Research and technological development RTD activities of the European Union. 1997 annual report

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OBJECTIVE: presentation of the European Commission's Annual Report on research activities during 1996. SUBSTANCE: the 1996-1997 report the third in the series, is based on the experience of previous reports and the comments received on them. It gives an overview of the major developments during the past year (extending into the first few months of 1997) together with more detailed information on the research activities carried out for each specific programme and on the type of projects and level of financing involved. The Commission's report highlights that the implementation of the fourth programme has been particularly intensive in 1996: nearly 24 000 proposals had been received as a result of different calls for proposals. More than 6 000 contracts have been signed, involving 25 000 research partners and more than 70 000 links between research teams in Europe and the rest of the world. Significant results have been obtained in numerous fields from projects terminating during the year. Particularly notable is the sequencing of the yeast genome. In all, more than 3 000 publications and patents from Community research were recorded in 1996. The Fourth Framework Programme was particularly successful in involving SMUs. During 1995 and 1996 their rate of participation was 20%: 3 800 SMUs were involved in collaborative research projects. Moreover, 1 200 SMUs had benefited from exploratory awards and took part in CRAFT projects during this period. The overall assessment, conducted by a Panel chaired by Viscount Davignon, acknowledges the importance and quality of Community research. However, the Panel concludes that a more strategic and flexible approach is needed if the full potential of the framework programme is to be realized. The main focus for policy developments in 1996 was the preparation of the Fifth Framework Programme. In this respect, the Commission had published a Communication under the title 'Inventing Tomorrow', which had signalled a major change in approach, in favour of simplifying the structure of the framework programme and to improve the flexibility and efficiency of research. The formal proposals for the Fifth Framework Programme were adopted in April 1997 (see COD97119), while in January 1996, the Commission had presented a proposal for a financial supplement for the Fourth Framework Programme (see COD96034). The Fifth Framework Programme would remain the central focus of Community research policy development in 1997, together with the detailed preparation of the specific programmes, the objective being to guarantee the funding for the new programme from the beginning of 1999, thus ensuring the continuity of research activities.