

# Research RTD, 7th EC Framework Programme 2007-2013: Capacities specific programme for European research and innovation

2005/0188(CNS) - 21/09/2005 - Legislative proposal

**PURPOSE:** To establish a specific programme entitled “Capacities” within the context of the EU’s 7<sup>th</sup> research framework programme.

**PROPOSED ACT:** Council Decision

**CONTENT:** The European Commission is presenting five “specific programmes” in follow up to the approval of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme in April 2005. The first relates directly to actions funded under the Joint Research Centre. The other four are entitled: Co-operation, Ideas, Peoples and Capacity. The one under discussion here is the Capacities specific programme.

## *Background:*

The restructuring of the RT&D framework programmes is a bid by the European Commission to help the EU achieve its goal of becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 and to help the EU realise its ambition of devoting 3% of GDP to RT&D by the same date. The specific programmes identified by the Commission have been designed to address major weaknesses in the level, quality and impact of European research. Their creation represents a further consolidation of the European Research Area by offering financial support to the free movement of ideas, knowledge and researchers. The re-structuring of the programmes includes a number of core innovations, including, for example, allowing researchers (under some actions) to identify topics for future funding. Other advances include the setting up of a Risk-Sharing Facility to improve access to EIB loans for large scale European actions and the establishment of a European Research Council. The Commission is also looking to overhaul the management methods of the framework programme by introducing improved efficiency drives through the externalisation of administrative tasks to an executive agency, seeking a clearer presentation of evaluation criteria, guaranteeing transparent work programmes and streamlining procedures for approving projects.

## *Specific programme – Capacities:*

The purpose of the Capacities specific programme is to ensure the optimal use of Europe’s research capabilities. By this it means that the programme will offer a unique role in facilitating and supporting the existing EU’s research infrastructures. A specific programme designed to buttress and strengthen existing – and future – research infrastructures is deemed essential if researchers and European industry alike are able to exploit the EU’s research possibilities. Access to existing infrastructures is considered indispensable for the execution of innovative science and technology projects.

More specifically speaking, the Capacities programme will be implemented by:

- Optimising the use and development of research infrastructures.
- Strengthening innovative capacities of SMEs and their ability to benefit from research.
- Supporting the development of regional research-driven clusters.

- Unlocking the research potential of the EU's outermost regions.
- Seeking a rapprochement between society as a whole and science.
- Supporting international co-operation.

As part of the over-all management of the Capacities programme, the Commission will encourage synergies with other Community policies such as the Structural Funds. In addition it will complement the other "specific programmes" being proposed by the Commission and in particular the Co-operation programme.

By research infrastructure, the Commission is referring to facilities or services that are needed by the research community to conduct research in all scientific and technological fields. Typically, the definition covers major equipment or sets of instruments used for research purposes. It can also refer to major collections, archives, computing and software applications. In terms of optimising the use of research infrastructures, the Commission proposes to do so firstly, by building upon and improving existing research infrastructure and secondly by fostering the development of new research infrastructures of pan-European interest based on the work of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructure (ESFRI).

Trans-national access to research infrastructures is given priority. Access may be made available to external users, either in person or by suitable electronic communication and will be implemented through "bottom-up" calls for proposals open to all scientific fields. Other measures will include the deployment of e-Infrastructures based on targeted calls for proposals. The e-Infrastructures will seek to foster high-performance communications and grid empowered infrastructures. There will be an emphasis on supercomputing facilities, data storage and advanced visualisation facilities. In addition to existing structures, the Capacities programme will encourage new research structures through design studies. Concerning the development of new infrastructures the Capacities programme will offer financial help for both preparatory and construction studies.

A further key feature of the Capacities programme is offering streamlined proposals which address the needs and concerns of Europe's SME's. By offering SME's help, the Commission hopes that they will be in a better position to outsource research, increase their research efforts, extend their networks, acquire technological know-how and significantly exploit the results of their own research.

The unexploited possibilities of the EU's outermost and convergence regions is also given due consideration within the context of the Capacities programme. In order to unleash the EU's full research potential the Commission proposes the creation of regional "research-driven clusters". Such clusters would be made up of regional authorities, universities, research centres, enterprises and related stakeholders. The realisation of such clusters will be done through a more focused use of Structural Funds for R&D investment. In addition "Regions of Knowledge" will be developed with the sole aim of improving the relevance and effectiveness of regional research agendas.

A further chapter proposed under the Capacities programme focuses on the outermost and convergence regions of the EU. Actions under this heading will build on past and existing measures and centre on both the "European Centres of Excellence" and the Marie Curie Host Fellowships for the Transfer of Knowledge.

Under the heading of Science in Society the Commission is seeking to build an effective and democratic European society of knowledge by stimulating a harmonious integration of scientific and technology. It is an attempt by the Commission to bridge the gap between many who feel alienated from rapid scientific advantages with the scientists themselves. In other words it seeks to stimulate an on-going and open debate with the wider community on the benefits and potential pitfalls of ground breaking innovative research. The Commission suggests that citizens' alienation from science in society can partly be blamed

on insufficient public participation in the decision-making process, a growing reservation regarding certain scientific developments and a questioning of the objectivity of scientific evidence relied on for policy making. In order to address these and other issues the Commission proposes more inclusive and transparent procedure for accessing the expertise needed to underpin credible policies. It also proposes setting ethical landmarks and to try and bridge the gap between those with a scientific background and those with out.

A final Chapter proposed under the Capacities specific programme deals with activities at an international level. The international co-operation component of this specific programme will have two objectives, namely to support European competitiveness through strategic international partnerships and to address the specific problems faced by third countries on the basis of mutual interest

**For further information concerning the financial implications of this measure, please refer to the financial statement.**