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# Regional Aspects in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme

Expert Advisory Group  
on  
"Research Potential"  
- 2007 -

REPORT



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# **Regional Aspects in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme**

Expert Advisory Group  
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## INTRODUCTION

On 18 December 2006, the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013) was decided by the European Parliament and the Council. The 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme is the instrument to support the Lisbon and Barcelona strategies that define the central role of research for developing the knowledge-based economy. For the “Research Potential” scheme several formulations in the introductory part of the Framework Programme decision <sup>1</sup> are of particular relevance:

- (1) *“... Through its support for research at frontier of knowledge, applied research and innovation, the Community seeks to promote synergies in European research and thus provide a stable foundation for the European Research Area. This will make a positive contribution to the social, cultural and economic progress of all Member States.”*
- (11) *“The research and innovation capacities throughout Europe should be strengthened, both quantitatively and qualitatively.”*
- (17) *“Under the “Capacities” programme ... the research potential in the Union’s convergence and outermost regions should be unlocked.”*
- (19) *“The regions have an important part to play in implementing the European Research Area. Unlocking the development potential of regions and wide dissemination of results of research and technological development help to bridge the technological divide and contribute to European competitiveness.”*

The 7<sup>th</sup> Framework follows not only new objectives. It is also structured differently compared to previous programmes and offers a simplified set of funding schemes (instruments). Therefore, all relevant information is been made available in a timely and user-friendly manner to all potential participants.

*“Under the Specific Programmes implementing the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (2007-2013), the Commission is responsible for drawing up Annual Work Programmes. In doing so, the Commission wishes to draw on the best possible external advice.”* <sup>2</sup> Therefore, Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs) have been set up by the European Commission and are composed of independent experts working in their individual capacity:

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<sup>1</sup> DECISION No. 1982/2006/EC OF THE European PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 concerning the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007-2013). Official Journal of the European Union, L412/1-41, 30.12.2006

<sup>2</sup> For the tasks of the EAG see: European Commission: Mandate for Advisory Groups of the 7th Framework Programme.

- *The members of the EAG commit themselves to discuss questions put forward and provide advice in their relevant fields of expertise to the best of their ability and in the best interest of Community research.”*
- *“Advice should be provided on strategy, relevant objectives and scientific and technological priorities, and the topics on which proposals are to be invited.”*
- *“The advice received from the EAG will complement other sources of external advice received by the Commission.”*

For the “Research Potential” EAG 15 experts were nominated by the Commission.

The compilation of the list of experts was based on the following criteria:

- the appropriate range of expertise taking into consideration the objectives of the scheme;
- the appropriate understanding of and insights into horizontal aspects;
- the reasonable distribution of geographical origin;
- an appropriate gender balance.

The EAG members come from different institutional backgrounds, from universities (7), research laboratory (1), funding organisations (5), ministry (1) and research policy consultancy (1). 8 members are academics. A majority of the members has long-standing experience in European research and technology cooperation.

Information on the members of the External Advisory Group<sup>3</sup> will be made available on EUROPA ([http://europa.eu/index\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/index_fr.htm)) in order to inform the public and European citizens about membership, mandate and activities of each advisory group.

This initiative is focused on "stimulating the realisation of the full research potential of the enlarged Union". Building on the decisions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and the Specific Programme “Capacities”, the Commission, on an annual basis, seeks expertise in order to identify the priority issues connected with the activity lines of the scheme.

The members of the EAG provide input during the meetings of the group and in written form to the Commission on a yearly basis, which is used in the preparation of the annual work programme. Advice to the Commission is the result of discussions within the Group. This report reflects the EAG advice in view of the preparation of the Work Programme for 2007 as summarised by the rapporteur of the group.

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<sup>3</sup> See ANNEX 1 – list of members of the EAG "Research of Potential"

## **EAG ADVICE for the Work Programme 2007**

### **1. Background and objectives**

#### **1.1 Background information on the work of the EAG**

In two meetings, on 4 July and 19 October 2006, the EAG discussed the general background and objectives of the “Research Potential” scheme. In the second meeting, the Work Programme was the main topic on the agenda.

Between the two meetings, the Commission structures have been changed. Before the change, the responsible unit was situated in the area of the Marie Curie scheme. In the course of the restructuring the responsibility for the “Research Potential” initiative has been given to the unit responsible for the “Regions of Knowledge” initiative and for RTD aspects of Structural Funds. Thus, all the regional aspects of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme are now organised within one responsible unit. Thus, also the synergies with the R&D related aspects of the Structural Funds are an integral part of this organisational unit.

