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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

on a Community plan of action relating to the evaluation of
Community research and development programmes.

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CORRIGENDUM

New page 8 (concerns only
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Brussels, 28th January 1983

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on a Community plan of action relating to the evaluation of
Community research and development programmes

The corrigendum replaces page 8 of the Addendum, marked as page 16 of the complete document.

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Summary

At its meeting on 21 October 1979 and in its conclusions adopted on 20 December 1979 the Council requested the Commission to develop appropriate proposals for a system for evaluating the results of common R&D programmes.

This communication responds to this request in the form of a Plan of Action relating to the evaluation of Community R&D programmes.

The Plan of Action, which should play a key role in the implementation and periodic revisions of the framework programme for the scientific and technical activities of the Community, has been elaborated on the basis of the experience acquired through the practical application of a number of evaluation test cases carried out during an experimental phase. The purpose, methods and results of these evaluations and the parallel actions undertaken by the Commission during this period which have led to the development of the Commission's evaluation strategy are described in the background note accompanying the Plan of Action.

The Plan of Action covers a three-year phase commencing in January 1983 consisting of four principal actions which the Commission will progressively undertake in this field during this period.

At the end of this phase, the Commission, on the basis of the experience acquired, will, if necessary, make a further communication to the Council on the implementation of a fully operational evaluation system applicable to all Community research and development programmes.

The Commission requests the Council to take note of its Plan of Action.

THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

PLAN OF ACTION

The evaluation activities included in this Plan of Action will play a key role in the context of the framework programme which the Commission proposed in its Communication to the Council in December 1982 on "Proposals for a European Scientific and Technical Strategy - Framework Programme 1984-1987"¹. The Plan of Action covers a phase of three years commencing in January 1983. At the end of this phase the Commission will review the results of its actions in this field and on the basis of this review will, if necessary, present further proposals to Council on the implementation of a fully operational evaluation system, taking into account also developments in the framework programme.

This phase will enable the Commission to apply the results of its previous experimental period on a broader and more systematic basis. The evaluation methods used during the first test cases will be progressively applied to Community R&D programmes at the appropriate time.

At the same time the Commission will further refine methodological and procedural aspects on the basis of more research in the field of evaluation and from the experience acquired through additional applications of the method.

¹ COM(82)865 final of 21 December 1982

The Plan of Action covers the following activities :

1. Continued strengthening of existing internal evaluation methods carried out during the implementation of R&D programmes in order to effectively control work progress and to adapt to changing needs, priorities and developments. the ACPM's play a key role in this on- going internal evaluation, as does an effective monitoring and reporting system. ACPM's should provide the Commission with their evaluation of the results of the R&D programmes on systematic basis, prior to any decision concerning programme revision or extension.

2. The retrospective assessment of the results of Community R&D programmes carried out by external independent groups of experts

2.1. The evaluation method is based on the principle of the assessment ex-post of the programmes, performed, programme by programme, by external groups of independent experts.

To a certain extent also some ex-ante evaluation aspects are included since the evaluation panels are expected to provide, on the basis of the retrospective assessment, recommendations for the future orientations of the programmes.

The evaluation method must be adapted to the nature and implementation procedures of the programme being evaluated and will therefore remain flexible.

A distinction should be made between the different methods of implementation used for the research :

a) For cost sharing programmes (indirect actions) the "peer evaluation method" will be applied. The objectives, which will vary to take into account the nature of the programme and the needs of the users, will in general cover the following aspects :

- determination of the practical contribution of the results of the programme to progress of R&D in the appropriate field within the Community, to Community objectives and to the socio-economic development of the Community in general ;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the management and of the resources utilised ;
- recommendations on ways of exploiting research results and on the future orientation of the programme.

b) For the programmes of the Joint Research Centre, the evaluation method which the Commission intends to apply will consist of two levels.

The first level encompasses the relevance and impact of the research results of the JRC, programme by programme, within a global strategy where the direct, indirect and other forms of actions are simultaneously used to reach a given target, i.e. within the frame of action programmes.

The first level covers the following aspects :

- determination of the practical contribution of the results of the programme to progress of R&D in the appropriate field within the Community, to Community objectives and to the socio-economic development of the Community in general ;
- recommendations on ways of exploiting research results and on the future orientation of the programme.

