

Preparation Research Council, 11 March 2002

(Andrea Dahmen)

The research ministers of the European Union will meet on Monday, 11 March 2002, from 10h00 in Brussels under the presidency of Ana Maria Birulés y Bertrán, Spanish Minister for Science and Technology. Philippe Busquin, Commissioner for research and development, will represent the European Commission.

Nota bene: A press conference will be held at the end of the meeting.

The main agenda points will be:

1) Rules of participation for researchers, enterprises and universities wishing to participate in the new Research Framework Programme (2002-2006; EC and Euratom Treaties)

Ministers will hold an orientation debate on a package of two proposals concerning both the EC and Euratom Treaties in which the Commission adopted on 10 September 2001 and on 6 December 2001, respectively. The Commission in the light of the first reading in the European Parliament and of discussions during the last Research Council (10 December 2001) subsequently modified the proposals. The modified proposals were adopted by the Commission on 10 January 2002. They contain the rules under which scientists and organisation/companies can participate in the Sixth Research Framework Programme. Please note that the rules of participation are eventually adopted under the so-called co-decision procedure meaning that the Council and the Parliament have to come to a joint position on the Commission's proposals. In fact, the Parliament has named Ms Godelieve Quisthout-Rowohl as rapporteur, and scheduled its May session for a first reading.

The rules of participation in a research project to be co-financed by the Commission encompass a number of issues such as the minimum number of participants, the participation of researchers from third countries, the degree of autonomy given to the participants for managing their project, the evaluation and selection procedures, the financial contribution of the Commission to a given type of project and the protection of intellectual property rights. Please note that the Commission proposed that participants from associated candidate countries have the same rights and obligations as participants from EU Member States.

2) Specific programmes implementing the Sixth Framework Programme

Ministers will hold an orientation debate on the five specific programmes designed to implement the Sixth Research Framework Programme. The Commission adopted its proposals on the 30 May 2001. In the light of the first reading in the European Parliament and of discussions during the last Research Council meeting, the Commission adopted a modified version on 31 January 2002. The discussion is likely to concentrate on management issues such as the follow-up of activities by the programme committee, the competencies and functioning of this committee.

The five research programmes are based on two different Treaties: the EC Treaty (3 programmes) and the Euratom Treaty (2 programmes) since research activities are foreseen in both. These five specific programmes are:

- *"Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area"* (12 855 million Euro). This programme sets out shared scientific priorities on which the Commission will concentrate financial support. This will also include activities such as benchmarking and mapping Europe's excellence in science and innovation.
- *"Structuring the European Research Area"* (2 655 million Euro). Objective: better integration of research and innovation, improved mobility of researchers, co-ordinated planning and access to research infrastructure and actions such as promoting ethics in science, combating the 'brain drain' and promoting public awareness of science.
- *Research in the nuclear field* (940 million Euro). Objective: foster nuclear fusion research and contribute to the construction of a novel reactor type called ITER, research into the aspects of treatment and storage of nuclear waste as well as on reactor safety.

There are also two programmes covering the work of European Joint Research Centre:

- A programme (760 million Euro) focussing on food safety and health, environment and sustainable development, technology foresight, metrology, combating fraud, monitoring/prediction of natural disasters and data security.
- A programme (290 million Euro) covering the Joint Research Centre's activities in the nuclear field: treatment and storage of nuclear waste, training of inspectors, reactor safety, nuclear medicine and radiation monitoring.

For more information see also press release IP/01/766.

Background on the Commission's proposal for a research framework programme

The Programme proposal is structured around three main headings: 1) Integrating ERA (thematic priorities); 2) Structuring ERA (innovation, human resources, infrastructure, science and society); 3) Strengthening the foundations of ERA (co-ordination, development of policies). The future Framework Programme on R&D is the major tool designed to implement the European Research Area (ERA). This strategy is designed to help make Europe more competitive in the field of research, and was endorsed by Heads of Government at the Lisbon summit in March 2000 and at Stockholm in March 2001. The global budget proposed for 2002-2006 is € 17.5 billion representing a 17 % increase compared to the existing framework programme.