In the meeting on 19 October 2007 also the chairpersons of the “Regions of Knowledge” EAG were present. Only in the course of that second meeting it became sufficiently clear to the EAG, that the “Research Potential” initiative addressing the convergence and outermost regions <sup>4</sup> of the Union has a distinctive different orientation compared to previous activities organised under the Marie Curie scheme. There is a need to make this explicit because these previous actions are mentioned in the decision on the “Capacities” Specific Programme.

#### **1.2 The European Research Area and the objectives of the “Research Potential” initiative**

The “Research Potential” action *“aims at establishing the conditions that will allow them to exploit their potential and will help to fully realise the European Research Area in the enlarged Union”*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Convergence regions are listed in the C(2006) 3475 and are defined as those regions having per capita gross domestic product (GDP) less than 75 % of the average GDP of the EU-25. Subject to international instruments associating third countries to the 7<sup>th</sup> EC Framework Programme, other regions may become eligible for participation; the modalities for the identification of eligible regions would be defined in these international instruments.

Outermost regions are defined according to the article 299§2 of the EC Treaty: Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique and Réunion (the four French overseas departments), the Canaries (Spain), and the Azores and Madeira (Portugal).

<sup>5</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, Work Programme 2007, Capacities, Part 4, Research Potential. European Commission c(2007)563 of 26.02.2007, p. 3

According to the Communication from 18 January 2000<sup>6</sup> a European Research Area should embrace – amongst others – the following three aspects most relevant for the present FP7 initiative:

- *“Networking of existing centres of excellence in Europe and the creation of virtual centres through the use of interactive communication tools;*
- *Greater European cohesion in research based on the best experiences of knowledge transfer at regional and local levels and on the role of the regions in the European research effort;*
- *Bringing together the scientific communities, companies and researchers from western and eastern Europe.”*

The main objective of the European Research Area (ERA) is to make optimal use of Europe’s research capacities. The “Research Potential” initiative is a capacity building action and is not designed for supporting research per se. It is part of the efforts to stimulate the creation of ERA by unlocking existing and emerging excellent research potential at regional level in the convergence and outermost regions of the Union.

The objective of the “Research Potential” initiative is to enhance the full integration of research entities from the convergence regions and outermost regions of the enlarged Europe into the EU research and technology activities. The target groups are entities that are excellent or that are of emerging excellence. The EAG was convinced that there are excellent and very good research groups in the target regions of the scheme. However, in many cases they would lack the knowledge and expertise for successfully participating in European research activities. Very often, such entities would also lack the appropriate visibility in other parts of the Union as well as contacts to experienced research organisations and teams in the “elder” member states. In the view of the EAG, there is certainly room for improvement of the integration of the target regions into the ERA, and the initiative has a very important role to play.

Therefore, the main aim is to strengthen research entities and researchers in these regions with a view to realising their potential for successfully participating in the 7<sup>th</sup> RTD Framework Programme (FP7, 2007-2013). Therefore, the scheme comprises activities for strengthening the knowledge base and for developing additional competence including research management, improving their equipment base or the gaining more visibility.

In the coming period of European programme 2007-2013, not only the RTD Framework Programme will support RTD activities, but also the

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<sup>6</sup> „Towards a European Research Area“, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region. COM (200) 6, Brussels, 18 January 2000

Structural Funds and the European Social Fund will offer important opportunities for improving the research capacities in the target regions. Thus, the “Research Potential” initiative will have a major capacity building objective by preparing the ground for the researchers and research entities to making optimal use of the available policy implementation instruments, mainly the Framework Programme but also other RTD related EU instruments.

The objectives of the “Research Potential” scheme were fully endorsed by the members of the EAG. However, it was emphasised that in the Work Programme the specific capacity building objectives of the scheme has to be explained more clearly to the possible proposers. A clear distinction has to be made between the “Research Potential” programme line and other parts of FP7. The Work Programme has to make clear that this initiative is not funding research activities per se but has been designed for strengthening the capacities for research (including also research planning and management) especially for participating in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

## **2. The Research Potential of the less developed and outermost regions – Developing capacities and sustainable collaborative links**

While addressing the convergence regions and the Union’s outermost regions, the “Research Potential” initiative follows still the general excellence approach of the Framework Programme and is not a cohesion measure. That means that proposers from the target regions will have to prove their existing or emerging excellence. It is particularly relevant, to explain this aspect also to possible partners in other parts of Europe. The “Research Potential” scheme will be attractive also for them because it provides opportunities to develop new working relations with excellent and promising partners that have been not enough visible at European level and were not sufficiently integrated in European research cooperation so far.

The EAG requested to point out that the initiative addresses researchers and research entities in all possible organisations - universities, research centres and others. The main objective is not research per se but raising the European visibility of research entities from the target regions and strengthening their capacities to develop collaborative links to well established research groups in other parts of Europe. This includes also the capacities and capabilities for preparing proposals for EU projects and for managing transnational European projects.