The second level addresses the problems of proper management practices : this second level of evaluation uses a number of permanent control bodies which are "built-in" in JRC and Commission structures : Advisory Committees, Ad hoc expert groups, and, at synthetic level, the Governing Board, as well as the various control commissions of the Commission, of the European Parliament, etc.

Whenever a difficulty is identified, the Commission takes advantage of specific contributions such as technical or financial audits performed by specialized bodies or companies of consultants upon specific request.

c) For concerted actions, including COST actions, the lighter "Hearing" method will be applied to take into account the more limited size, in terms of Community input, and scope of these types of research actions. The evaluation objectives will cover the following aspects :

- assessment of the value and impact of concerted actions and of the benefits derived from the concertation ;
- assessment of the effectiveness of the management and coordination of the actions ;
- recommendations on the future orientation of the programme.

d) Combined evaluations

Where it is felt that Community activities in a particular research area covered by different methods of implementation require simultaneous evaluation, the peer evaluation method will be used. This procedure will be necessary in particular once the "action programmes" concept¹ will be implemented.

2.2. The evaluation panels should be relatively small to permit informal working procedures, numbering generally 6-9 members, with appropriate member composition to include the necessary mix of competence.

Each panel will be free, within general guidelines, to establish its own specific evaluation methods and criteria.

The evaluations will take place approximately mid-way through each four or five year programme taking into account the results of the previous programme and the partial results of the current programme.

The results of the evaluations should be rapidly published and widely distributed. The reports will be submitted to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, the CECA Consultative Committee, the Court of Auditors and other delegated advisory bodies (CREST, ACPM, COMAC, etc.). Reports will also be distributed to other interested organisations, institutions and governmental bodies within Member States, including in particular potential users of research results in the industrial or other sectors.

¹ see COM(82)865 final p. 85

Systematic feedback on the evaluations will be encouraged in order to ensure that programmes are meeting the real needs of the users. This will be done amongst others, through oral presentations and discussions with users on the results of the evaluation and the organisation of seminars on the impact and utility of current evaluation methods and procedures.

3. The Commission will carry out studies on certain evaluation aspects and encourage research in this field within the Community. In order to provide the panels with the most effective tools to carry out their tasks, the Commission will contract out specific studies in order to develop or improve certain methodological aspects. Given the relatively undeveloped state of the art in this field, this constitutes an important on-going task not only for the success of the Commission's own evaluations but for their application in other organisations and institutions in Member States. The Commission will widely distribute the results of its research.

4. The Commission will encourage the exchange of information in this field within the Community through the organisation of workshops and seminars and by progressively establishing an informal Community evaluation network. The Commission will endeavour to keep abreast of national and international developments in the field. It intends to encourage the exchange of information on evaluation covering both its own experiences and those of other organisations and institutions in Member States. As part of the establishment of a network of experts in the field (national and international), it will organise periodic workshops and seminars on specific topics (e.g. assessment of the long term benefits of research results or technology assessment methods), the results of which will be published.

* * * * *

Administration, Planning and Budget

In order to effectively carry out this Plan of Action and to ensure the necessary detachment from on-going programme management activities, the Commission is maintaining and will be reinforcing a unit, independent vis-à-vis the R&D programmes, responsible for evaluation activities. The Commission intends to keep its administrative structure as light as possible in order to reflect the flexible and adaptable nature of the proposed evaluation strategy.

Over the next three years it is planned to perform approximately seven or eight evaluations per year and organize two workshops and a major conference. To carry out its Plan of Action the Commission foresees to utilize credits inscribed in the general budget of the European Communities under chapter 72 - General and Preparatory Projects in the field of Scientific and Technological Research (article 721).

At the end of the three year phase, the Commission will, if necessary, make new proposals taking into account the results of this phase and the requirements for the subsequent fully operational phase.

* * * * *

The Commission invites the Council to take note of its Plan of Action relating to the Evaluation of Community Research and Development programmes.

THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Introduction

1.1. At its meeting on 21 October 1979 and in its conclusions adopted on 20 December 1979, the Council stressed that the ultimate aim of Community research must be to produce results which contribute to the attainment of the economic, social and other objectives of the Community and its Member States. It accordingly requested the Commission to develop appropriate proposals for a system for evaluating the results of common R&D programmes.

