

## Working Together to Strengthen Research in Europe European Research Area Conference 21-23 October 2009, Brussels

Summary of discussion and conclusions of individual session  
Towards Joint Programming in research. For whose benefit ?

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### **The issue and context:**

This summer the Lund Declaration furthered a debate launched by the 2008 Ljubljana Process stating that "*European research must focus on the Grand Challenges of our time, moving beyond current rigid thematic approaches. This calls for a new deal among European institutions and Member States, in which European and national instruments are well aligned and cooperation builds on transparency and trust. [ ... ] It will require Member States to develop more pro-active strategies on research priorities at regional, national and Community level.*"

This comes in perfect resonance with conclusions of the 2008 Spring European Council, in which the contribution of science and technology to solving major societal challenges was invited through initiatives for Joint Programming in research. Joint Programming is a structured and strategic process whereby Member States agree on a voluntary and à la carte basis common visions and strategic research agendas in a partnership approach to addressing those challenges.

National research currently makes up 85% of all European public research funding, and so the potential for raising in short to medium term the impact of the entire research fabric lies much more in Member States selectively pooling their resources and better coordinating their efforts than in looking for additional support.

### **State of play:**

**Political support for Joint Programming is growing steadily.** However, some parts of the scientific community voice concerns, fearing that top-down programming will crowd out bottom-up research funding.

The development of the **Joint Programming pilot on Neurodegenerative diseases**, including Alzheimer's disease, **is promising.** Representatives from 21 countries have joined in the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) management board and 6 October, under Prof. Amouyel's chairmanship. The JPI Scientific Advisory Board is about to be established to further define the initiative's vision and its Strategic Research Agenda.

The **selection of themes for Joint Programming is underway.** A high-level group of Member State representatives (**GPC**), set up early 2009, is working on identifying "a limited number" of themes for Joint Programming amongst the some 20 presented. The adequate involvement of regional and local governments, the science community and industry is being ensured via national stakeholder consultations. The GPC is expected to deliver to the Council its first set of priorities by the end of 2009. The identification of mature themes will be a continuous process.

**The development of Framework Conditions has started.** The GPC has decided that work on these issues will be carried out under its auspices, with close involvement of the Heads of the Research Councils (EuroHORCs) and possibly with the involvement of other stakeholders such as TAFTIE, RPOs and industry.

**The role of the Commission is getting clearer.** Regarding the work of the GPC, the Commission is a member and supports the group's work within the remit of its competence, providing a state of play of European research for each of the chosen JP themes, putting forward recommendations on selected themes, and analysing the use of existing instruments.

### **Highlights from the session:**

Discussions in the session highlighted:

- That evident progress has been made since the last ERA Conference (Lisbon, 2007) – ‘mind sets’ have become more positive; Member States have proactively taken steps and trust is growing.
- It was necessary to clarify early in the session that Joint Programming is a process providing a framework for co-operation.
- Whilst high-level political support *is* important there remains the need to involve more shareholders, (Research Councils, Ministries other than Research) and stakeholders (i.e. the main actors affected by relevant socio-economic challenges)

The session clarified that Joint Programming poses different challenges to different countries who in many cases seek to primarily build on existing public research strengths. Where an emerging JP theme corresponds more to sectoral strengths, countries are considering when and how to involve industry. Furthermore, depending on the state of ‘maturity’ of national and regional research systems the challenge remains as to how to calibrate with emerging JP themes.

A very real issue related to the current trend in research programming by governments between Top-down approaches (also called "society-driven" or "strategic", based on multi-annual programmes such as in the Community Framework Programme and Joint Programming ) or bottom-up ones (responsive to research drive like in the ERC)

- The Session concluded that top-down and bottom-up is not an “either or” option however there are clear roles around either approach with policy makers having the primary responsibility for identifying societal challenges, articulating the vision and setting out the objectives. Evidently it is for the researchers and subject experts to set out the Strategic Research Agendas to achieve the aforementioned objectives and to help realise the vision.
- Those who are used to programming for themselves may have problems to redirect their multi-annual programmes;
- Those who do not readily practise programming in a targeted way can identify opportunities (several countries are seen to move towards more strategic approaches);
- But strongly "strategic" countries in the past (CH, AT, EU) are also introducing more bottom-up components.
- Whatever approach finally prevails, the need for competition based on excellence remains

A major point was that, like FP6 coordination tools introduced by the Commission (Art.169 initiatives, ERA-NET scheme), the wider Joint Programming approach, may bring more programmes and programming modes in the ERA, with two significant differences however:

- Joint programming themes will be deliberately cross-sectoral (different to the Framework Programme), and
- The same Member States will find themselves programming both for their home-based activities and for the JP initiatives with which they become associated.

This might create an opportunity to streamline/rationalise the existing portfolio of funding instruments and rules at regional, national and EU level and help to counteract unnecessary fragmentation. The Framework Conditions discussed by the GPC have an important role to play here and particularly in relation to their deliberations regarding a peer review system which the session concluded absolutely needs to be accepted and trusted by all concerned.

Whilst the question of ‘money’ has not yet been addressed by the GPC, it certainly was a discussion point in this session. As JP is about optimising our investment in certain areas with the objective of achieving greater socio-economic impact, it was widely agreed that in the current economic climate we need to show the EU tax-payer that their money is being well spent before researchers can expect any new money.

### **Main conclusions from this session:**

Three conclusions can be drawn from the session:

- Considerable progress has been made on Joint Programming since the ERA debate in 2007.
- More awareness of the JP-process is needed in order to build up more confidence and trust in the relevant communities.

- Whilst for this first round it is understandable that the identification priorities is done in an ad hoc manner, future prioritisation processes need to be done using more coherent and robust mechanisms.

Two questions in particular need further debate:

- At what stage of the JP-process would it be appropriate to involve industry in the dialogue on research priorities?
- What are the options for financially supporting future Joint Programming Initiatives