Research and technological development RTD: achieving coordination through cooperation

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Faced with international competition, fragmented research policies and the duplication of effort which results, the Commission's strategic document proposes that coordination between national and European research policies should gradually be improved by stepping up European cooperation as and when RDT policy is drawn up and implemented. The Commission stressed the need to coordinate research activities (for which provision is made in Article 130 H of the Treaty) in its White Paper "Growth, Competitiveness and Employment" and the European Council in Corfu listed it as one of the six political priorities. The purpose of the Commission communication is to put this approach into practice and it proposes action at three levels: 1) laying down RDT policy so as to give ministers a forum for discussion, with systematic groundwork in order to provide the common information needed, the aim being to ensure that Member States have relevant and comparable basic information on national RDT policies and common basic references for technological forecasts; 2) carrying out research in order to strengthen the overall coherence of efforts: - programming committees should exchange information more systematically on action taken at national level on the specific programmes in question in order to identify areas where improved cooperation and coordination could prove beneficial; - priority should be given when selecting projects to action which might improve cooperation or coordination between Member States' activities; - the rigid boundaries between programmes should be made more flexible (e.g. aeronautical, automotive, maritime). The programming committees have a decisive role to play here; - the dialogue with industry, including SMEs, should be stepped up by holding thematic meetings; - cooperation should be stepped up with other European RDT organizations or agencies (European Space Agency, Eureka, European Molecular Biology Laboratory, CERN); - the possibility of complementary research programmes (Article 130K of the Treaty) and Community participation involving certain Member States only (Article 130 L) should be explored; - Member States should be encouraged to include research teams from other Member States in their programmes in order to promote the development of RDT partnerships and networks in the EU; 3) international cooperation: the Union should take a consistent stand at international fora and participate in programmes of worldwide scope in a coordinated manner. Systematic Community consultations are therefore needed prior to international meetings.