

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 27.8.2004
COM(2004) 574 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

responding to the observations and recommendations of the high-level Panel of independent experts concerning the new instruments of the 6th Framework Programme

{SEC(2004) 1057}

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the Decision of the Council and of the European Parliament adopting the 6th Framework Programme, and the specific programme "Integrating", a panel of **high-level experts** was set up in October 2003 to assess the effectiveness of the new instruments of the 6th Framework Programme;

The high-level Panel was given the task of carrying out a mid-term evaluation of **the impact of the New Instruments** and their contribution towards achieving the objectives of the Framework Programme, particularly as regards the following:

- Added value of Community research as compared with national activities;
- Critical mass;
- Integration of research capacity;
- Management simplification.

Accordingly, on 1 July 2004, the high-level Panel officially forwarded to the Commission its report containing, in addition to an "executive summary", an introduction and an overview of the information collected and the main messages sent out by the 6th Framework Programme user community, its conclusions and recommendations relating to both the remaining period of implementation of the 6th Framework Programme and the prospects for the 7th Framework Programme.

POSITION OF THE COMMISSION REGARDING THE WORK OF THE PANEL AND EXISTING CONSTRAINTS

The Commission is pleased with the high quality of the report which is based on detailed discussions and investigations among the scientific community. It stresses moreover that most of the conclusions reached by the Panel match to a large extent its own findings which have already led, as the attached staff paper shows, to the adoption of "corrective measures" to make the 6th Framework Programme more flexible and easier to use. These "corrective measures" will moreover be reinforced during the remainder of the 6th Framework Programme. However, measures whose implementation would entail changes to the existing legal framework (Council Decision adopting the Framework Programme, Specific Programmes, Rules for Participation, Commission Decision adopting the model contract) can be considered only in connection with the preparation of the 7th Framework Programme and its legal framework.

COMMISSION'S POSITION REGARDING THE MESSAGES CARRIED BY THE PANEL'S REPORT

The Commission welcomes the first of the main messages from the Panel which backs up the Commission's findings during the preparation of the 6th Framework Programme: the **objectives** of the new instruments are **valid**, particularly as regards their anticipated contribution to the establishment of the European Research Area, and the **conception** of the instruments is well **adapted** to those objectives.

It also fully endorses the Panel's conclusion that the scientific community certainly **needs continuity** in terms of available instruments. This applies to both the need to maintain the so-called "traditional" instruments such as the targeted specific research projects and other coordination actions and to the pursuit of the New Instruments such as integrated projects and networks of excellence in the context of the 7th Framework Programme.

This is moreover completely in line with the guidelines set out by the Commission in its Communication of 16 June 2004 entitled "*Science and technology, the key to Europe's future – Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research"*[1].

The third of the key messages from the panel concerns the **implementation of the new instruments**, varying according to the different phases, from the presentation of a proposal to the conclusion of the contract relating thereto. The Commission is aware of the need to bring about certain improvements in terms of the implementation of the new instruments and has moreover already adopted and applied a certain number of "corrective measures" in this regard, some of which will be further consolidated in the course of the 6th Framework Programme. It does not however agree with all the conclusions reached in the report, particularly those concerning the freedom of choice of objectives and instruments to be left entirely to participants or again certain statements by participants regarding the quality of the procedure for evaluating proposals.

Moreover, the Commission points out that the whole of this exercise must also be seen from the perspective of preparing the 7th Framework Programme. In this context, it also reiterates the commitment made in its Communication of 16 June 2004 entitled "*Science and Technology, the key to Europe's future – Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research". "The financial and administrative provisions must be revised and simplified in the light of the experience of current practice. A process will be launched with this purpose in mind, involving programme users and national research structures. The financial rules will be re-examined and proposals will be made to the Council and the European Parliament in the framework of proposals for Commission Decisions for the next framework programme and for the corresponding rules for participation."*

To this end, the Commission has notably launched a study of financing mechanisms in order to explore possible ways of further relaxing participants' obligations while guaranteeing the necessary transparency in terms of use of public funds.

The attached document sets out in detail, for each of the recommendations on the implementation of the instruments, an analysis of the situation and the Commission's position, as well as, where appropriate, the corrective measures already adopted, planned or proposed in connection with the 7th Framework Programme where they require changes to the existing legal framework.

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[1] COM(2004) 353.