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An overview of the research activities of the European Union in 1997-1998

"1998 Annual report on the research and technological development activities of the European Union"

1997 was the busiest year yet for the European Union's research programmes. Nearly 24000 proposals were received by the Commission in response to calls for proposals and over 7000 contracts and amendments to contracts were signed, corresponding to nearly ECU 3000 million and nearly 24000 participations. On 31 December 1997 over 11000 projects were in progress.

Cumulatively, more than 15 000 research projects had been established under the Fourth Research Framework Programme (1994-1998) by the end of 1997, amounting to ECU 8 200 million in signed contracts.

These data are extracted from the fourth Annual Report on Community research, which has just been published by the Commission [1] and which gives an overall picture of both policy developments and research activities (including those carried out by the Joint Research Centre), as well as some of the results obtained in the framework of the research programmes under the responsibility of Mrs Edith CRESSON, Member of the Commission responsible for research, innovation, education, training and youth.

The Framework Programme increases the dynamism and productive capacity of European research by supplementing efforts at national and regional level (in line with the principle of subsidiarity). In particular, as a result of the numerous links that it establishes between the various players involved (since 1994, 160000 collaborative links between EU partners have been created, of which nearly 60000 in 1997 alone), it helps European researchers and enterprises to address complex problems (which are more and more trans- frontier in nature) and to put forward new technologies (which are more and more expensive to develop).

The main results of 1997 are summarised below:

Preparation of the Fifth Framework Programme

1997 was a pivotal year in the development of Community research policy, with the Commission presenting its proposals for the Fifth Framework Programme (which will cover all the EU's research activities for 1998-2002).

Many contributions were received from the consultation of various players involved in European research. By the end of 1997 over 300 contributions had been received, including just under 150 from European associations and over 170 from private bodies; among the latter 50 were from European industrial and professional federations. A conference on the scientific and technological content of the Fifth Framework Programme was held in February 1997, at which comments were provided by representatives of the research community, industry and users. This process of consultation was continued by a more in-depth review, in July 1997, of the proposal content of the specific programmes, again with the help of the stakeholders most directly.

The ground was therefore well prepared for the negotiations with the Parliament and Council of Ministers and for their decisions which are needed before the end of 1998 to secure continuity of research funding in 1999.

Participation of SMEs

The percentage participation of SMEs (small- and medium sized enterprises) in all the specific programmes increased between 1995 and 1997, bringing it to a level which, according to a recent report, is the highest of all public national or international RTD programmes. SMEs now account for 24% of total participations.

Between 1995 and 1997, the technology stimulation measures for SMEs (TSME) enabled 2900 SMEs to benefit from one of the 1 264 exploratory awards financed and nearly 1900 other SMEs to participate in one of the 300 cooperative research (CRAFT) projects in progress. Over 80% of the SMEs receiving an exploratory award had never before taken part in a Community project.

With an average of six or seven SMEs per CRAFT project, it can be estimated that the calls scheduled for 1998 will bring total participation under the Fourth Framework Programme to around 12500 SMEs compared with 5400 for the previous Framework Programme. It is likely that under the Fourth Framework Programme nearly 8000 SMEs will have participated not only in their first international research project but also their first public RTD programme.

What is an EU research project?

On the basis of the aggregate data for 1997/1998, a typical shared-cost research project has the following profile:

- an average EU contribution of ECU 0,73 million
- an average of 4,8 partners per project
- an average of 3,2 Member States per project

Stimulating technological innovation

Work continued during 1997 in taking forward the objectives of the *First Action Plan for Innovation*, whose principal aim is to help overcome European weaknesses in the transformation of research results into innovations. Mobilising the various services concerned (Innovation, Internal Market, SMEs, Industry, Education and Training, Research and Development), the Commission in this first phase put in place a series of coordinated initiatives, mainly in 5 areas: protection of intellectual property; innovation financing; the regulatory framework and administrative simplification; education and training; gearing research towards innovation.

Impacts and scientific and technical results

In the course of 1997, numerous results were achieved through Community RTD projects which will contribute, sometimes indirectly and/or in the medium to long term, to improving the quality of life in Europe: for example, sequencing of the genome of several living organisms, development of a powerful climate-forecasting model for Europe, development of several innovative production technologies, launching of an international campaign to study the depletion of the ozone layer above Europe, etc.

Community funding has made it possible to establish hundreds of networks and conferences and has given rise to thousands of publications and patents - activities which help to promote the dynamism of European science and technology.

Thanks to the coordination of research made possible by the European programmes, and because Community projects are selected on the basis of their quality, European research

teams are consistently at the forefront of research in their particular sector. To quote just one example, a network under the TMR Programme made it possible to discover the quantum teleportation phenomenon, offering the prospect of new generations of computers.

A study in 1998 of completed projects under the Brite-EuRam Programme has indicated that firms' participation in Community research has major economic implications: nearly half of all the firms involved have managed to increase their turnover; 40% of them have gained access to new markets; and 40% have been able to increase the size of their workforce. Another study concerning a series of projects under the Esprit Programme has also shown that 1 ECU invested in research results in ECU 11 of economic output eight years later.

A key objective of the Framework Programme is to improve the translation of the results of research into economic and commercial benefits and, through the Innovation Programme and the other specific programmes, to establish a framework conducive to innovation in Europe. Thus, research programmes in Information Technology and Biotechnology have, for example, established annual Investment Fora designed to bring together firms and investors in innovation.

Thanks to the Training and Mobility of Researchers Programme several thousand young scientists have been able to obtain training in a country other than their own and have been able to expedite their research by having more rapid access to relevant and recognised results. For example, by the time it ends. The current programme will have made it possible to support the training through research of 6500 researchers/year in training networks activity and some 5600 researchers/year in the case of mobility fellowships. The "large facilities" activity of the programme has made it possible to facilitate the access of European researchers to very expensive large facilities in order to carry out certain research work. This activity is particularly important for researchers working in the regions of the Community that are the furthest away from such facilities.

Programme management

Management was a subject of considerable Commission attention during the year and into 1998. Besides the ongoing issue of progressive improvement of management performance and quality, significant advances were made in the evolution and further development of management systems to reflect fully the new principles of focus, coordination and flexibility in the implementation of the Fifth Framework Programme.

A colloquium of European Union research ministers was organised on 28 April in London, during which the Commission proposed a series of measures with a view to adapting the management of EU research programmes to the new Framework Programme.

Further information on eu research

Extensive information is available on EU research through regular complementary reports relating to different aspects of research activities. In addition to the present Report, which is issued annually, the following main types of documents are published by the European Commission which together provide a very comprehensive picture:

- *Annual Monitoring Reports*, for the Framework Programme and the Specific Programmes, which provide rapid, independent feedback on the state and quality of programme implementation.
- *Five-year Assessment Reports*, issued every fourth year, both for the Framework and the Specific Programmes, which present an independent retrospective evaluation on the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and impact of the EU RTD programmes.
- *The European Report on Science and Technology Indicators*, the second edition of which was issued in December 1997 and which gives data and comparative analyses on European and national RTD in the world context.
- *Research and development*: annual statistics, a Eurostat report issued each year, which provides extensive data on Community and national R&D expenditures, R&D personnel and patents
- *The Commission's main annual budgetary documents* i.e. the preliminary draft budget, the budget and the consolidated revenue and expenditure account and balance sheet.
- *Various studies and analyses* conducted and published on the initiative of the research programmes and which address issues specific to the RTD domains they cover.

► *For additional information, see [some examples of research activities or contact](#):*

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