

research and technology

bulletin published by the press and information services
of the commission of the european communities

REPRODUCTION AUTHORIZED

Brussels, 17 November 1970

No. 75

CREATING A EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The circles in which Community decisions on research and development are prepared - or shelved, as the case may be - are extremely variegated, just as the status, terms of reference and composition of the different Community groups involved are of a hotchpotch nature. Nonetheless, the studies and labours of this profuse and somewhat disorderly throng of groups, committees, sub-groups and sub-committees fall far short of covering the entire range of scientific and technological activities of the Community countries.

This is the conclusion which the Commission of the European Communities has reached after a rigorous analysis of the impasse into which scientific research and technological development in Europe is sliding.

Almost a year ago, however, on the evening of 2 December 1969, the heads of state or government reaffirmed at The Hague "their readiness to continue more intensively the activities of the Community with a view to coordinating and promoting industrial research and development in the principal manufacturing sectors, in particular by means of common programmes, and to supply the financial means for the purpose". Very little has in fact been done by the Community since towards achieving this ambitious aim, although the possible consequences of prolonged inaction on the Community's economic growth and the welfare of its inhabitants are manifestly obvious.

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A completely new and overall approach is essential in order to get out of the rut, and the Commission recently proposed such an approach in a letter of intent which it sent to the Ministers.

A European Research and Development Committee

The first requirement is to create a single body within which all projects, plans or programmes relating to Community cooperation in the field of research and development will be drawn up and submitted to the Commission. This European Research and Development Committee (Comité européen de la recherche et du développement - CERD) should group around the Commission not only the high-ranking officials responsible for research policy in the member countries, but also representatives of all the scientific, economic and social structures in the Community - universities, industry and trade unions. Its task will be one of planning and programming: it will make a broad survey, and on this basis define the fields in which cooperation is necessary. In these fields it will propose the most suitable type of Community action, ranging from simple coordination of national activities to the initiation of joint research programmes. In addition - and this is important - it will define the aims and methods of Community cooperation with non-member countries or international organizations.

On the basis of the work of this Committee, which will thus cover the whole field of scientific and technical activity, the Commission will make precise proposals to the Council for the setting up of Community projects where necessary. In order to carry out these projects a European Research and Development Agency will be created under the aegis of the Commission: it will be the trustee of the funds made available to the Community for implementing its R & D programme, and will carry out the Community projects in accordance with the principles of modern industrial management.

The Joint Research Centre

In the light of these same principles of efficient management the Commission of the European Communities is calling for the reorganization of the Joint Research Centre. This Centre, of course, will come under the Agency when it is set up and will constitute one of its main instruments.

Its research programme will be drawn up in accordance with the recommendations of the European Research and Development Committee and on the basis of an overall view of scientific cooperation in the Community.

Pending this, the Commission proposes the immediate reorganization of the Joint Research Centre, and is to put forward right now a multiannual transitional programme, which will be reviewed and expanded as soon as the European Research and Development Committee is able to fit it into a general framework.

This framework is vast, and the list of groups of activity which appear to call for action at Community level is an extremely long one: basic research when it requires substantial spending on equipment; applied research on human or social objectives (medicine, etc.) or exploratory research for industrial purposes (reactor types, materials, etc.); public scientific and technical services, including both facilities made available to administrative bodies responsible for drawing up and enforcing regulations or private companies faced with similar problems, and technical infrastructures which serve the economy as a whole (meteorology, oceanography, etc.); industrial development projects, particularly in the field of advanced technology; training of scientists; scientific and technical documentation, etc.

The environment

Among the sectors in which Community action appears necessary, to an extent and in a manner to be decided on by the European Research and Development Committee, special mention must be made of the environmental sector. Here the need is to map out a Community policy covering the whole range of adverse and sometimes dangerous effects which our advanced industrial system has upon nature and society - for social poisoning is no less dangerous than ecological poisoning. The Community will admittedly have to refrain from duplicating work in progress in other international organizations, but it is clearly capable of setting up projects which are both of a more down-to-earth nature and wider in scope by defining multidisciplinary research programmes and by promulgating Community regulations based on the results of studies carried out.

In this way it will be possible to ensure that the free play of competition, which is guaranteed by the Common Market, does not hamper the fight against pollution (each state being afraid of imposing new restrictions on industry), while at the same time preventing a proliferation of new national regulations, which if not dovetailed will constitute so many fresh obstacles to Community exchanges.

By their very nature, pollution and its effects are frequently no respecters of national frontiers. Is it not fitting, therefore, to begin the attack on them at Community level by creating a multi-disciplinary establishment for the study of the whole range of problems posed by the environment -- and heaven knows they are numerous enough?

It can be seen that the field for European cooperation on research and development is vast. Hitherto it has too often been approached piecemeal, a method ill suited for solving the very real problems involved. It is to be hoped that the overall approach -- scientific, economic and social -- proposed by the Commission will enable the Community to implement a research and development policy on a par with its ambitions. Perhaps this might mean that one day the Treaties would have to be amended, but they already provide a sufficient basis for the gradual -- but urgent -- implementation of the proposed measures.
