



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 14 February 2005

6347/05

RECH 30

NOTE

Subject : Spanish position regarding the Seventh RTD Framework Programme of the EU

Please find attached the Spanish position relating to the Seventh Framework Programme.

Document on the preliminary Spanish position on the 7th Framework Programme for R&D**I. General Considerations**

Spain wishes to contribute to the debate on the European strategy on research and the goals of the 7th Framework Programme for R&D (FP7) and welcomes the Commission's communication of 16 June 2004.

- Firstly, in coherence with achieving the goals of the Lisbon process and the Barcelona Summit, and taking into account the recommendations of the Kok report and the catalysing effect of FP7, we believe the resources dedicated to the latter should be expanded to a sufficient level, among other possible contributions to meeting the above goals, within the framework defined by the new financial perspective.

- In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals and to create the European Research Area, there must be a coherent approach to actions at the national and European levels, such that resources and actions are additional and complementary, thus provoking a multiplier effect on private sector R&D investment.

- We believe the fundamental principles on which the earlier FP were based, and which have provided such good results, should be maintained. Such principles include European added value, subsidiarity of activities and complementarity with national actions. Furthermore, as far as is practicable, we should foster collaborative transnational research, cooperation between research groups, companies, end-users and administrations, and contribute to solving social problems and advancing the frontiers of knowledge. It is also necessary to further simplify processes, following the recommendation put forward at the latest Spring Summit that the FP should be more 'user-friendly'.

II. Comments on the proposed axes

- Collaborative transnational research, especially in the areas considered priority at EU level, must continue to be the core activity of the FP, and be allocated the largest proportion of available financial resources.

We believe that transnational collaboration between consolidated centres of excellence and groups offering promise will contribute to furthering excellence within the EU.

Excellence and potential impact should be borne in mind when activities are decided upon. The size of the consortia should be proportional to the goals to be achieved, and should not comprise an end in itself. We should promote the inclusion of groups which, albeit small, have the potential to contribute to the European research process. Moreover, we should take into account support for industrial policy and the furnishing of added value to traditional sectors in order to increase European competitiveness.

- Technological platforms, being as they are new ventures, should first be created in the form of exploratory actions with a limited budget. They should be headed by elements from the private sector, and the inclusion of SMEs and all interested parties in each sector should be facilitated. These platforms should be open, both in their operation and in adopting common research agendas. Public funding would only be justified if the relevant administrations played a significant role within management bodies. In addition to integrated projects, the application of other instruments, such as Article 171, should be studied case-by-case, starting as a pilot project, with additional funding also being sought.
- Support for excellence in basic research, as the engine of technological development and economic growth and competitiveness of the EU, taking into account the dissemination and possible application of the results achieved, is fundamental to the Lisbon strategy. It is, therefore, necessary to create a funding mechanism under the conditions proposed in the Mayor Group report, with excellence as the sole criterion for selection, to be managed by the scientific community, with accountability to the Commission and to the Member States, and neither imposing nor excluding transnational collaboration. In FP7, funding should be increased with respect to the levels currently provided to basic research under FP6.

- Making Europe more attractive to the best researchers, promoting their mobility, establishing a scientific career-programme to attract young and female researchers and encouraging the return of highly-qualified scientists are all vitally important to further advance and disseminate knowledge in all the areas affected by FP7. Funding should be increased with respect to the current levels provided under FP6 and oriented towards further promoting the transfer of knowledge between the public and private sectors.
- We welcome the infrastructure development of interest for Europe, although it is necessary to further clarify the concept of European infrastructure and to reinforce the role of the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructure (ESFRI). The emphasis on FP7 funding should be focused on facilitating access to infrastructure, both new and pre-existing, and to take the private sector into account. EU policy in this respect should be coordinated with that of the Member States such that the decisions on the construction and operation of new infrastructure are adopted with clear commitments and criteria on co-funding and requirements, under the “variable-geometry” principle. We should also promote the siting of scientific infrastructure in ultra-peripheral regions, taking into account the particular characteristics of each.
- The coordination of national programmes is essential for the creation of the European Research Area (ERA). FP7 must not be limited to the level of project coordination but should serve, as far as is practicable, to better coordinate national programmes and policies. Current funding levels should be increased and oriented more strategically, helping opening-up and promoting the joint creation of programmes by Member States, with possible additional EU funding. At an international level, it is necessary to clarify the cooperation and support given to international organizations and programmes.

