

Common Position Paper of the EU-12 Member States for the next Framework Programme¹

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 integrated European Research Area (ERA) 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.

As of 2007 the EU consists of 27 Member States (MS). This gives the EU a significant increase in its critical mass, in size, and in human potential making the EU a key player in the global scene and contributing to the success of the Lisbon Treaty objectives and the Europe 2020 goals.

Ambitious European objectives in a continuous competition on a global level can only be attained if the whole internal European potential, including the intellectual capital of Europe, is used effectively and if common efforts and an inclusive approach are applied.

In this regard, the EU-12 MS would like to highlight the fact that the present situation in the field of RTDI, which has a direct link to EU economic growth, does not fully reflect the capabilities and potential as far as the involvement of the EU-12 MS in FP7 is concerned. This is clearly substantiated by different statistics and the recent report on the interim evaluation of FP7.²

In the light of this situation, the EU-12 MS have undertaken the initiative to present their commonly identified perspective towards the next FP in order to point out the issues of common concern for our countries and to suggest possible solutions to them.

¹ EU-12 Member States: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

The submission of the EU-12 Common Position Paper does not prejudice the ongoing national consultation processes for the next FP and that each Member State might choose in its own discretion to send its individual national contribution as input to the discussions of the next FP.

² Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, pp. 46-48.

II. Changing the concept of the new Framework Programme: Inclusive solutions for a more integrated 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. FP7 reflects the structure and capabilities of economies with more mature research and innovation environments; it was 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 all EU Member States. As a consequence, FP7 is less accessible for some Member States.

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.³

The next FP should address the needs of all EU Member States. 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 and to identify more inclusive and flexible instruments.

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.

Finally, the EU-12 MS underline that the principle of excellence should continue to be the cornerstone criterion for the next Framework Programme. Notwithstanding that, it should be stressed that the interim evaluation report of FP7 states that: “Too narrow focus on research excellence can overshadow the benefits of full-scale involvement of EU12 in the FP and this should not be neglected”.⁴ In the design of the next FP other principles could be taken into account like inclusiveness⁵, cost efficiency, relevance of research and contribution to growth and jobs.

³ Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 47.

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.

III. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness and impact of the next Framework Programme

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, ensuring that research retains its important role within the three axes of the knowledge triangle.
- 2) Greater emphasis should be dedicated to SMEs 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, time to grant 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 the future FP, especially to facilitate the participation of SMEs and smaller research entities.
- 5) More flexible and simpler administrative and financial rules should be adopted, such as: more flat rate financing, lump sums for personnel cost, reduction of the eligibility criteria and simpler reporting.
- 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.⁶
- 7) In order to fully exploit the synergies between Framework Programmes and Structural Funds more attention should be paid to the simplicity and coherence of rules in both sources of EU financial support.
- 8) Strive for more effective use of funds of EU research projects; inter alia, increasing cost-efficiency.
- 9) 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, while taking into account the EU common benefit and equal opportunities of all MS.

⁶ Report of the Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of FP7, p. 11, recommendation 7.

Towards the Internal Dimension of the ERA

- 10) In the future "Ideas" Programme, which should continue to promote basic research in Europe, the evaluation criteria should be focused more on the scientific merit (idea) of the project proposals.
- 11) 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.
- 12) 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.
- 13) Special attention should be given to support the operation, to ensure open access and to promote the attractiveness of European Research Infrastructures.
- 14) R&D participation of all Member States has to be monitored across FPs by the Commission and independent experts, with periodic in-depth analysis and reporting. Principles for systematic long-term integration into the ERA should be enshrined in all instruments and mechanisms of the next FP.
- 15) A more balanced participation of evaluators and other experts, including women, in the evaluation process and other independent steering, advisory, governing, assessment and evaluation activities should be assured.
- 16) A more flexible approach to support research excellence in the EU-12 with more differentiated measures in place in the future FP should be considered. In this respect, incentives for the MS with less developed RTDI systems should be given and their effectiveness should be monitored.
- 17) In the next FP, special attention has to be given to increase funding and to adopt appropriate measures to strengthen the participation in the "Research Potential" initiative. In addition, apart from convergence regions, regions with relatively lower R&D intensity should be eligible. Furthermore, the "Regions of Knowledge" programme should be reinforced during the next FP.
- 18) 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.
- 19) Additional support through access to Commission expertise, know-how, monitoring and benchmarking of activities should be given to NCP networks to be more effective in support of EU12 integration.

February 2nd, 2011