Resaerch RTD, 5th framework-programme EC 1998-2002: research, technological development and demonstration activities

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The aim of the European Research Area is to create conditions making it possible to increase the impact of European research efforts by strengthening the coherence of research activities and policies conducted in Europe. However, Europe is still suffering from structural weaknesses where research is concerned, compared to the United States for example. Against this background, in January 2000 the Commission proposed the creation of a European Research Area. The purpose of this paper is to propose guidelines for future measures in support of EU research, and more specifically the research Fraemwork Programme, for the period 2002-2006. In addition, this paper contains the Commission's mid-term review of the 5th research Framework Programme. In this respect, it also constitutes the mid-term Communication provided for in Articles 6 of the Decisions 182/1999/EC and 1999/64 Euratom on the Fifth Framework Programme. The main points contained in the report are as follows: - supplementing the European intergovernmental scientific co-operation initiatives launched since the 1950s, the EU's Framework Programmes have made a significant contribution to strengthening European research capabilities. - the collaboration networks and the forms of co-operation to which they have given rise (250,000 transnational co-operational links between 1995 and 1999) represent a considerable achievement. However, these Framework Programmes have up to now to a large extent been additional to the 15 series of national programmes conducted independently of one another; - in order to be able to play a more strucutring role in support of the realisation of the European Research Area, they need to be closely linked with national activities and European intergovernmental co-operation initiatives. Their funding should be combined to a greater extent with other public and private sector funding; - the European Research Area project requires the full application of the principle, enshrined in the Treaty, of complementarity between EU research activities and Member States' research activities; - new instruments and new methods of intervention need to be conceived and used for this purpose, specifically designed to help correct the structural weakness of European research; - European research efforts should be focused on a more limited number of priorities which should be subject to a political choice on the basis of objective assessment criteria.