1.2. In response to this request, the Commission submitted, on 31 December 1980, a communication to the Council on the "Exploitation and Evaluation of Research Results"¹. This communication outlined the Commission's current actions in the field of research evaluation, its philosophy and future strategy for developing an effective R&D evaluation system. The general guidelines put forward by the Commission were accepted by CREST at its meeting of 13 January 1982.

¹ COM(80)889

1.3. Further, in its Communication to the Council of 21 December 1982 on "Proposals for a European Scientific and Technical Strategy - Framework Programme 1984-1987"¹, the Commission underlined the importance of strengthening the way in which Community R&D results are evaluated for the development of an effective common R&D strategy where important choices have to be made and priorities set.

1.4. The purpose of this background note to a Plan of Action for the Evaluation of Community R&D programmes is to outline the Commission's philosophy in this field, the evaluation objectives, and the past and current actions and experiences which have contributed to the development of a R&D evaluation strategy which the Commission is proposing to progressively apply to Community R&D programmes.

2. The Role of Evaluation

2.1. Over the past decade, a number of factors have led to an increasing recognition of the important role of evaluation. The deteriorating economic climate within the Community has resulted both in a reduction in resources available for distribution to the various sectors of the economy and in efforts to redefine economic strategies and set new priorities. In this context it is therefore essential to ensure that funds devoted to scientific and technological research are directed to areas most likely to have a positive impact on the future needs and problems facing the Community and that the results produced are of the quality, applicability and value to be expected in relation to the expenditure.

2.2. Close scrutiny of scientific activities is necessary not only for the development of more effective science policies but also for ensuring that, in an era of growing demands for accountability, society at large is provided with the necessary assurances that public funds expended on research have been effectively employed in the past and are likely to continue to be so in the future. In

¹ COM(82)865 final of 21 December 1982

this sense evaluation should be inherent to the continuing process of R&D programme formulation, execution and revision contributing to the validity and applicability of research results.

2.3. Evaluation provides an additional tool for policy makers in their task of deciding how to distribute scarce resources between different and competing areas of research and between groups and organisations within them. Further, in the current difficult economic climate, continued progress in research and the effectiveness of its contribution to identified needs and objectives, will depend more and more on the existence of mechanisms, such as evaluation, capable of ensuring the rapid shift of resources from less productive areas of research to promising new areas.

2.4. Expenditure on Community Research and Development has risen from about 70 million ECU's in 1973 to almost 400 million ECU's in 1982¹ and now covers a large number of fields ranging from energy and the environment to data processing and health. The Commission, as at national level, must endeavour to ensure that the resources allocated to Community research are producing valid results which are making positive contributions to the development of Community objectives and to research within the Community in general. It must equally set priorities between research areas and allocate resources to meet changing needs and objectives. In this sense evaluation has a role to play not only in assessing the results of R&D programmes but also as an important input into decisions regarding the future orientation of programmes.

2.5. In the context of the Commission's proposal to develop a general framework programme embracing all Community research programmes, the existence of such an evaluation mechanism is of paramount importance. On the basis of an agreed overall Community R&D research strategy, the Member States and Community Institutions will have to make choices between national, international and Community level actions to select areas where joint actions and ini-

¹ 590 million ECU's for all the scientific and technical activities (R, D&D)

tiatives could be usefully undertaken and to rearrange priorities and revise the framework programme on the basis of observed changes in the medium and long term. All this requires a permanent and on-going assessment capability in order to ensure that the right choices are made for the long term development of the Community.

2.6. Having recognised the need for an effective R&D evaluation system and following requests from both the European Parliament and the Council for action in this field, the Commission has progressively developed an evaluation strategy which is outlined below.

3. The Development of a Community Evaluation Strategy

3.1. In June 1978, the Commission took its first initiative in this field by organising a seminar in Copenhagen on the "Evaluation of R&D"¹. The purpose of this seminar was to compare existing evaluation methods both within and outside the Community and to see in what way if any they could be adapted to the specific characteristics of Community R&D programmes.

