

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Communication from the Commission on Science and Technology: the key to Europe's future Guidelines for future European policy to support research

(2005/C 71/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the European Commission Communication on *Science and Technology: the key to Europe's future - Guidelines for future European policy to support research* (COM(2004) 353 final);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission of 17 June 2004 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision of its President of 5 April 2004 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an Opinion on this subject;

Having regard to the Decision of the Lisbon European Council, which adopted the concept of European Research Area (ERA), thereby laying the foundation for common science and technology policy across the European Union;

Having regard to the Decision of the March 2002 Barcelona European Council where the European Union set itself the objective of increasing the European research effort to 3 % of the European Union's GDP by 2010;

Having regard to the European Commission Communication on *Europe and Basic Research* ⁽¹⁾;

Having regard to the European Commission Communication ⁽²⁾ on *The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge* and the CoR Outlook Opinion on *The role of universities in local and regional development within the context of a Europe of knowledge* (CdR 89/2003 fin) ⁽³⁾;

Having regard to the Report of a High-level Expert Panel chaired by Professor Ramon Marimon *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the New Instruments of Framework Programme VI* (21 June 2004);

Having regard to its Draft Opinion (CdR 194/2004 rev. 1) adopted on 22 September 2004 by its Commission for Culture and Education (rapporteur: Jyrki Myllyvirta, Mayor of Mikkeli, FI/EPP);

WHEREAS:

- 1) the overall goals of the Communication are absolutely necessary elements for implementing the Lisbon strategy of Europe. Increasing the European R&D investment to 3 % of the GDP, 2 % of that coming from private sources and all of it linked to research and development promoting the knowledge-based society and economy in Europe, is an ambitious objective which can only be met through shared commitment and coordinated actions of the Union and Member States;
- 2) the Communication adopts six major objectives for development. The objectives are:
 - creating European centres of excellence through collaboration between laboratories;
 - launching European technological initiatives;
 - stimulating creativity of basic research through competition between teams at the European level;
 - making Europe more attractive to the best researchers;
 - developing research infrastructure of European interest;
 - improving the coordination of national programmes;

⁽¹⁾ COM(2004) 9 final

⁽²⁾ COM(2003) 58 final

⁽³⁾ OJ C 73 of 23.3.2004, p. 22

The wider procedural proposals are related to:

- raising research performance throughout the Union, especially in the new Member States;
 - focusing the European Union's efforts on key topics and
 - doing better to do more;
- 3) the actions proposed in the Communication are not cohesion instruments as such, but they inevitably have an impact, either positive or negative, on cohesion. The knowledge-based industries are the driving force of development for the whole of Europe; getting these forces to promote cohesion targets is much more effective from the regional policy point of view than research policy leading to centralisation, which has to be compensated by increased regional policy subsidies and handouts;

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 57th plenary session, held on 17-18 November 2004 (meeting of 18 November):

1. The Committee of the Regions' views

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.1 **welcomes** the Communication on *Science and Technology: the key to Europe's future - Guidelines for future European policy to support research* and considers it an utmost important starting point for increasing and improving European research for the success of the whole of Europe;

1.2 **agrees** with the European Commission that scientific research, technological development and innovation are at the heart of the knowledge-based economy, a key factor in growth, competitiveness of companies and employment and improving the quality of life for the EU citizen;

1.3 **reminds** us that in Europe, the growth and success of every region depends increasingly on the advancement of a knowledge-based economy;

1.4 **considers** that while the efforts in the field of research policy by the European Union have shown to be valuable and necessary, this approach now seems to fall short of today's needs;

1.5 **supports** the aim of investing 3 % of GDP in research and development. This absolutely necessary aim can be reached only through solid commitment of all the Member States into this aim. Quantitatively, the role of direct EU research funding can only be marginal. The EU measures can, however, contribute into and they are necessary for the strengthening of the commitment and for getting the maximum benefit out of the investment;

1.6 **supports** the proposal by the European Commission to double the Union research funding between 2007-2013. It is in the interest of the whole of Europe that this proposal is realised even if other parts of the budgetary plans for the period 2007-2013 would change;

1.7 **emphasises**, as the Commission, that the new member countries with their human and cultural resources are an extra motivation for improved action and increase of resources in research policy.

THE EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.8 **emphasises** that in the field of research policy the European added value is evident. It is created by:

- the possibility to build up the necessary critical mass in research subjects where the single countries are too small;
- better attracting top scientists; and
- the improved mobility of highly educated researchers and other experts;

1.9 **considers** that the research and development funding of the Union, including the new Framework Programme, must be dynamic and responsive to the needs of business, science and the community, in order to direct the research in fields where the impact on European growth, competitiveness of companies and employment is most evident;

1.10 **points out** that cities, local and regional authorities can in many positive ways contribute to the fulfilment of European added value. This includes regional innovation policies, technology centres, incubators, science parks and risk-capital funds, which all are taken well into consideration in the Communication. Local and regional authorities also have an important role to play in innovating in issues such as sustainable development within the community, through their close links with EU citizens;

1.11 **welcomes** the objective of developing the research infrastructure of European interest;

1.12 **welcomes** the aim to make the European Union's research policy more cost-effective;