During the last Council meeting on 10 December 2001 a political agreement was reached on the Framework Programme, and the Council formally adopted its Common Position on 28 January 2002.

Next steps

At this point, the European Parliament and the Council seem to agree that the decision on the Sixth Framework Programme for Research should be taken under the Spanish presidency.

3) European Space Strategy: Framework Agreement between the EC and the ESA

The Commission will present its proposal (adopted on 14 February 2002) for the above Framework Agreement.

Background

During the year 2000, the European Commission and ESA Executive jointly developed a European Strategy for Space (ESS). The EU and ESA Councils adopted in November 2000 two complementary resolutions endorsing this Strategy. Subsequently, a Joint Task Force (JTF) was created and charged to monitor the Strategy's implementation and proposing a permanent joint co-operative structure between ESA and the European Union. This Task Force recommends among other things

- that the European Space policy should be embedded in the overall EU policy framework
- to elaborate a detailed strategy for co-operation with Russia as well as a strategy to better imply the candidate countries in space collaboration
- to negotiate a framework agreement between the EU and ESA to allow ESA to act as the EU's "implementing agency" for space projects such as GMES (satellite system for the global monitoring of the environment and security)
- holding a Joint meeting of EU and ESA Council ministers before mid 2002.

This document with recommendations was adopted by the Commission on 7 December 2001.

4) Nuclear Fusion: negotiation directives to conclude an international agreement on the construction of a fusion reactor (ITER)

The Commission will present a proposal that it adopted on 27 February 2002. The objective is to conclude an agreement with the objective of building a thermonuclear fusion reactor capable of producing energy at an industrial scale (1 500 MW). Currently, the interested parties are the European Union, Canada, Japan, Russia and Kazakhstan. The USA, originally a party to the project withdrew from it in 1999 but is currently reconsidering its position.

Background

Fusion research in Europe has its origins in the Euratom Treaty. It has been implemented, since 1958, under successive multi-annual research and training programmes, as provided for in Article 7 of the Treaty. The EC Council, when adopting the fusion programme (1976-1980), defined its long-term objective as "the joint construction of prototype reactors". At the end of the seventies the JET project was launched for the construction and operation of a device which for the first time could study plasma in near-reactor conditions. For the upcoming Sixth Research Framework Programme € 750 million are foreseen.

The worldwide collaboration on fusion energy R&D became highly visible with the Agreement on the Engineering Design Activities of ITER (ITER-EDA), signed in 1992 between the European Union, Japan, Russia and the United States and undertaken under the auspices of the IAEA. Canada later joined the project as an associate of Euratom, and Kazakhstan as an associate of the Russian Federation. The Agreement, initially due to have ended in 1998, has been extended up to July 2001 but without the US, which withdrew from the co-operation in July 1999.

Over the past eight years the ITER-EDA Parties have shared the financial burden for ITER design and R&D work. This has amounted to almost € 1 000 million.

5) Life Sciences and Biotechnology

The Commission will present a strategic document adopted on 23 January 2002, which will also be discussed at the upcoming Spring Summit in Barcelona (15 + 16 March 2002). For more information see press release (IP/02/122) and website http://europa.eu.int/comm/biotechnology/introduction_en.html.

6) Other business

- ***Bioterrorism: The Commission will make a statement on the current state of play***

Background

The Council of research ministers arrived at a political agreement on the next framework programme for research during its meeting on 10 December and added civil protection, especially the issue of bio-response, to the list of European research subjects to be dealt with under the priority of anticipation emerging needs. Subsequently, the Commission created a group of experts in the field whose task it is to look into research already undertaken in various Member States and to identify possible gaps. For more information see also press release IP/01/1810.