

INFORMATION

CCR RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Commission proposes Revision of the Multiannual Research Programme

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The European Commission has proposed a revision of the Community multiannual research programme for the next three years.

The action, in accordance with a request made by the Council at the time the programme was approved in 1973, involves proposals in the field of energy, aerial detection of earth resources, training and education, recycling of primary materials, environmental protection and new activities for the Petten research center. In some cases, the Commission revisions involve a shift or an increase in certain operations while in other instances the Commission suggests a reduction or a standstill.

Overall the Commission plan, which still must be adopted by the Council, further underlines the new policy of diversification for Community-sponsored research activities. This diversification is aimed at increasing the involvement of the Common Research Center in new areas of immediate concern such as energy, the environment and space sciences as well as maintaining a meaningful role in its traditional nuclear sector. The Commission also aimed at replacing expenses which no longer seemed justified under present conditions with activities that promote technical development of future oriented programmes.

This interest in the future has been a hallmark of European Community research since its inception. The European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) was founded in 1958 to further the use of nuclear energy in Europe for peaceful uses and to assure that Europe did not lag behind in the expected atomic revolution. It was launched with a five-year programme in 1959 and the establishment of a Joint Nuclear Research Centre with facilities in Italy, Belgium,

Germany and Netherlands. Another multiannual programme was approved for 1963 through 1967, but since 1967 Euratom and research facilities had been operating on an annual basis. Then in 1972 the Paris Summit Meeting gave a new thrust to Community research activities which was followed by the adoption of a new multiyear programme in 1973.

In approving the original Commission proposals for a multiyear programme in 1973, the Council had directed the Commission to periodically revise the planning to adjust to changes in the Community's priorities. This is the aim of the new Commission proposals made on April 3, 1974.

Energy

In submitting its programme revisions, the Commission observed that "it is evident that the energy crisis constitutes the most important new element" affecting Community research priorities. In order to cope with the sudden emergence of new energy demands, the Commission said that some of the nuclear research programmes, which had been reduced in the past few years, should be maintained, if not increased.

There should therefore be greater emphasis on the research conducted on nuclear reactor safety. In the programme for the production of hydrogen through decomposition of water, the revision placed more stress on contractual participation of outside laboratories and industry. In the fusion sector, the Joint Research Center will contribute to joint technical studies.

To permit this increase and reorganisation without an increase in expenditures, the Commission suggested a shutting down of the ISPRA I reactor, since the ISPRA complex still has a neutron source in the ESSOR reactor. The Commission observed that the curtailment of the operations at the ISPRA center agreed to earlier had also resulted in the slowing down of other activities.

In a note of caution despite the urgency given to the energy field, the Commission said it would withhold a formal proposal on research into solar energy, until it had consulted with experts. However, the revised plan foresaw higher priority for the experimental research in solar energy.

In other areas, the Commission made proposals concerning detection of earth resources by satellite, training, recycling of primary commodities and activities at the Petten Center.

Aerial Detection

The Commission plan asked for an increase in the manpower and budget for the aerial study of earth resources originally approved by the Council. The Commission stated that despite a delay in the programme due to late launching of the American ERTS-B satellite which was to undertake some of the experiments in question, the programme could be pursued at an accelerated pace. This speedup is justified, according to the Commission, because EEC technicians have completed training in the United States and because part of the activities could be performed with aircraft and balloons. The first areas of study will involve agricultural research in northern Italy and southern France that will include identification of characteristics and diseases in rice fields.

Training and Education

An instruction and training programme was launched in 1973 with preliminary studies. The Commission reported that these studies focused on a series of courses on "safety and control of fissionable materials", preparation for a series of technical and scientific courses at ISPRA which could begin in late 1974 and various summer courses beginning in 1975. These courses would be given in conjunction with professional organisations, would involve lecturers from several European countries and the United States and might require additional facilities. It noted that further studies still must be made on this subject.

Recycling of Primary Materials

The Commission suggested that the programme of study concerning recycling of primary materials included in the new technologies segment of the multiannual programme should be continued before beginning new laboratory work. It observed that such a course seemed preferable in view of the work that industry will be called upon to play in this new field.

New Vocation for Petten

The Commission proposed a thorough change in the operations of the Petten Center while still utilizing the personnel's acquired experience and expertise. This reorganisation would concentrate on the Center providing support services in the implementation of the EEC customs union and on the study of coal. The Council

had asked the Commission in 1973 to submit a new plan of operations for the Center. The Commission plan noted that although they might be limited at first, the proposed support service the Center could provide to the Commission could be "the nucleus of a new vocation for the establishment." It visualized work carried out at the Center on classification of products in various tariff categories that require precision measuring of chemical and physical properties. It noted that the Commission's services in the customs union had called the field an "urgent" need and that several countries had also established their own customs research facilities. It also proposed that the Center could assist developing countries in creating such customs laboratories.

The second phase of the new direction at Petten would involve shifting from previous activities in carbon research to inquiries into coal. The Commission observed that the energy crisis had increased the interest in coal. Research to be conducted at Petten might involve work in new means of extracting coal, studies into coal properties and characteristics, new refining techniques and possible new uses for coal.

Environmental Protection

The Commission asked the Council to authorize an increase in the number of personnel involved in the environmental protection programme from four to eight without increase of the budget. It noted that this team will have to supervise from 60 to 80 contracts from the scientific as well as financial and administration angle. It also commented that this team will be responsible for the secretariat of the COST accords in this field (Committee on Science and Technology). Fields that this group is involved in include the establishment of a data bank on chemical products harmful to the environment, the danger of lead, studies on the health hazards of air and water pollution, the effects of micropollutants on man, the ecological impact of water pollution and the tele-detection of atmospheric pollution. All this research is conducted through contracts with other agencies.

The Commission urged that its revisions of the multiannual research programme be approved by the Council by July 1, 1974.