Therefore, it was important for the members of the EAG to being confirmed by the Commission services that the term “researchers” does

not mean just researchers in the narrower sense, but also research managers and technicians. Such a broad approach will certainly be necessary in the view of the capacity building nature of the initiative. However, there is a need that this specific nature of the scheme is adequately well explained in the Work Programme.

The EAG understood and supported the idea that proposers will have to develop an appropriately well coordinated set of measures addressing their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT analysis). That means that in the course of preparing their proposal they should perform a self-assessment and they should develop an action plan for overcoming their weaknesses and strengthening their strengths.

An important aspect of the initiative is also to support synergies with RTD relevant parts of the Structural Funds. That means that in the action plans it will be most important that reference is made to the means provided by the Structural Funds for developing the human resources and upgrading and renewal of research infrastructure in the broadest sense.

The proposed measures should encompass all activities as described in the Work Programme. That means that the set of measures given there is not a menu where one or the other measure can be chosen alternatively. The whole set of measures has to be used in a well balanced way in accordance with the findings of the pre-ceding analysis. Proposers will have to make a convincing case of the capacity building potential of the proposed set of actions and their relation to and relevance for overcoming the weaknesses they have identified as well as for strengthening their strengths. As for the expected impact priority will be given to the improved participation in the Framework Programme.

Through appropriate explanations in the documentation accompanying the Calls for Proposals, especially in the Guide for Proposers, it has to be made clear for the researchers that such an action plan with several mutually supportive activities has to be prepared. Especially the potential of this plan for facilitating future successful participation in joint EU RTD projects in FP7 with well chosen partners in other European regions will be the main criterion for success.

In the June meeting, based on the explanations given by the Marie Curie unit in charge at that time, the EAG clearly favoured a project duration of four years rather than two years in order to provide opportunities for setting up new research groups and for performing substantial research.

In the October meeting, with only a small number of the EAG attending, the newly responsible Commission officers emphasised the priority of the scheme to build capacities for future cooperation in the Framework Programme and RTD related measures of other Community instruments and that project duration of two years will be sufficient to lead to measurable results. Examples of very successful twinning arrangements with such duration were given. Also the TOK-DEV in FP6 the duration of

secondments was between 2 month and 1 year, the duration of recruitment was up to 2 years.

However, some of the present EAG member and also written comments supported longer project duration. Therefore, the EAG recommended to the Commission to reconsider the project duration issue once more and to ensure that this aspect is carefully monitored in the further development of the scheme.

The EAG supported the approach to open the full set of three activities foreseen in the Council Decision on the “Capacities” Specific Programme, because that would allow proposers to prepare an action plan with several activities precisely according to their specific needs.

The EAG missed the consideration of the gender aspect in the work programme. However, the members of the group were satisfied to learn from the Commission that the gender issue will be addressed in the guideline for proposers and will be considered during evaluation and selection of proposals as well as during contract negotiations.

The EAG took note that third countries will not be eligible as project partners. However, researchers from third countries may be recruited as part of the action plan to attract experienced researchers to the research entities in the target region.

### **3. Different activity lines for achieving a common objective**

The “Research Potential” initiative combines three activity lines for the EU’s convergence and outermost regions. The EAG saw clear complementarities and synergies between these three lines. Priority is given to the following two activities

- Unlocking and developing the research potential, and
- providing evaluation facilities for research organisations

#### **3.1 Unlocking and developing the research potential**

The set of measures for strengthening the research potential are well chosen. However, the EAG emphasised once more, that it will be necessary to clearly explain the capacity building objective of the initiative to potential proposers especially the need to propose an action plan based on a SWOT analysis. The target audience are research entities with proven or emerging excellence. A convincing case has to be made that the proposed set of measures will help overcome existing weaknesses and facilitate future improved participation in EU RTD activities.

The EAG emphasised the importance of human resource development with an emphasis on attracting, recruiting and preparing the ground for retaining especially younger researchers. As for “experienced researchers” it was agreed that no further definition should be given, but to leave it to the proposers to make a convincing case when applying for an incoming experienced researcher.

Regarding the budget of projects some members of the EAG were of the opinion that € 1,2m might be too high for one project. However, there was no consensus on this aspect and it was agreed to carefully monitor this point in the course of the first call and re-visit this aspect when preparing for the second call.

### **3.2 Providing evaluation facilities for research organisations**

The EAG welcomed the evaluation facilities scheme but would have welcomed the possibility of a direct combination with the second activity line. However, it became clear that ambitious proposers can go for both activity lines.

The EAG suggested also, that such an evaluation scheme would be most valuable also for addressing research promotion organisations. Improving and strengthening the capacities of research promotion organisations would certainly have extremely beneficial impacts for the positive development of regional and national innovation systems.

