

Brussels, 29 April 2009

Modernisation of EU research funding on the right track

Today, the European Commission presented a progress report covering the first two years of the 7th EU framework programme for R&D (FP7), which will last until 2013. The biggest EU R&D funding programme ever, with a €54bn budget over 7 years, proves to be well suited to answer the EU's economic and societal needs. Its structure and new instruments help the EU to address its challenges. Priority areas such as environment, energy or nanotechnologies contribute to building a sustainable, low carbon economy, with industry-led technology platforms helping to define topics which meet industry's long term needs; the European Research Council supports our best researchers to globally compete on scientific excellence. Joint Technology Initiatives embody new public-private ventures on an unprecedented technological and financial scale. FP7 is a strong asset in the EU's fight against the current crisis with its budget growing every year by 13% until 2013. The report underlines remaining challenges for the FP7 such as the mobilisation of new Member States, the participation of SMEs and administrative simplification.

The European Commissioner for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik, said: "The economic crisis is a good reality check for our programmes. I'm happy to see that FP7 is passing the test: it injects fresh money to support research, with almost a doubling of the annual budget between 2007 and 2013, and acts as an incentive for Member States and the industry to do likewise. FP7 is one of the EU's key instruments to prepare for recovery from the crisis and to come out of it greener and smarter."

Unfettered demand for EU funding and a successful launch of new R&D instruments

In its first two years, with around 25,000 proposals reaching the final evaluation stage, 5,500 were selected to receive grants totalling around €10 billion. Demand was high for the new European Research Council, with around 11,000 proposals for its first calls. Over 600 grants have been provided to excellent EU researchers. Responding to the needs of industry for strategic technology development, five Public-Private Partnerships (JITS) have been launched. The new Risk Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF), managed together with the EIB, has approved loans of €2 billion to support high risk R&D projects.

Realising the European Research Area

The FP7 overall objective is to build the Single Market for research and support open innovation. It supports transnational cooperation, promotes "brain circulation" through mobility grants and improves EU research and innovation capacities by supporting research infrastructures. The programme supporting collaborative research has attracted more than a third (36,7%) of all submitted proposals, followed by the scheme for mobility of researchers (23,5%).

Boosting sustainable development and the economy

In the first two years, 44% of the budget for collaborative research has been allocated to interdisciplinary research such as environment, energy, agriculture, transport, nanotechnologies, ICT, supporting the EU's renewed sustainable development strategy. As part of the EU economic recovery plan, FP7 will support the "greening" of the EU automotive, manufacturing and construction sectors through three public-private R&D partnerships.

Opening EU research to the world

Stronger and more strategic international cooperation is among the FP7 priorities. For instance, new countries have been associated to FP7, bringing their total number to 12; a specific EU-Africa Partnership on Science, Information and Space has been signed; and the International scientific collaboration was promoted by the launch of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).

Cutting red tape

FP7 has made progress in cutting red tape, notably through a new Guarantee Fund and a Unique Registration Facility. Two new Executive Agencies have been set up to specialise in the efficient implementation of EU research programmes: the Research Executive Agency (REA) and the European Research Council (ERC). Audit processes have been improved and streamlined.

The way ahead

Some issues need further attention, such as the rather low participation of SMEs. Successful participation of researchers from new Member States can be improved. Progress on simplification and the effective operation of new instruments may require changing the ground rules.

To further improve FP7, the Commission will be seeking advice from an independent expert group, which will undertake a FP7 Interim Evaluation by autumn 2010.

The Commission today also adopted a response to the ex-post evaluation of the FP6, which provides further input to the interim evaluation exercise.

Link to the full text of the Communication and to the FP6 evaluation report:

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=reports>

See also [MEMO/09/209](#) (Q&A)