Research and technological development (RTD): activities of the Union. Annual report 2001

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PURPOSE : to present the 2001 Annual Report on the research and technological development activities of the EU. CONTENT : This annual report covers a period which marked a turning point with the launch of two major political initiatives: the discussions on creation of a European Research Area (ERA) and the preparations of the new RTD Framework Programme for 2002 to 2006. At the same time, the Fifth Framework Programme accelerated to full speed in 2000. In its communication "Towards a European Research area", the Commission drew the alarming conclusion that the EU is losing ground to its main rivals in the research and development race. With the support of the Heads of State and Government at the Lisbon summit, the Commission consulted institutions, industry and scientists on a series of courses of action to make European research more dynamic by opening up activities at regional, national and European levels and coordinating them more closely to make more efficient use of the available resources. The Commission's actions were backed by the European Parliament, the Council and other institutions and by the opinion expressed by the scientific community and industry. The first steps have already been taken towards making a reality of the ERA, with work progressing on the introduction of a Community patent, benchmarking national research and innovation policies, mapping scientific excellence in Europe, networking national research programmes, evaluating the level of mobility amongst researchers in Europe and identifying the obstacles to mobility. The measures to implement the 5th RTD Research Programme in 2000 focused mainly on adaptation of the work programmes to the objectives of creating a European Research Area, particularly by reinforcing the concerted action and thematic networks. Boosted by a substantial increase in the total value of the contracts signed (around EUR 3.9 billion), the impact of the Community's research activities is becoming tangible within the EU and relations with the associated countries and other partners are growing closer. In the thematic programmes the average Community contributions to the shared-cost actions now stands at around EUR 1 300 000 per project. Participation of SMEs is growing strongly and the proportion of women involved is moving in the right direction at all levels of research. The socio-economic impact can be measured in terms of the knowledge built up and greater institutional competitiveness. The year 2000 was also marked by the preparations for the Framework programme for RTD for 2002-2006. One major milestone was the adoption, in October 2000, of the communication "Making a reality of the European Research Area: Guidelines for EU research activities (2002-2006)", which identified the new forms which Community activities could take. It proposes that the next Framework Programme contributes to the creation of the ERA by bringing real European added value to the RTD undertaken at national and regional levels, based on three main principles: -concentrating resources on a limited number of areas; -applying new methods of intervention capable of exerting a more structuring effect on the RTD activities conducted in Europe; -simplifying and streamlining management procedures. Discussions will draw on the deliberations sparked by several documents on numerous specific aspects of the strategy for thecreation of the ERA, such as the dialogue between science and society, infrastructure and human resources, and the international and regional dimensions. The European Research Advisory Body (EURAB) will play a key role in this debate, by giving independent advice to back up the efforts to develop Europe's research policy consistently and effectively.