Members of the EAG emphasised that for developing the regional research potential all main research as well as research policy and promotion actors should be addressed. This is something to be considered when future programmes are designed.

### **3.3 Transnational co-operation among National Contact Points**

The third activity line, further developing the National Contact Point (NCP) organisations in the target regions has clearly an important capacity building role for improving the participation in FP7.

It was confirmed that the establishment of efficient and effective NCP systems has been important in the integration process of the new member states. Of course, there is room for further improvement and strengthening of the NCP systems in accordance with the requirements and challenges of the 7th Framework Programme. Like in previous Framework Programmes twinning arrangements with more experienced NCP organisations will be most promising. Proposals for the NCP activities should also encompass quality assurance measures.

It was understood by the EAG that the NCP related activity would be launched only in the first Call.

#### **4. Complementarities and synergies with the “Regions of Knowledge” initiative and with the Structural Funds**

The EAG strongly encouraged the complementarity and the possible synergies between the “Research Potential” initiative and the “Regions of Knowledge” strand of FP7. The “Research Potential” EAG would welcome close cooperation and coordination between the two EAGs, and proposed holding a joint meeting in the course of preparing the Work Programmes for 2008.

For both schemes the complementarities with the Structural Funds are most relevant and should be addressed explicitly also in the further development of the two initiatives. Complementarities and synergies between the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and the Structural Funds should be particularly utilized when dealing with the regional aspects of the Framework Programme. Structural Funds can be used for activities such as e.g.<sup>7</sup>

- strengthening the human resource base for RTD;
- for improving and renewing research infrastructures;
- supporting networking between regional actors in research, research promotion and research policy in order to develop regional research and innovation strategies and actions;
- development of clusters and poles;
- promoting the scientific, technological, entrepreneurial and managerial capacity of regional actors and thereby increasing their capacity to participate in the Framework Programme;
- connecting the regional or national research system to international networks and trends in Europe;
- valorising research results, achieving access to knowledge and transferring knowledge produced under the Framework Programmes into economic and social use;
- strengthening the role of SMEs in research and development;
- getting researchers more involved in development activities and business creation;

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<sup>7</sup> Guidelines on Coordinating the Research Framework Programme and the Structural Funds to support Research and Development. CREST Working Group on “How to achieve better coordinated use of Framework Programme and Structural Funds to support R&D”, April 2007

- making sure that researchers involved in the Framework Programme know about the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds;
- making sure that information is available and easily accessible on the two instruments.

In the further development of both schemes, “Research Potential” and “Regions of Knowledge”, the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds should be addressed in information and assistance activities for proposers when forthcoming calls will be promoted.

## **CONCLUSION**

The EAG hopes that the contributions made in the course of the meetings and by the written inputs will contribute to the further improvement and strengthening of the “Research Potential” initiative for the benefits of the proposers and their research entities as well as for the further development of the European research activities and the European Research Area.

During their activities for the preparation and support of the Work Programme 2007 the members of the EAG have shown their conviction that the “Research Potential” scheme is very much appropriate to substantially enhancing RTD cooperation in Europe and supporting the integration of research entities from the convergence and outermost regions in the Union.

Better utilizing the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds for supporting the RTD activities is certainly an area for further improvement. Also in the recently published Green Paper “The European Research Area: New Perspectives” the priority given to the development of research and innovation capacities is underlined.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> GREEN PAPER: The European Research Area: New Perspectives. European Commission. COM(2007) 161 final, Brussels, 4.4.2007, p.6

## **ANNEX 1**

### **Members of the External Advisory Group**

#### **“Research Potential”**

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
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| <b>PERKOWSKI</b> , Thomas            | Foundation for Polish Science, Poland                               |
| <b>SAVUNEN</b> , Liisa               | Finnish Council of University Rectors, Finland                      |
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| <b>WIENEKE-TOUTAOU</b> , Burghilde   | University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany                      |
| <b>WILLIAMS</b> , Clive              | Trinity College Dublin, Ireland                                     |



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The objective of the “**Research Potential**” initiative is to enhance the full integration of research entities from convergence regions and outermost regions of the Enlarged Europe into the EU research and technology activities.

During the activities for the preparation and support of the Work Programme 2007 the members of the EAG have shown their conviction that the “Research Potential” scheme is very much appropriate to substantially enhancing RTD cooperation in Europe and supporting the integration of research entities from the convergence and outermost regions in the Union.

Better utilizing the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds for supporting the RTD activities is certainly an area for further improvement. Also in the recently published Green Paper “The European Research Area: New Perspectives” the priority given to the development of research and innovation capacities is underlined.

