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

2000/2334(COS) - 06/02/2001

The committee adopted the report by Elly PLOOIJ-VAN GORSEL (ELDR, NL) on the Commission communication, emphasising that it served as the starting point for an in-depth political and scientific debate on establishing the European Research Area. The committee stressed that the financial resources applied to the 6th Framework Programme should in future reflect the new objectives and the new instruments, as well as enlargement. It noted that, in view of the importance of the SME sector in Europe, at least 10% of EU research funding should be allocated to SME-related research. The committee was in favour of introducing new research policy instruments, provided they: promoted genuine cooperation and coordination between EU research actions and Member State activities, as well as between the activities of the various Member States; were integrated in the next Framework Programme, and presented equality of opportunity to all Member States and to members of the scientific community, so as to prevent the risk of one specific application of the instruments known as ·major projects·, ·networks of excellence· and ·concentration· excluding either public or private research groups. However, the committee approved the development of 'networks of excellence', provided that they promoted cooperation between universities, research centres, industry and SMEs, and that they did not focus exclusively on large-scale projects. It believed that this concept should be made clear in the future proposal for the Sixth Framework Directive. The committee also wanted the Commission to oversee the rapid creation of a high-speed trans-European research network with a capacity of 100 gigabit/second. Without this network a dynamic, knowledge-based economy would not be possible. Lastly, Member States were urged to improve the recruitment of EU science and engineering students.