

The perspective of the EU-12 Member States vis-à-vis the future Framework Programmes

I. Introduction

The EU Framework Programmes for research, technological development and demonstration activities are by definition designed to make a significant contribution to European science and to the development of the European Research Area by complementing a variety of funding activities across the EU. At the same time RTDI constitutes a substantial part of the new Europe 2020 strategy which is strongly oriented towards accelerating the growth of Europe's competitiveness and economic capacity.

Since 2007 EU consists of 27 MS. This gives EU a significant increase in its critical mass, in size, and in human potential in all regards. This situation is also an advantage in the process of achieving the Lisbon Treaty and Europe 2020 goals.

Ambitious European objectives in a continuous competition on world-wide level can only be attained if the whole internal European potential will be rightly used and if common efforts and a positive inclusive approach will be applied.

In this regard we would like to highlight the fact that the present situation in the field of RTDI, which has a direct link to the economic growth, is problematic as far as the participation of the new MS in FP7 is concerned. It is also very clearly witnessed by different statistics and the recent report on the Interim evaluation of the FP.¹

That is why the EU-12 MS took the initiative to present their commonly identified perspective towards the next generation FP's in order to point out the issues of concern for our countries and to suggest possible solutions to them.

¹ See Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, pp. 46-48.

II. Changing the concept of the new FP: Inclusive solutions for a more balanced ERA

The negotiations on the 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013) (FP7) took place in 2005-2006 when 10 new Member States just joined the EU and another 2 Member States were not part of it. Due to their status of newcomers, the EU-12 Member States were not able to participate actively and effectively in the decision-making process on FP7.

FP7 reflects the structure and the possibilities of the well-developed economies; it is designed according to the orientations and interests of the scientific and innovation potential of these countries and it does not reflect enough the different starting points of the EU-12 Member States. As a consequence FP7 is less accessible for these Member States. The hitherto prevailing results in FP7 have not entirely reflected all their potential and possibilities.

On 12th November 2010 the expert group interim evaluation report of FP7 was published. The report suggests that the reasons for low participation rate and more specifically, lower financing for EU-12 participants should be the topic of further thorough analysis.²

We strongly believe that in the long term perspective, the coherence and sustainability of the European RTDI system will depend, among other factors, on the pace and the effectiveness of bridging the EU-15 and EU-12 divide. Therefore we suggest that the next FP should address all the EU Member States' needs. It should pursue the creation and the consolidation of ERA, boosting excellence and unlocking the full potential of all the regions and Member States in the EU. The latter is also reinforced by article 179 of the Lisbon Treaty.

EU-12 Member States have identified some common priorities with the aim to build a targeted perspective for them, such as: to raise the capacity and the competitiveness of the EU-12 Member States up to the standards of excellence, to promote the internal dimension of ERA, to identify more inclusive and flexible instruments to be adapted to the different national circumstances.

We believe that different potentials require different approaches. The different situation of the EU-12 Member States should be addressed with specific instruments and measures across the entire future FP that could more successfully tackle their specific needs. The reduction of the research, innovation and technology gap among Member States and regions should be promoted as a strategic political goal of the EU.

While recognizing the principle of excellence as a cornerstone criterion, we consider it could be reinforced in the future with other principles. Among others these could be inclusiveness, cost-efficiency, relevance of the research, contribution to growth and jobs.

Another important change, in our view, should concern the selection process of evaluators. It should be more transparent and ensure balanced participation of all MS. The same should be valid for selection process of experts invited by the Commission when preparing strategic documents or Work Programmes as well as in other governing processes and bodies.

The importance of the upcoming work on that issue calls for stepping up the discussion about possible improvements. The present frame of FP7 might be maintained, however, changes need to be made in order to better satisfy the needs of all EU Member States.

² Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 47.

III. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness and impact of future Framework Programmes

It is evident, that the next FP will have to strategically support the Europe 2020 process and objectives in order to strengthen the research and innovation capacity in Europe. Its structures and themes have to be therefore more adapted to meet the Grand Challenges and at the same time the demands of European citizens and industry, taking into account the diversity of the Member States (different research systems, innovation potential, scales, availability of resources etc.). In this regard we formulate two sets of recommendations (of general and more specific nature) which take into account the perspective of the EU-12 MS:

General Principles

- 1) Future instruments and funding mechanisms in the future FP should ensure the real functioning of the knowledge triangle;
- 2) Greater emphasis should be dedicated to industry, especially to SMEs and clusters and to more efficient knowledge transfer.
- 3) A more balanced distribution of research entities (e.g. research infrastructures, Agencies, KICs) across the EU should be secured.
- 4) Many simplifications measures for reducing administrative bureaucracy, fragmentation, duplications etc. should already be in place before the start of the next FP. We would recommend the use of pilots in the last years of FP7, in order to better estimate the viability and effects of instruments and measures intended to be introduced in future FP, especially to facilitate the participation of SMEs.
- 5) More flexible and simpler administrative and financial rules should be adopted, such as: more flat rate financing, lump sums for personnel cost, inclusion of non-refundable part of VAT into eligible costs, reduction of the eligibility criteria.
- 6) The introduction of new instruments should be limited and should be accepted only when bringing significant added value regarding the present situation, as it is indicated in the Interim evaluation report.³
- 7) The budget of the next FP should remain at least at the level reached during FP7.
- 8) In order to fully exploit the synergy between research and structural funds more attention should be paid to the simplicity and coherence of rules in both sources of EU financial support.
- 9) Increase cost-efficiency and overall reduction of EU project research costs by selecting the available excellence in each MS, where research costs may be lower.
- 10) The Commission's political and executive leverage in designing FPs and overseeing and balancing MS interests and stake in EU FPs for R&D has to be strengthened. The FP programmes insisting on decentralization, deregulation and relaxed monitoring as a precondition of success have to be examined in terms of the EU common benefit and contain safeguards against any discrimination.

³ See recommendation 7 in Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 11.

Towards the Internal Dimension of the ERA

- 11) As highlighted in the Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, too narrow a focus on research excellence can overshadow the benefits of full-scale involvement of EU-12 in the FP and this should not be neglected.⁴ Excellence should be better defined and correctly evaluated. In addition to that, the principle of excellence could be reinforced with other principles such as inclusiveness⁵, cost-efficiency, relevance of research, contribution to growth and jobs and to education and training for young and new researchers.
- 12) In the future Ideas Specific Programme, which should continue to promote basic research in Europe, a weighing of proposal evaluation criteria should be introduced where greater emphasis is put on the project's scientific merit (idea) than on the track-record of the investigator, team or consortium.
- 13) Marie Curie actions support the realization of the ERA through researchers' mobility. We strongly support the continuation of efforts to professionalize the careers of early stage researchers, as well as retaining the focus on research-based training and increasing access to Marie Curie initiatives for junior post-doc researchers.
- 14) In order to increase the human potential in R&D, greater attention in the future FP must be paid to young researchers, not only from the third countries, but also from the EU itself: both in calls for proposals and in the project evaluation process, we recommend to adopt special measures in support to young researchers or their teams.
- 15) In the future FP a special funding line should be dedicated for construction and operation of European Research Infrastructures. Political and financial efforts should be made for a more balanced geographical distribution of the R&I infrastructures. Special attention should be given to ensure free access and to promote the attractiveness of European Research Infrastructures.
- 16) EU-12 R&D participation has to be monitored across FPs by the Commission and independent experts, with periodic in-depth analysis and reporting. A system of measures has to be developed for corrective intervention, if and when necessary. Long-term measures should be planned to ensure systematic integration of EU-12 into the ERA.
- 17) A more balanced participation of EU-12 evaluators and other experts in the evaluation process and other independent steering, advisory, governing, assessment and evaluation activities should be assured.
- 18) A targeted approach to support research excellence in the EU-12 with specific instruments in place in the future FP should be considered. In this respect, temporary incentives for the MS with less developed RTDI systems should be given, such as: regional calls, quota systems, minimal numbers of EU-12 participants and coordinators in projects, adjusted mobility programmes and small-budget projects.
- 19) In the next FP, for all eligible convergence regions, special attention has to be given to increase funding and to adopt appropriate measures to strengthen the participation in the "Research Potential" initiative.

⁴ Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 48.

⁵ Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 74.

- 20) Specific measures to develop research and innovation driven clusters within Regions of Knowledge could be envisaged.
- 21) The cooperation in the framework of ERA-NET projects has enhanced international relationships between research entities and should be continued and strengthened by tailor-made instruments.
- 22) Additional support should be given to NCP networks to be more effective in support of EU-12 participation.

Brussels, 17 December 2010