

POSITION PAPER

EIROforum comments to the Commission's Proposal for the 7th Framework Programme

On 6 April, the European Commission published its proposal for the 7th Framework Programme, together with a Communication entitled 'Building the ERA of knowledge for growth together with and a document on simplification of the administrative procedures related to FP-7 contracts.

While noting the general character of the statements made in the current texts, we present below some initial views on these proposals.

Our overall comments are as follows:

- We enthusiastically welcome the proposed **budget increase**, which is considered necessary to maintain and strengthen European competitiveness,
- We welcome the **seven-year running time**, which will ensure better planning, in particular in the area of research infrastructures,
- We welcome the overall **programmatic features**, which seems to strike a reasonable balance between the many objectives and areas that a European research scheme must cover,
- We very much welcome increased funding for **major research infrastructures** of European interest but regret that, in the current proposal, the question of funding for operations and ongoing exploitation is not adequately addressed,
- We are equally **concerned** about the level of funding available for capitalising upon the significant investments in the **existing infrastructures**,
- We welcome the proposal for the creation of the **European Research Council** and urge that it is equipped with a budget that is commensurate with the task to 'enhance the dynamism, creativity and excellence of European research at the frontier of knowledge.'
- We support an ERC that represents an autonomous and responsible body which is granting research funding on the basis of scientific excellence only

- We are, however, **concerned** about the aspect of coordination between the ERC and the existing funding bodies and we stress the importance of **coordination between ERC and the EIROforum** where funding decisions affect research groups that use facilities operated by the EIROforum partner organisations.
- We support very much the strengthening of the **Science in Society** activities,
- We welcome initiatives for **simplification** of the administrative procedures,
- We would like to see a streamlining of the **evaluation procedure** and, in particular circumstances, **alternative ways of assessing/selecting projects**.

Here we offer some more detailed comments to the points above:

I. Financial Expectations

On 20 April 2005, the EIROforum published its paper on science policy '**Towards a Europe of knowledge and Innovation**' (can be downloaded from the EIROforum website at www.eiroforum.org). The comments below reflect our reaction to the current proposal by the European Commission in view of the ideas expressed in this paper.

a. Budget and Running Time

We consider the proposed running time of seven years a step forward in providing stability and planning confidence for many projects that are critically dependant upon funding over a longer time-span.

We welcome the proposed budget increase, which is considered necessary to maintain and strengthen European competitiveness. We are aware that even if it constitutes a doubling over the current Framework Programme, it is insufficient to reach the *overall* Barcelona target of 3 % GDP spending in Europe (even if the Programme period covers the year 2010, which constitutes the target year) and that, in addition to this proposal, significant increases of national research investments are necessary in order to achieve this goal.

We are aware that the proposal must be seen in the light of the ongoing discussions about the Financial Perspectives, but we warn against reducing the financial envelope for the Framework Programme, which is designed to provide the means for a future-oriented development of Europe.

Equally, we emphasise that the funding allocated for investigator-driven front-line research must be maintained at the proposed level or increased. A reduction in this area will have severe consequences for the ERC to make the impact which is hoped for.

We welcome increased funding for major research infrastructures of European interest, and regret that, in the current proposal, the question of running costs is not adequately addressed. The very large investment, which the current European large infrastructures represent is by no means fully explored. Although we welcome the longer running time proposed for the 7th Framework Programme, we note that even seven years is too short for deciding upon, constructing and commissioning major research infrastructures. We are equally concerned about the level of funding available for existing infrastructures, including e-infrastructures.

Finally we note with pleasure the increased funding for human resources and for the Science in Society activities.

II. Programmatic expectations

In general, we welcome the overall programmatic features, which seems to strike a reasonable balance between the many objectives and areas that a European research scheme must – of necessity – cover. Our comments here will focus on areas of specific interest to our fields of activities.

We welcome the strong support for biomedical sciences and health related research, however we see a danger that in contrast to the situation of translational and applied research, basic research will not be funded at the level necessary. Even though genomic and post-genomic research has provided a wealth of information that is likely to lead rapidly to medical applications, basic research in genomics, functional genomics, computational biology, systems biology and especially basic molecular biology must be continued at a significant level in order to sustain longer-term progress in applied medicine..

As for the financing of space activities under the thematic priority of space and security (in programme ‘Cooperation’), the special character of these activities should be taken into account. Research, development **and** demonstration should be eligible for funding.

