Prospects for European research and technology in the 21st century

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In adopting the report by Mr Claude DESAMA (PSE, B), the European Parliament took the view that European financing of research was necessary both for the competitiveness and economic security of the EU as well as for the development of social and ecological well-being. With this in mind Parliament called for a better dissemination of results and innovations at local level and urged the Commission to include, in its actions, efforts to promote a positive culture and attitude to research among the population. In outlining what it expected from the Fifth Framework Programme for Research and Development, which was to be proposed in March 1997, Parliament drew up the following recommendations: - the first activity (specific research programmes) should be based more on the enabling technologies, with programmes being centred on objectives which reflect social needs. Indicators relative to job creation should therefore be incorporated in all applied research. Financial resources should be mobilised so as to ensure a wide spread of projects ranging from basic long-term research to short-term applied research, in keeping with the framework of EU policies. A fund for technological development should be set up whose function would be to support actions at local level, thereby allowing a greater dissemination of innovative technologies. It should be noted that Parliament was opposed to any EU research funds being used for the development and production of arms and took the view that European aid which might possibly be used for such purposes should be handed back to the EU; - on the second activity (international cooperation), Parliament called on the Commission to evaluate mechanisms which would allow non-member states to join in an experimental series of cooperative programmes and advocated that the Fifth Framework Programme specifically take account of the participation of the CEECs; - with regard to the third activity (dissemination and optimisation of results), Parliament called for a regulation on intellectual property rights which would encourage technology transfer. It also advocated a greater integration of the activities of the Structural Funds and R&D programmes. Finally, it repeated that special attention should be given to SMEs so as to create a more favourable fiscal, economic and financial environment for this group (granting of loans and loan guarantees, high-risk capital in the event of synergy between SMEs, etc.), and underlined the need for cooperation between SMEs, universities and major businesses; - as for the fourth activity (training and mobility of researchers), the report called for: the development of a system of targeted grants in universities and in industry, 'return grants' to encourage researchers to re-establish themselves in their country of origin, and grants to enable confirmed researchers to work temporarily in underprivileged regions; the establishment of 'circles of expertise' whose purpose would be to comment, independently of the management committees, on the implementation of the programmes; the setting up of a European institute to finance advanced technologies (risk capital) and the development of mechanisms to support the commercial exploitation of university research. Lastly, Parliament called for the role of the Joint Research Centre to be redefined, recommending that it should become an essential instrument of scientific support for all the institutions of the European Union (including the European Parliament).