

European research area: activities within the scope of the EC framework programme 2002-2006

2001/0053(COD) - 28/01/2002 - Council position

The Council's common position reflects to a considerable extent both the proposal of the Commission and the opinion of the European Parliament as regards the structure, scientific and technological content, means of implementation of the Framework Programme as well as the financial amount and its indicative breakdown. During its examination of the Commission's proposal, the Council sought to incorporate to the largest possible extent the amendments of the European Parliament, to reflect the considerable degree of consensus between the two legislative bodies, while at the same time respecting the general thrust of the Commission's proposal. To this end, the Council has followed certain guiding principles: 1) recognition of the role of the Framework Programme as an instrument for achieving major Community objectives, bearing in mind that the bulk of European research and technological development efforts are funded by the Member States at national level; 2) the need for a focussed Community research effort bringing about a critical mass of expertise and European added value, while ensuring sufficient in-depth coverage of relevant topics under the themes chosen for Community research; 3) the need to complement the focussed effort on key thematic research areas by providing flexible support to Community policies and by enabling a response to emerging scientific and technological needs in the rapidly evolving research environment, while setting appropriate parameters for such flexibility so as to ensure legal clarity; 4) the need to implement the Framework Programme using instruments which are apt to achieve the critical mass of expertise and European added value in the research activities, while ensuring a smooth transition from the Fifth Framework Programme and safeguarding the possibility for all interested parties/entities to participate in Community research, provided the criterion of scientific excellence is fulfilled; 5) the need for clarity, in particular by providing the necessary level of detail, both in terms of S/T content and funding, bearing in mind that the Framework Programme must be implemented through specific programmes which will, by their very nature, provide for more detailed implementing modalities. As regards the budget, the Council has endorsed the overall amount of EUR 16,270 million which the Commission proposed, this having been agreed by Parliament on first reading. As regards the structure of the programme, the Common Position maintains the various components of the programme proposed by the Commission, including the focus on seven thematic priorities areas and the flexible element of the programme, on "Anticipating the EU's scientific and technological needs". Moreover, it closely follows the Parliament's opinion, which was taken up in the Commission's modified proposal, as regards the internal reorganisation of the first and sixth thematic priorities. Thematic priority 1 on "Genomics and biotechnology for health" has been subdivided into two sections, on advanced genomics and its applications for health, and on combating major diseases, the latter focusing research efforts on certain diseases, in particular cancer. Thematic priority 6, on "Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems" has been structured around three sections: sustainable energy systems; sustainable surface transport, and global change and ecosystems. In terms of the research content, a large proportion of the amendments proposed by Parliament and accepted by the Commission in its modified proposal, are carried through into the common position. However, these amendments have been accompanied in some areas, notably in thematic priority 6, by some dilution of the original focus. Some revisions have also been made to the content of the section of the programme on "anticipating the EU's scientific and technological needs". The Common Position recognises the importance of the new instruments (Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence) as an overall priority means to attain the objectives of critical mass, management simplification and European added value, and the integration of research capacities. They will be used from the start of the framework programme, in each thematic priority and, where deemed appropriate, as a priority means, while maintaining the use of specific targeted projects and co-ordination actions. This is consistent with the spirit of the "Stairway of Excellence" concept put forward by Parliament, in order to

effect a smooth transition to the new instruments. An independent evaluation will be carried out in 2004 on the efficiency of the new instruments in the execution of the sixth framework programme. Given the importance attached to the question of the instruments during the discussions, the Council considered it appropriate to include in the Framework Programme text a list of all instruments and the modalities of their application. On the budget breakdown, the Common Position is broadly consistent with the Commission modified proposal and Parliament opinion, with the following adjustments: - Under the first heading, "Focusing and integrating Community Research", as compared with the Commission's modified proposal: - Increased amounts for four thematic priorities: "Genomics and biotechnology for health", "Aeronautics and space", "Food quality and safety", "Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems"; in particular for the renewable energies and the environment. - A significant reduction in the section on "Anticipating the EU's scientific and technological needs" dealing with Research in support of community policies and responding to emerging needs. - Reductions are made under the 2nd heading, on "Structuring the European Research Area", in particular in the area of Research infrastructures. Funds for high speed electronic networks (building on the Géant and GRID activities) are foreseen both here and in priority 2. - Under the 3rd heading on "Strengthening the foundations of the European Research Area", a cut is made to the budget for the co-ordination of activities. On ethics, which is a major concern for the European Parliament, the Common Position asserts, in line with the Parliament and Commission, that fundamental ethical principles are to be respected in the conduct of research under the 6th framework programme. However, it does not go as far as defining activities that will be excluded from funding. At the time of the 10 December Research Council when Ministers arrived at political agreement, this led the Commission to make a specific declaration to the Minutes. This declaration, in accordance with Parliament's amendment, clearly sets out a number of areas of research that should not be financed under the Framework programme: research activities aimed at human cloning for reproductive purposes, research activities intended to modify the genetic heritage of human beings which could make such changes inheritable, research activities intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer. Animal experiments should also be replaced by alternatives wherever possible, and suffering by animals avoided or kept to a minimum.