Research RTD, 6th EC Framework-programme 2002-2006: structuring the European Research Area

2001/0123(CNS) - 30/01/2002 - Modified legislative proposal

The positions expressed by Parliament and Council on the new framework programme demonstrate a high degree of convergence, with broadly similar positions expressed on the overall budget and its breakdown, programme structure, scientific and technological priorities, and means of implementation. For its part, the Commission has worked to encourage the process of convergence, in particular by modifying its framework programme proposals to take up a significant proportion of Parliament's amendments. It notes with satisfaction the substantial consensus on the underlying principles of the new framework programme that has been achieved through the efforts of Council and Parliament, in particular with respect to the priority to be given to the use of powerful new instruments, the strong focus of the thematic priorities, and the introduction of greater flexibility in the implementation of the programme. A sufficiently stable basis now exists for the Commission to come forward with amended proposals for the specific programmes. These take up the changes in the framework programme resulting from the first reading, and set out their detailed implications as regards the research to be conducted and its means of implementation. The objective is to assist the other institutions in their examination of the specific programmes, and their further negotiations, with the aim of reaching early agreement on the framework programme, rules of participation and specific programmes. The most extensive adjustments to the Commission's earlier proposals are to be found in the programme "Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area", including the following: - adaptations to the structure and detailed research content of thematic priority 1 (to reflect its organisation in two sections, respectively on advanced genomics and its applications to health, and on combating major diseases) and thematic priority 6 (to reflect its organisation in three parts, respectively on sustainable energy systems, sustainable surface transport, and global change and ecosystems). More limited, but in some cases nevertheless substantial, amendments have been introduced in to the research content of other priority thematic areas. - adjustments to the initial policy-orientated research priorities under the heading "supporting policies and anticipating scientific and technological needs", along with some re-attribution of research activities in relation to the thematic priorities (notably as regards agriculture and marine ecosystem research). These take account of the modifications to content and the significant reduction in budget introduced following the first reading. - the description of the instruments (Annex III) has been refined and clarified, in the light of the debate leading up to the first reading. This reflects the principle of a smooth transition from "traditional" to "new" instruments in the implementation of the thematic priority areas, and the idea of a fourth instrument, in the spirit of the "escalier d'excellence". In implementing this specific programme, the Commission proposes to be assisted by a committee of Member States' representatives. The committee shall meet in different configurations, as appropriate, corresponding to the thematic priority areas of research. The modifications introduced in the programme"Structuring the European research area" relate mainly to the mobility and infrastructure actions, where additional detail and clarity has been introduced in the mechanisms and instruments to be adopted, while also taking account of the more limited budget attributed to these actions. As regards the Euratom programme on "Nuclear energy", the main changes relate to the fission part, with the introduction of a new thematic priority on radiation protection and activities on the safety of nuclear installations. In both these programmes, the descriptions of the instruments (Annex III) have been substantially updated, in line with the programme "Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area". In all cases, the budgetary allocations have been revised in conformity with the common position of the Council.