

**Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision concerning the Conclusion of a Multilateral Cooperation Agreement 'Community - European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST)' on Eleven Concerted Action Projects in the Field of Food Science and Technology (Flair programme) between the European Economic Community and COST Third States<sup>(1)</sup>**

(92/C 40/13)

On 2 September 1991 the Council, acting in pursuance of Article 130 Q(2) of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community asked the Economic and Social Committee for an Opinion on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Energy, Nuclear Questions and Research, which was responsible for the preparatory work, adopted its Opinion on 8 November 1991. The Rapporteur working alone was Mr Velasco Mancebo.

At its 291st plenary session (meeting of 27 November 1991), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by a unanimous vote.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. The specific research and technological development programme in the field of food science and technology (1989-1993) (Flair) was adopted by a Council Decision of 20 June 1989<sup>(2)</sup>.

1.2. Article 3 of the Council Decision lays down that the programme is to be carried out in the form of concerted and shared-cost actions and training and mobility grants.

1.3. It is also stipulated that participation in the concerted action projects—designed to coordinate research at national level—shall be open not only to all EC Member States but also to other specified States, including COST participating States.

1.4. Article 7 of the Decision authorizes the Commission to negotiate, in accordance with Article 130 N of the EEC Treaty, cooperation agreements with a number of organizations and countries, including the COST participating States.

1.5. COST was established in 1971. It provides a framework for cooperation between the EC Member States and non-EC European States with regard to the implementation of research projects in scientific and technical fields of mutual interest to the participating countries. It was the first such framework to be established.

1.6. The COST scheme complements, in particular, bilateral cooperation between the EC and States of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) under framework agreements covering scientific and technical cooperation. COST differs from these bilateral agreements in particular in that, under the COST scheme, States may participate in selected action projects on an 'à la carte' basis.

1.7. As well as the twelve Member States of the Community, seven third countries are parties to this cooperation: five of the seven EFTA member countries (Austria, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland), plus Turkey and Yugoslavia.

1.8. Iceland, together with three countries of central and eastern Europe, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which at present have observer status, will become full members of COST at the ministerial conference of participating countries in November 1991.

1.9. The cooperation agreement which is the subject of the draft Council Decision under review covers eleven concerted action projects designed to coordinate research and technological development (R&TD) activities in the EC and in non-EC States which are members of COST.

1.10. The research topics covered by the action projects, which are listed in Annex A to the draft Council Decision, are as follows:

- spectroscopic techniques [Near Infrared (NIR), Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR), Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR)] for the rapid direct measurement of food quality,
- relating sensory, instrumental and consumer choice studies,
- predictive modelling of microbial growth and survival in foods,
- prevention and control of potentially pathogenic microorganisms in poultry and poultry meat processing,
- food safety and quality based on the application of combined processes and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP),

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ No C 224, 29. 8. 1991, p. 5.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ No L 200, 13. 7. 1989, p. 18.

- *in vitro* toxicological studies and real-time analysis of residues in food,
- improvement of food safety and quality through the use of interactive and competitive bindings of food lectins and bacterial adhesions in the gut,
- measurement of micronutrient absorption and status,
- physiological implication of the consumption of resistant starch in man,
- improvement of the quality and compatibility of food consumption and food composition data in Europe,
- information flow on food technology, food safety and healthy eating, for small and medium-sized enterprises and consumers (Flair-FLOW project).

1.10.1. The cooperation agreement attached to the draft Decision also provides, among other things, for:

- a financial contribution by the Community and the third countries which are members of COST and take part in the projects; the amount of each contribution is specified in Article 2 of the Agreement; the rules governing the financing of the Agreement are set out in Annex B,
- the establishment of a Cooperation Committee to assist the Commission in the implementation of the concerted action projects; this Committee would consist of representatives of the Commission and of the participating third States,
- exchange of information resulting from the implementation of the research covered by the concerted action projects,
- publication of reports on the results of the concerted action projects,
- conditions and procedures for participation in the concerted action projects,
- conditions for renegotiation, renewal and denunciation of the Agreement.

Done at Brussels, 27 November 1991.

## 2. Comments

2.1. The Committee endorses the draft Decision. In the Committee's view the implementation of the proposed cooperation agreement will not only further the development of a European scientific and technical area extending beyond the frontiers of the EC but it will also promote the interests of consumers by enhancing the quality and safety of food products.

2.2. The Committee considers that the constantly increasing level of trade in agri-food products between the EC and non-EC European States must be backed up by a vigorous policy aimed at improving public health and strengthening consumer protection and a sustained effort to achieve these goals.

2.3. In this context the Committee shares the Commission's view that 'mutual benefit shall be derived from coordination of national research via concerted action projects in the relevant sectors, and utilization of specialized skills and capabilities disseminated throughout Europe'.

2.4. As regards the proposed cooperation agreement itself, the Committee calls for provision to be made, in respect of each of the concerted action projects, for appraisals of the social, human and economic consequences of the research carried out in the participating States in the eleven fields concerned, together with appraisals of any technological hazards involved in such research.

2.5. As regards the dissemination of information on cooperation under the COST scheme, the results of COST concerted action projects and the assessment of these results, the Committee would refer to the comments set out in its parallel Opinion on the draft Council Decision on the conclusion of a similar agreement in the field of biotechnology<sup>(1)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ No C 224, 29. 8. 1991, p. 16.

*The Chairman*  
*of the Economic and Social Committee*  
François STAEDLIN