

Position Paper on

SIMPLIFYING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMMES

(COM (2010) 187 – Brussels 29/04/10)

General statement

WssTP fully supports the initiative taken by the European Commission to simplify FP rules and implementation. This represents an important first step to boost research and innovation at the European scale particularly in setting up the future FP8.

WssTP considers however that the recommendations provided by the European Commission don't include any specific actions on the evaluation criteria of proposals and details on external experts involved in such evaluation process. WssTP recognised the high quality of the evaluation process and experts involved in current FP, we would however like to draw the attention on the importance of implementing a 'stakeholder's panel' when process calls and proposals (before, during and after). The concept is to ensure a fair representation of involved parties when evaluating, granting a proposal which means involving academics as well as industries, SMEs, end-users.

Measures in place and past efforts from EC

WssTP recognised the improvement already in place to simplify procedures and barriers. WssTP fully supports the following statements:

1. Difficulties for networking and finding partners particularly for new comers, small and medium research organisations, SMEs, organizations from Eastern countries.
2. The understanding of procedures, time and cost for preparation of calls proposals.
3. The image of FP being heavy in procedures, time consuming, too academics (mainly for industries) and limited in access (mainly for SMEs and new comers that feel they can't access funding if they don't have access to "Brussels")

Proposed actions

WssTP strongly supports the shift of the European Commission approach for result-based research. This new paradigm should fully answer to the current political priority for innovation.

We would like to comment some propositions considering that the others are relevant and adequate with the views of our stakeholders.

Stand 1: Proposal management

1. Size of consortia should be clearly specified. FP should work on targeting small consortia as well as large consortia (small to large scale research projects).
2. Agenda of calls with a two-stage should focus on ways to boost flexibility and less heavy administrative stages.
3. Use of prizes should boost new ideas and research activities that won't be supported by industries and enterprises. Early-stage research should be considered as a potential beneficent of such prize.

Stand 2: Standardisation of rules and cost-based system

WssTP supports the standardization of rules particularly if it evolves towards compatibility with general business practices. To avoid new complication in processes and rules for applying to calls, a strong focus should be put on explaining such new rules.

Stand 3: Result-based funding

The result-based funding approach is a very interesting shift that should support innovation and new scientific initiatives. If it aims at promoting excellence and if it works towards bottom-up approach, the new funding schemes of the European Commission will represent good opportunities to fund new services and technology developments.

The proposed organisation through consultation of external experts is highly valuable for WssTP; we would recommend bringing it forward. These “external experts” should be solicited based on their “recognised” expertise and as representing the different stakeholders involved in the targeted research area (shift from an “academics dominated” system to a balanced panel of industrial, policy-makers, end-users). The idea is **to promote a “stakeholders” approach in evaluation and processing calls.**

Such a new approach implies a particular emphasis **on rules of ethics and transparency.**

Revised the research landscape

The European current research landscape is covering most of the research cycle, it is providing many funding opportunities to European research organisations.

The main difficulty is “too many” different funding schemes, “too different” approach of each scheme and the fragmentation of management of funding schemes (managed by one DG).

To evolve towards more and more standardization, coordination and integration of funding schemes should definitively supports **a better understanding of the European research landscape.** The COM (2010) 187 shortly highlighted that the EC is evaluating the relevance of PPPs, JTIs, KICs to further support one framework of joint initiative. The major risk is the administration of such a scheme (heavy and administrative).

Standardisation of procedures and funding processes will support coordination and **integration within the European Commission and European Research.**

The approach chosen by the EC strongly support the creation of highly specialised European know-how that will promote “niche” as a solution to boost competitiveness. This approach clearly supports technology developments and new standards that could be implemented worldwide. This approach is clearly an asset; the only risk is identification and prioritisation of research areas. This underlines the need for vision rather defined priorities under “political agenda”.

In this regard, WssTP would like to underline that water is a key challenge and represents a high potential to boost innovation and new markets. WssTP advocates that water research should benefit from the political push on green growth. The water sector could offer many opportunities to boost new services and products in Europe through a new PPP.

Conclusion

- Simplification of rules in short term is highly valued
- Shift to result-based research will support innovation and bottom-up research
- In its revision, EC should consider the importance of the evaluation process as being integrated relevant in expertise and representative of involved organizations – *stakeholders approach*
- Shift to standardization is highly beneficial, it shouldn't forget tailor-made approach when needed