3.2. The major conclusions of this seminar and the results of the subsequent practical experience acquired through the implementation of "test cases", have highlighted a number of guiding principles which form the backbone to the Commission's evaluation strategy. These are :

- Evaluation should be an integral part of the R&D management and decision-making process.

- Existing internal evaluation procedures carried out by the Commission, assisted by the ACPM and other experts, during the implementation of its programmes are satisfactory and ensure that research is constantly adapted and reoriented in the light of progress made, of new developments and of new problems encountered.

¹ EUR 6346

- The ex-post evaluation of the results of R&D programmes should be strengthened in order to measure the final success of a given research in relation to the original objectives and to the input in money and manpower, to assess the validity of the research and the applicability and value of the results and to reorient the future work of the programme on the basis of identified needs and changes in the medium and long term.

- There is no unique all-embracing formula for R&D evaluation. Evaluation methodology is still developing and the Commission should continue to encourage research in the field and to analyse and take benefit from the experience in the Member States and other countries.

- The evaluation methods and procedures applied should be flexible, taking into account in particular the nature of the work being evaluated, the institutional, organisational and management structures, the method of implementation and the needs of the users.

- For the results of the evaluation to be credible and therefore of value to the users of the evaluation, they should be as objective as possible and therefore evaluations should be carried out by persons not involved in the programme being evaluated. Evaluation by peers is a method which adapts well to this criteria.

- The needs of the users of the evaluation are of paramount importance and evaluation methods should be continually adapted through a permanent feed-back mechanism so as to ensure that they are producing assessments which provide a positive contribution to the programme formulation and decision making process. The purpose of the evaluation is :
 - to assist the Commission
 - . in assessing the effectiveness of their management and operational structures and to make the necessary changes ;

- . in defining and reorienting its research strategies and priorities and in particular for the elaboration of programme revisions and extensions ;
- to assist the Council, the European Parliament, the Court of Auditors and delegated bodies (e.g. CREST)
 - . in assessing the effectiveness of the management of Community programmes and of the utilisation of allocated funds ;
 - . in taking decisions on the revision and extension of R&D programmes as proposed by the Commission ;
 - . in assessing the validity, applicability and value of the results of Community R&D programmes, and in particular the contribution and potential impact of the programmes to the achievement of Community objectives and to the solving of societal needs and problems.

4. Experimental Application of Evaluation Methods

- 4.1. In the light of these guiding principles the Commission decided to carry out a number of "test cases" in order to gain experience on procedures and criteria applicable to the evaluation of Community R&D programmes and to assess the value of these evaluations to planners and decision-makers.
- 4.2.1. For indirect actions, the Commission applied the "peer evaluation" method. This method involves the retrospective assessment of research results by panels of external and independent experts. Different selection procedures were followed for these test cases, the final decision however was always taken by the Commission. The panels provided a mix of expertise in the area being evaluated, in evaluation methodology and in the socio-economic field.

4.2.2. The evaluation objectives given to the panels varied according to the nature of the programme being evaluated but in general covered the following :

- the assessment of the scientific and technical achievements and of the quality of the research ;
- the evaluation of the effectiveness of the management of the programme and of the resources utilised ;
- the determination of the practical relevance of the programme results and of their contribution to progress of R&D in the appropriate area of research within the Community, to the achievement of Community objectives and to the socio-economic development of the Community in general ;
- recommendations regarding the future orientation of the programme.

4.2.3. Five test cases have been carried out using the "peer evaluation" method :

- Evaluation of the Solar Energy and Energy conservation sub-programmes of the Community's Energy R&D programme (1975-1979)¹;
- Evaluation of the Geothermal Energy, Hydrogen and system Analysis : development of models sub-programmes of the Community's Energy R&D programme (1975-1979)²;
- Evaluation of the Community Bureau of Reference indirect action programme (1975-1978)³;

¹ EUR 6902

² EUR 7350

³ EUR 7422

- Evaluation of Community's indirect action programme on the Management and Storage of Radioactive Waste (1975-1979)¹;
- Evaluation of the FAST (Forecasting and Assessment in the field of Science and Technology) programme (1978-1983)².

