Specific research programme RTD: biotechnology (1994-1998)

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"Horizontal" amendments to the specific programmes. As with its consideration of the 12 specific programmes approved by the EP at the end of the previous parliamentary term, the EP adopted horizontal amendments which dealt with the same issues but which were located in different places in the texts of the individual projects. These amendments related to: 1) the EP's prerogatives with regard to the budget: the Committee on Research felt that the final amounts for the programmes should be adopted by the budgetary authority in accordance with the resources available under the financial perspective and the relative priority laid down for the fields covered by the various programmes. 2) the progress made in implementing the programmes: as far as the committee was concerned, any increase in the overall maximum amount of the Fourth Framework Programme for RTD would depend, in particular, on the evaluation of the progress made in implementing the programmes; in this respect, it stressed that for the progress to be deemed satisfactory, it was important for the first commitments of appropriations to be effected within a period of 12 months following the adoption of the programme in question. 3) the need to speed up the selection procedures and make them more transparent: it was important to simplify and speed up the application and selection procedures in order to make it easier for small and medium-sized entreprises, research centres and universities to take part in the specific programmes. 4) information for the EP: the work programme drawn up by the Commission setting out in detail the scientific and technological objectives and specifying the stages in the implementation of the programme as well as the proposed financial arrangements should be forwarded to the EP along with any updated versions. 5) comitology: the EP reiterated its support for consultative committees rather than regulatory committees. It also recommended that any expenses involved in taking part in the committees should be borne by the Member States. 6) international agreements: the EP proposed extending the scope of the negotiations undertaken by the Commission with a view to involving, through international agreements, third countries in Europe in the RTD programmes, so as to also include third countries in the Mediterranean. Biotechnology. The EP stressed the importance of research in this field, particularly in the agricultural sector, in obtaining products with interesting characteristics (e.g. increased resistance to diseases, etc.). These products could help increase the competitiveness of the Community. However, increased competitiveness should go hand in hand with consideration of the environmental and social factors. Therefore, the Community should not decrease its efforts in biotechnological research if it hoped to maintain its agricultural independence. The EP also called for cooperation/coordination between biotechnological research and research on biomedicine/health and agriculture/fisheries. There should also be coordination in optimising and disseminating the results of the research. The committee felt it was necessary to set measurable aims as soon as possible in order to facilitate the evaluation of the progress of the research. Furthermore, given the consequences of the research and its applications, in terms of the environment, socio-economic aspects and health, particularly in developing countries, it stressed that these countries should have access to the results of the research. The EP called for ex-ante and ex-post assessments of the economic, social and ecological impact of the programme as well as the biological risks. In addition, the research should be socially acceptable. The EP stressed the importance of adequate information for the general public on the objectives, content and methods of the research on biotechnology. It felt that the research programme could contribute to the development of ethical guidelines for the promotion of biotechnological research. The EP called for the exclusion from the research financed under the programme of research to modify germ cells or any stage in the development of the human embryo. Research should respect the provisions of Directives 90/219/EEC and 90/220/EEC (contained use and release of genetically modified micro-organisms). The programme should also give support to the implementation of a Community legislative framework for biotechnology designed to protect human beings and the environment. Parliament proposed extending the scope of the scientific objectives by including work on biomolecules that would strengthen the research on cancer and work on

the production of other biomolecules of importance to the pharmaceutical industry (vitamins, enzymes, etc.). The development of transgenic animal models was permitted insofar as it was essential for the understanding of severe human or animal diseases. It wished to be kept informed of the developments within international bodies with regard to a bioethical code. Finally, as regards the breakdown of appropriations and the fields of activity, it proposed the creation of an additional field - "international cooperation" - and recommended a reduction in the percentage of appropriations set aside for plant and animal biotechnological research in order to increase those intended for the field relating to information, social acceptance and ongoing assessment.