III. Horizontal aspects

- SMEs should be encouraged to participate in all thematic priority areas, especially in the axes of transnational collaboration and of technological initiatives, by the funding of appropriately-sized projects and the use of specific instruments, according to the needs in question (STREPS, integrated projects for SMEs and specific activities). The budget provision for specific activities should be greatly increased (in order to reduce over-subscription), announcements should be open, with no restrictions on research topics, and six-monthly reviews and simplified management procedures should be introduced.

In setting participation by SMEs in FP7 as a goal, the definition of SME used must be carefully considered. In this respect, it is advisable that only companies should be considered SMEs. If a wider definition were used, as is currently the case, the quantitative target would have to be adjusted.

- The promotion of technological innovation in FP7 is essential to improve industrial competitiveness. In all thematic areas and, especially, in the axes of transnational collaboration and of technological initiatives, we must strengthen the relationship between the results of FP7 projects and the companies that could make use of such results. This could be achieved by means of mechanisms to disseminate and transfer the new knowledge resulting from the projects.
- International cooperation in R&D is important, both concerning the international dimension of the ERA and with respect to EU cooperation policy. Therefore, the essentials of the structure and operation of the current INCO programme should be maintained, but with a clearer definition of European policy of international cooperation.

IV. Thematic area priorities

- Priorities should not be set for basic research. The criteria for selecting thematic area priorities at other levels should involve the scientific community and the private sector, seeking a greater degree of alignment with national programmes in order to ensure the added value of FP7. It is important that there be continuity with the seven current FP6 priorities, with changes in the initial allocation of resources being determined by new circumstances and challenges. A possible new priority could be the subject area of Marine Science and Resources, due to its potential economic importance for the EU.
- Research into scientific support for other Community policies should continue, not just because this is required by the Treaty, but to guarantee that the design and introduction of policies can be carried out on the basis of the fullest possible scientific knowledge. The Joint Research Centre must compete, in all respects, under the same conditions as apply to other institutions.

- The Framework Cooperation Agreement between the EC and the ESA makes the creation of a European Space Strategy possible. In order to put this into practice, there should be a clear definition and separation of the respective roles played and the types of activities managed by the EC and by the ESA. Moreover, there must be transparency in the management, for example, of joint undertakings.

- In the context of the threat posed by global terrorism, we welcome research into security; this should focus on aspects such as civil defence, including subjects related to catastrophes, whether natural or otherwise. Activities with military aims and functions should not be included under this heading. Attention should be paid to aspects of domestic security that are in the public domain.

V. Implementation and management

The rules concerning participation and the use of instruments should follow the recommendations of the Marimon Report, seeking to increase the use of traditional instruments (mainly STREPS), which are favoured by researchers and by the private sector. Projects should be funded strictly according to their quality, irrespective of the instrument utilised. This latter should be freely chosen by the proponents on the basis of the goal to be achieved.

The preparation and evaluation of projects, including cost models, should be simplified to speed up decision-making and negotiation processes, thus reducing the time lag between presentation and contract signing. The first part of the evaluation, concerning excellence and potential impact, should be anonymous, as was the case under FP5. The timeframe for calls for offers should be established from the outset. To reduce over-subscription, we should reintroduce pre-checking, on a voluntary basis, before the deadline established in the calls for offers.

While accepting the principle of the separation between policy design and implementation, externalised management is only justifiable in very special cases such as basic research. Be that as it may, externalisation cannot affect aspects such as the establishment of priorities, the content of work programmes, the norms on evaluation and strategic-decision taking or funding.

The proposals for managing the actions carried out under Articles 171 and 169, together with those related to the construction of infrastructure, require further details and explanations concerning the participation of national administrations.