4.2.4. The work of the evaluation panels covered a period varying from 6-8 months. The panels were left free to determine their own evaluation methods and criteria. The panels acquired information on the programme in four different ways. Firstly, through written material in the form of contract proposals, progress and final reports, seminar and contractors meetings proceedings and other statistical indicators in the form of publications and patents, all of which were submitted to the panels by the Commission partly on a confidential basis. Secondly, through oral interviews of Commission staff involved in the programme, project leaders, chairman of the appropriate ACPM and potential users of research results. Thirdly, through the use of a questionnaire sent to all contractors, in particular to encourage comments on the effectiveness of management practices and procedures. Finally, through direct contacts with national experts and officials.

4.2.5. The evaluation criteria were established in function of the programme being evaluated. These included the extent to which results met the original objectives and/or expectations, the scientific and technological value of the results, stimulation of research in the field within the Community and the contribution of the results to related sectoral objectives such as industrial development, protection of the environment, energy independence and regional aspects. Particular emphasis was attributed to those aspects that should characterise Community sponsored research as distinct from national research such as the stimulation of cooperation among Member Countries and contribution to the coordination of their programmes. These cri-

¹ EUR 7693

² EUR 8274

teria were applied at different levels of contracts, projects, sub-programmes, etc. For full details refer to individual evaluation reports.

4.3.1. For concerted actions, an evaluation method was applied which took account of the more specific and limited objectives of this type of research modality and in particular the less substantial administrative and financial responsibilities involved. The method selected was a form of "Hearings".

4.3.2. The Hearings method was applied for the evaluation of the concerted actions of the Community's first Medical Research Programme (1978-1981)¹. A Hearing has been carried out in 1982 on the COST Projects 11 and 11 bis in the field of teleinformatics.

4.3.3. The Hearings were carried out by panels of seven external and independent experts in the relevant field, including each an economist and potential users of research results. Over a period of 2-3 days the panels interviewed a number of people having had an active role in the execution of the programmes both on the administrative and on the research side. These included appropriate Commission staff, project leaders, some leading participants in the programme and the chairman of the relevant advisory committee (COMAC)(Refer to final evaluation reports for full details on procedures and criteria applied by the panels.)

4.3.4. The objectives of this relatively light evaluation procedure are more limited than for the peer evaluation in view of the time available and the nature of the programme. The major objectives are :

- to assess the value and impact of the concerted actions ;

- to assess the effectiveness of the management and coordination of the actions ;

¹ EUR 7730

- to make recommendations for the future orientation of the actions.

Of particular importance for this type of action are aspects concerning cooperation, coordination and stimulation of research activities in the field within the Community.

4.4. A completely different experimental exercise was applied in the field of fusion research¹. A special approach was considered necessary for this programme in view of the very long term nature of the research and the fact that this programme covers all research carried out in this field within the Community. The review in this case took the form of a strategic study with special emphasis on possible strategies for future developments in the field. The method applied was similar to the peer evaluation in that the evaluation was carried out by a panel of external and independent high ranking experts in the field. This unique exercise has proved to be most effective for this specific type of programme, confirming the need for flexibility in the establishment of an evaluation mechanism.

4.5. A complementary evaluation exercise was carried out by the Directorate-General for Agriculture on the "Beef Production Research Programme (1975-1980)². The evaluation was carried out by one of the national experts advising on the programme.

4.5.1. Many of the procedures and methods applied by the expert for this evaluation were similar to those used during the previous "peer evaluations", confirming their utility and applicability. However, the "peer evaluation" involving a number of external experts not involved in the programme, has been recognised as

¹ SEC(81)1933 "Report of the European Fusion Review Panel"

² VI/1265/82 : "Evaluation of the CEC Beef Production Research Programme" (1973-1983)

carrying more weight and of being of more value to decision-makers in view of its greater objectivity and therefore credibility of the results.

4.6. The results of these evaluations have or are being widely distributed to all interested parties including executive summaries of the principle recommendations. Reports have been transmitted to the appropriate advisory bodies (ACPM and CREST), the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, Court of Auditors, the Council and to a wide variety of R&D organisations and institutions within the Community and elsewhere. Constructive feedback from the users of evaluation has been actively sought in order to ascertain the value and usefulness of the evaluations. The feedback received has been positive with recommendations that the methods be further applied. The reports have been used by the Commission as an input into the elaboration of programme extensions and by the ACPM's for discussion on these proposals. A number of constructive suggestions for improvements and adaptations to the method have also been made (see point 4.10.).

