Research and technological innovation in Europe RTD: support and investment, action plan

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Rolf LINKOHR (PES, D) in response to the Commission communication on an action plan for investing in research in Europe. The committee generally endorsed the Commission's recommendations and underlined that science and technology had been "an intrinsic element of Europe's identity since at least the Renaissance". MEPs called on the Member States to increase their expenditure on research to 3% of GDP by 2010. They were critical of the Council for not following up its words with deeds and of the Member States for making little or no effort to increase their R&D expenditure or, in some cases, actually reducing such expenditure. They therefore called on Member States and private investors to increase their R&D expenditure, the required increase being 6% for public investment and 9% for private investment, to reach the average of 8% needed to achieve the target figure of 3% of GDP overall by 2010. To this end, the committee said that more funding was needed for the European research framework programme, and called for an increase in the 7th research framework programme budget to EUR 30 billion for the whole period of the programme, to include allowing for enlargement to 25 and more Member States. The committee also supported the creation of regional networks of SMEs and called on the Member States and the Commission to support such initiatives as a priority. Lastly, MEPs called for the establishment of a European Research Council with the aim of strengthening the worldwide position of basic research carried out in Europe at the highest scientific level by offering long-term funding for that purpose. The body should: primarily be a funding rather than an advisory body; follow a bottom-up approach in stimulating proposals for funding; cover all fields of science, including the natural sciences and engineering, the humanities and the social sciences, using a flexible approach; base its decisions on scientific criteria and have a rigorous and transparent peer review process; be accountable to its funders, but autonomous in its operations and run by highly respected scientists and focus on financing bottom-up academic research.