's scientific and technological needs. The proposed instruments for the implementation of the major part of the Framework Programmes and the use of Article 169 allows the Community to participate in R&D programmes undertaken by several Member States. On the basis of the debate and the conclusions reached by the Swedish Presidency, discussions will continue within the Council with a view to adopting a common position on the EC Framework Programme during the autumn, taking into account the opinion of the European Parliament. The President concluded the debate by stating that : Concerning the scientific and technological priorities, Ministers agreed that the programme should aim at focussing Community research on a limited number of areas. The seven thematic priorities proposed by the Commission to this effect received broad support. Two of these priorities, i.e. sustainable development and global change, and food safety and health risks, need further work to be undertaken on them to underline certain aspects (such as transport, energy, agriculture including fisheries and forestry, marine sciences). Ministers generally agreed on the fact that the eighth priority should include research activities in support of Community policies. Ministers stressed the importance of breaking the eighth priority down into its various components with a budget allocation to each one. On the instruments, Ministers shared the Commission·s objective of using integrated projects and networks of excellence to achieve in the most effective manner the overall objectives of the programme, bringing together a critical mass of scientific expertise. However, the operational modalities require further clarification so as to ensure transparency of selection procedures and equitable participation of all research actors, including the smaller players. Long-term research should also be catered for. It was considered that these instruments should be implemented in a flexible manner. A substantial number of delegations, moreover, considered that these instruments should be implemented alongside existing instruments so as to ensure a smooth transition between the Fifth and Sixth Framework Programmes. Regarding the use of Article 169 of the Treaty, clear interest was expressed in examining this modality in more depth in relation to all areas of the Framework Programme. Ministers expressed broad support for the horizontal measures proposed under the headings "Structuring the European Research Area" and "Strengthening the foundations of ERA". As regards possible financial support for the creation of new large-scale European research infrastructures, a large majority felt that this should not be allocated via the Framework Programme, but was rather a national responsibility, although financial support for feasibility studies could be envisaged. Lastly, Ministers consider that international collaboration should have a high degree of visibility in the programmes, with particular emphasis being put on the integration of candidate countries.