1.13 **emphasises** that critical mass depends on the topic, the thematic area and the participants (see the Marimon report). The concept of 'one size fits all' should not be applied across all thematic areas and instruments;

1.14 **points out** that, in improving the coordination of national programmes, also regional research programmes and the impact of the programmes on regional development have to be taken into consideration;

1.15 **stresses** that small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), 99 % of all business enterprises, are providers of the most jobs and key actors in European innovation and regional development. The European research policy has to involve the SMEs and their research and development needs better than thus far;

1.16 **agrees** that researchers must be able to fully exploit the European research policy measures – including the possibility of projects of a smaller size – according to their interests and needs and **welcomes** the suggestion to create a more open mechanism of research funding;

1.17 **would like to see** more weight behind projects proposed by researchers on their own initiative based on the R&D needs of companies;

1.18 **emphasises** the contributing role of local and regional economic development policy and strategies. Usually, the cities, local authorities and regions, in cooperation with the universities and businesses in the area, coordinate the tools for local and regional economic development and the whole innovation infrastructure;

1.19 **considers** the EUREKA-method a good example of a scientifically oriented and ambitious research network where also SMEs have a low threshold to take part.

THE DIVERSITY AND GEOGRAPHICAL DECENTRALISATION OF RESEARCH

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.20 **points out** that a main asset of Europe is the high educational level of a very large part of the population; in

order to exploit this fully, Europe must have a widely spread education and research infrastructure;

1.21 **requests** strong measures to enable also smaller institutions and public authorities to benefit from European research policy. The research and development world has become many-sided and versatile. The distinction between basic and applied research is becoming blurred. New knowledge can be produced in establishments of varying size and type. Even small institutions can produce knowledge of worldwide interest in narrow fields of expertise, especially if they collaborate with high-technology businesses;

1.22 **emphasises** that diversity, autonomy and geographical decentralisation of research are important factors in increasing its regional impact. Developing the administrative structures of cities and regional authorities is also a prerequisite for the successful spreading of innovations from research into business and public organisations. This is particularly important in the new Member States, where developing decentralised administrative structures, as well as strengthening local and regional government, are key factors in ensuring the establishment of sustainable development at local and regional level;

1.23 **points out** that there are different systems across Europe. Depending on the country, the roles of the cities, local authorities and regions are often crucial in organising, financing and developing higher education and research, and particularly in creating the innovative surroundings combining research, development, incubators and business environments, where the research results lead into new business activities, new jobs and improved well-being;

1.24 **believes** that the concept of 'centres of excellence' as proposed in the communication has to be implemented taking also into consideration highly specialized smaller centres that can be essential for the development of globally competitive business in narrow fields of production and can be a starting point for emerging new large-scale business;

1.25 **believes** that the same applies for the technology platforms; it is necessary to see the platforms as a vehicle to promote diverse high-tech business in various parts of Europe;

1.26 **welcomes** the complementary use of research funding and structural funds; the practical solutions have to be developed in the 'Convergence' Objective regions and within the 'Regional competitiveness and employment' Objective, with special emphasis on the new Member States;

1.27 **recommends** the 'Marie Curie' actions for making Europe more attractive to the top researchers be continued and strengthened. European research must be able to harness all of its potential to improve European competitiveness, young people, women, all regions and the benefits of increased cooperation with extra-European countries.

TOWARDS THE SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1.28 **welcomes** the invitation presented at the end of the Communication to different stakeholders in and users of research in Europe to take part in the discussion process through which the seventh Framework Programme will be formulated;

1.29 **emphasises** also the possible positive role of different stakeholders and especially the role of local and regional authorities in the proposed European Research Council. The idea of a European Research Council, be it a Union agency or a different kind of structure, should be developed to have close contacts with the local and regional administration and the Committee of Regions. The European R&D finance should be directed on the basis of scientific excellence and of the potential of bringing new innovations to the commercial market and to meet society's needs. The CoR **believes** it is important that European regions and researchers who are not part of the teams that would be funded by the proposed European Research Council should also be able to benefit from the research results;

1.30 **supports** the proposed rationalisation and regrouping of the union activities to support research in SMEs and for

their benefit; for the development of risk-capital funds, science parks, incubators and regional innovation policies; for technology transfer and the management of intellectual property and patents. This proposal involves many DGs of the Commission and has to be prepared jointly – it is essential that also the Committee of Regions is closely involved.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

2.1 **recommends** that the aspect of promoting balanced regional development in Europe be included in the implementation of European research policy;

2.2 **emphasises** that the promotion of R&D has to be taken into consideration in the preparation of new structural fund programmes;

2.3 **emphasises** that the 'human dimension' and societal needs should be included in the new funding programme;

2.4 **underlines** the importance of research and innovation infrastructure, research centres, technology parks and centres of excellence including those of a smaller scale, keeping in mind their key role in the training of researchers and in the building of human capital locally but also to the benefit of wider regions;

2.5 **recommends** that the Union finance more research in entrepreneurship, regional innovation processes and commercialising research results in order to develop instruments for strengthening knowledge-based economy in different parts of the Union.

Brussels, 18 November 2004

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Peter STRAUB
