

**Belgian contribution to the debate on the Communication of the EU Commission
'Science and technology, the key to Europe's future – guidelines for future EU-policy
to support research' (COM(2004) 353)**

We welcome the Commission's communication and its invitation to reflect on the main axes along which EU research policy should develop in future years. We support the Commission's proposal to strengthen the European effort in R&D, to significantly increase the budget allocated to it and to further orient the EU budget, including the structural funds, towards research and innovation related activities. We especially welcome the proposals to broaden the scope of the EU's research policy towards both fundamental and applied research, as both are needed to develop a knowledge based society and economy.

General comments

- The six axes along which the Commission proposes to build its future research policy do each correspond to a specific set of needs and the principles as outlined in the communication are a sound basis for further discussion.
- Taking account of the already existing needs for a more consistent management of Framework Programme activities, and also in view of the anticipated new forms of management, a set of coherent management practices ought to be established throughout the new Framework Programme in order to enhance transparency and accessibility.
- In making concrete proposals for the Seventh Framework Programme, the Commission should take full account of the recommendations made in the Marimon panel's final report and thoroughly evaluate both EDCTP and GALILEO before any further initiatives are undertaken based on Articles 169 and 171.
- The relatively limited duration of the Framework Programme (4 years) makes it hard to conduct any meaningful evaluation which can subsequently be used in optimising the current Framework Programme or designing the next. The four year cycle also results in the Framework Programme being perceived as not stable enough to be easily accessible and requiring frequent and rather steep learning curves. The stability in the Framework Programmes should be increased, either by considering a longer duration (e.g. coinciding with the financial perspectives) or by avoiding to introduce drastical operational changes in an abrupt manner, as has also been recommended by the Marimon panel.

Specific comments regarding the 6 axes

- poles of excellence and collaborative research : both the 'new' integrating and the traditional instruments should be maintained in the next Framework Programme, though a better balance and more flexibility in their implementation would be beneficial.

The "International Co-operation" Commission (ICC) is a permanent Commission of the Belgian Interministerial Conference for Science Policy. It deals with international issues regarding science policy that are of interest to the Federal Authority, the Regions and the Communities.

Secretariat : Federal Science Policy Office - Wetenschapsstraat 8, Rue de la Science – 1000 Brussels
Tel.: +32-2-238 34 11 - Fax : +32-2-230 59 12 - URL: www.belspo.be

- joint European technology initiatives :
 - this is certainly an interesting avenue to explore, as it holds the potential of gathering stakeholders on a European level and of establishing large partnerships between EU, EIB, member state and even private funding
 - for setting up such initiatives, a clear and transparent selection mechanism is necessary
 - in view of the limited experience that has been obtained with this instrument, it is suggested to extend the experience base by launching a small number of limited scale pilot initiatives
 - concerns exist about the potential effects of this type of large scale programmed research on creativity and competition
 - in developing these initiatives, maximum synergy must be created with existing clustering activities within EUREKA and ERA-NET actions which are being developed in parallel.

- fundamental research :
 - full support for the creation of a funding mechanism for fundamental research at the European level, that should contribute significantly towards Europe's future social and economic development
 - funding should be provided to research teams which are selected at European level on the basis of scientific excellence (which should not be confounded with reputation) and peer review and using fair and transparent criteria
 - research carried out within this scheme should be curiosity driven and bottom-up
 - adequate measures should be taken to avoid severe oversubscription and excessive overhead costs.

- human resources and mobility : we fully support the Commission's policy on human resources for science and technology as outlined in the communications on the researcher mobility strategy and on the diversity of research careers, as well as in the 3% action plan; especially actions towards mobility between universities, research centres and industry will be vital in furthering the concept of the European Research Area.

- research infrastructure :
 - endorsement of the Commission's plans to increase the budget for research infrastructures, strengthening the double track of supporting the development of new infrastructures and reinforcing access to existing ones, and taking a broad view towards the definition of research infrastructures, i.e. including amongst others databases, collections,...
 - decisions on the planning and funding of new large scale infrastructures should be subject to a standard set of quality criteria, such as the size of the research community it serves, its alignment with current and future European socio-economic needs (based on a broad consultation), potential for flexibility and adaptability, complementarity with existing facilities,...
 - the coordination of the use of existing infrastructures should also be improved.

- coordination of national research programmes :
 - initiatives towards the coordination of national research programmes are a key tool in addressing the problem of fragmentation and the building of critical mass
 - during the Seventh Framework Programme, priority should be given to making concrete steps towards the mutual opening up of research programmes of the member states, using EU funding as leverage funding

- the possibility of limited groups of member states and member state regions moving forward together should be supported, with particular attention being given to the specific needs and capacity of the smaller European regions.

We welcome the Commission's proposal to open up new areas of research dedicated to space and security as research activities within these domains can have an important economic impact. In the field of space research, we particularly welcome the Commission's plans to develop transportation technologies, earth observation satellites and telecommunication equipment.

As to security research, the Commission should include all stakeholders (including industry, the scientific community, medical, legal and defense experts) in defining its policy which should preferably address the problem in an integrated manner, targeting prevention, control and crisis management.

Finally, there are a number of ***cross-cutting issues*** deserving attention :

- In line with one of the main suggestions of the Marimon report, effective measures should be taken towards decreasing the administrative burden imposed on participants.
- We also support the Marimon panel's recommendation to enhance the transparency of the proposal evaluation system.
- We look forward to the Commission's proposals towards the future role of SMEs in European research policy as a whole and in the next Framework Programme in particular. In the future European research policy, the needs of both traditional SMEs and technological SMEs (including start-ups and university spin-offs) should be taken into account. In light of the experience in the current Framework Programme, for traditional SMEs we would support the Commission taking action, jointly with the Member States, towards the establishment of a flexible scheme for the funding of transnational cooperation in SME research, using national and regional funding schemes as basic tools and offering Community funding in a synergetic manner towards increased transnational coordination. For technological SMEs, their participation level and role in research actions should be enhanced by optimising existing instrument design and implementation, preferably following the main recommendations made by the Marimon panel.
- As it is clear that at this time the European paradox still exists, innovation, both technological and non technological, deserves specific attention and we would like to invite the Commission to further elaborate on this topic and present its views on the coordination of research and innovation policies at EU level. Important issues in this respect are university-industry interaction and the European patent.