European Research Area: guidelines for European Union research activities 2002-2006

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PURPOSE : to propose guidelines for future measures in support of EU research, and more specifically the Research Framework Programme, for the period 2000-2006. In addition, this paper contains the Commission's mid-term review of the 5th research Framework Programme. CONTENT : according to the Commission, future measures in support of EU research should be designed with reference to the broad lines of the "European Research Area", that is: to strengthen the scientific and technological bases of Community industry and encourage it to become more competitive at international level; promote the research activities deemed necessary by virtue of other EU policies. This implies action in number of areas, the first of which (various forms of support for research activities in their strict sense) should account for a substantial proportion of EU efforts: 1) Research activities : improving the performance of European research, in particular through the networking and coordinated implementation of national programmes; networking centres and areas of excellence in the public (in particular university) and private sectors in the Member States; carrying out large-scale targeted research projects, particularly in the field of industrial research; 2) Research and innovation, "start-ups" and SMEs: strengthening technological innovation capacities in the EU, in particular by supporting research for and in SMEs, dissemination, transfer and take-up of knowledge and technologies, exploitation of research results and setting-up of technology businesses; 3) Research infrastructure : strengtheing the European research infrastructure by implementing a European policy in this area, taking into account questions concerning access, operation and construction, and also covering the question of large-capacity electronic network for research; 4) Human resources : in support of the development of a knowledge-based economy, strengthening Europe's human resources in science, technology and innovation, in particular by increasing transfrontier mobility, developing European careers, increasing the participation of women in research and making the scientific professions more attractive to young people and Europe more attractive to researchers from thrid countries; 5) Science, society and citizens : establishing on a European scale, a new contract between science and society by strengthening the link between research activities adn policies and the needs of society, taking greater account of the needs relating to the application of the precautionary principle and the sustainable development principle, as well as the social and ethical consequences of scientific and technological progress. Three specific aspects should be taken into account with regard to measures taken in these areas: the European scientific and technological development; regional dimension; international dimension. These three aspects should be taken into account in particular by efforts to implement joint measures with these of the "European Research Area", or measures complementing activities in its main fields, in thespheres of action of : European intergovernmental scientific cooperation structures and organisations (e.g. the European Science Foundation, COST and EUREKA but also ESA, EMBL, ESRF and CERN); the Structural Funds, regional initiatives and European Investment Bank activities; the programmes of economic and technical assistance to the Central and Eastern European countries and Mediterranean third countries, and the other financial instruments of international cooperation. Moreover, European research efforts should be focused on a more limited number of priorities which should be the subject to a political choice on the basis of objective assessment criteria. There are two aspects to the question of selecting and justifying EU research activities: the justification of public funding and justification for support at EU level (European added value).