It is clear that in order to achieve the Lisbon/Barcelona aims links between industry, academia and research laboratories must be strengthened. Of course industry itself must be encouraged to join in with academic research

organisations to engage in achieving these aims. While that is not a simple task, the EIROforum members are willing to play their part. There are three elements to emphasize:

- (i) High-technology organisations, such as ours, place demands upon industry which require the highest precision and quality. Is European Industry developed fully to respond to this need?
- (ii) The role of large-scale infrastructures in creating start-up companies is neither fully elaborated nor encouraged nor facilitated. This needs to be addressed.
- (iii) Organisations such as ILL and ESRF perform research on new materials, which are close to being commercially exploitable. The links of industry to such large science facilities need to be strengthened and made more visible to help ensure a swift transition from research to commercial exploitation of such new materials.

We wish to recall the recommendations of the EIROforum, as set out in its paper on science policy regarding cooperation with industry in the areas of technology transfer and development of scientific instrumentation.

a. The European Research Council ('Ideas')

We consider the creation of the European Research Council to be of the utmost importance to ensure competitive research on a European scale and urge that its budget is set at a level commensurate with its task to 'enhance the dynamism, creativity and excellence of European research at the frontier of knowledge.' We also wish to lend our support to the fundamental operating principles – which have continuously been stressed by the European scientific community – that the ERC is established as an autonomous body to promote research at the highest level of excellence and covering all disciplines, involving a bona-fide scientific peer-review system.

This notwithstanding, we are, however, concerned about the aspect of coordination between the ERC and the existing funding bodies and we wish to underline the importance of good coordination between ERC and the EIROforum especially in those areas where ERC funding decisions will affect research groups using facilities operated by the EIROforum partner organisations.

b. Human Resources ('People')

As regards the international activities under the Human Resources part

(‘People’), we strongly support the idea of ‘Common initiatives between European organisations and organisations from countries neighbouring the EU and countries with which the EU has a Science and Technology agreement’.

We also support very strongly the proposal for Specific actions to support the creation of a genuine **European labour market for researchers**, by removing obstacles to mobility and enhancing the career perspectives of researchers in Europe. In its recent Paper on Science Policy, the EIROforum has called for this and pledged its support for such actions.

c. Research Infrastructures (‘Capacities’)

On support for new research infrastructures, we acknowledge the idea of changing the selection procedure from a bottom-up approach, as in the current Framework Programme, to a system that ensures sufficient political backing by the member states. Nonetheless we regret that the Commission has failed to lay out in a clear and transparent way its ideas about this new procedure and has not exposed it to a public debate similar to that through which the proposal for a European Research Council arrived at the current degree of maturity and acceptance by the scientific community. The EIROforum Paper on Science Policy has specifically raised the point of consultation with the major European organisations which we feel will add significantly to the quality of the base upon which decisions are taken in this policy area.

d. Regions of Knowledge/Research Potential

We consider the proposal regarding ‘Regions of Knowledge’ and ‘Research Potential’ very interesting and clearly appropriate, both given the enlargement of the EU, the establishment of the ERA and the overall need to harness Europe’s S&T capacity, while at the same time working towards convergence of the overall conditions within the Union. We note that participation in the major European research infrastructures and projects is an important element of the development of a sustainable research climate in those countries that so far have been denied access to this possibility. We therefore encourage that this aspect is taken into consideration when preparing the Specific Programme for this action.

e. Science in Society

EIROforum fully supports the increased activities in the area of Science in Society. The EIROforum Paper on Science Policy has made a series of specific proposals for activities and we urge that these ideas are taken into account in the forthcoming Specific Programme. Among the proposals is the suggestion of a European Science Press Centre to further the visibility of Europe’s contributions

to scientific and technological progress. We also repeat the proposal for a pan-European Partnership for Science Education, which we believe is fully in line with the notion of 'the Triangle of Knowledge' espoused by Commissioner Poto_nik and a concept that we fully support.

With respect to 'events' we encourage the Commission to maintain and strengthen the European Science Week as a distinct action and with the specific remit to carry out activities with a clear European dimension in terms of content and reach.

III. Administrative and Legal Expectations

a. Evaluation of proposals, project selection

In view of the Statement of Intent, signed between the EIROforum and the European Commission, which has led to discussions of a series of 'Joint Actions', we are very keen that the legal and administrative issues regarding implementation of these Joint Actions are taken into account. We stress that we believe that the partnership between the Commission and EIROforum can constitute a powerful pillar for the European Research Area, but that in the current legal and administrative regime, this potential has remained underexploited.

b. Initiatives for simplification of the administrative procedures

We note with satisfaction that the Commission intends to ensure a uniform interpretation, in particular of the legal and financial provisions of the contracts...across all of the Commission services concerned.' However, equally important, is that this is put in place at the very beginning of the Framework programme. It is clearly not satisfactory that important elements, such as the Financial Rules, only exist in provisional documents until many months after the programme has been launched and proposals have been submitted.

We welcome simplification of the Cost Models and the use of lump sum payments and flat-rate financing.