4.7. In order to review and analyse the evaluation methods applied in the test cases, the Commission organised two meetings during the experimental phase. The first was a Colloque in Brussels in October 1980 to review the methods applied for the evaluation of the Energy R&D programme and the second a Conference in Brussels in January 1982¹ to determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the methods applied in all the "test cases" and other evaluations and to make suggestions for future actions. These meetings were attended by experts working in the evaluation field and by potential users of both the results of the evaluation and of the research results themselves. The conclusions of both these meetings unanimously recommended that the Commission continues its evaluation activities using the methods applied in the "test cases". Both the importance and difficulty of the task were simultaneously emphasised and resulted in constructive suggestions for

¹ "Proceedings of the Conference on the Evaluation for R&D" January 1982

improvements. These suggestions and those obtained from other sources (p.4.6,4.8 and 4.9) are outlined under point 4.10 and have where appropriate been included in the Plan of Action.

- 4.8. In parallel to these activities the Commission has been closely following developments in evaluation methodology within Member States and elsewhere. Numerous contacts have been established with universities and organisations active in this field in order to make use of existing evaluation methods, procedures and criteria where these are applicable to the specific characteristics of Community R&D programmes¹. Evaluation activities in other countries such as the US and Sweden have also been analysed and utilised when relevant. The Commission intends in this way to progressively establish an evaluation network in order both to keep abreast with new developments and to actively stimulate research in this field within the Community.
- 4.9. The Commission intends to continue to be actively involved in evaluation methodology research for the benefit of its own as well as national evaluation activities. In particular, attention is being paid to improving methods for assessing the socio-economic impact of research results on which one study has already been completed. Other areas include the establishment of suitable R&D indicators as a partial input into evaluations. Research in these areas will be encouraged through the network which the Commission is progressively establishing, through the organisation of workshops and seminars on specific topics and by contracting out studies.
- 4.10. The results of the experimental phase of the Commission's evaluation activities can be considered to have been positive, confirmed in particular by the feedback received from the users of the evaluation and supported by the conclusions of the Evaluation Conference of January 1982. Evaluation is a key element in the R&D process. The various evaluation methods applied to date by the Commission are suitable for the evaluation of community R&D programmes and meet a real need. These methods should be progres-

¹ COM(80)889 "Exploitation and Evaluation of Research Results"

sively applied to the evaluation of all Community R&D programmes on the basis of the guiding principles outlined above and taking into account the following factors :

- Users of research results should be associated with the evaluation process to ensure that their interests are catered for.
- The evaluation objectives should be adapted to the size and nature of the programme, taking into account the needs of the users of the evaluation. Attention should be paid to the exploitation of results.
- Making use of comparative assessments, notably at international level, during the evaluation.
- Where appropriate all Community activities relating to a particular research area should be evaluated together regardless of the type of action involved.
- For multi-annual programmes evaluations should take place half way through a programme to allow the complete assessment of the previous programme, partial assessment of the current programme and to provide an input into the preparation of the subsequent programme.
- The definition of clear objectives, good planning and an efficient reporting system are important pre-requisites for an effective evaluation.
- The Commission should encourage research in the field of evaluation methodology and keep abreast of national and international developments. Particular attention should be paid to the assessment of the medium and long term benefit of research results to the Community. Ultimately, evaluation should contribute to the sound assessment of priorities within a programme and, eventually among programmes in a global R&D strategy.

- Peer evaluations should as far as possible be limited to six months. Results should be published as rapidly and widely as possible to ensure immediate and effective utilisation at the appropriate levels.

- A permanent feedback mechanism on the utility of the evaluations should be established. Users of evaluations could eventually be involved in the evaluation process.

4.11. This note deals only with the research and development activities. In addition it is worth mentioning that the demonstration projects have, themselves, been submitted to evaluations by means of somewhat different methods, adapted to the characteristics of such projects, such as the industrial applications and commercialization of their results.

4.12. On the basis of the above considerations, the Commission decided to undertake a Plan of Action for the evaluation of its R&D programmes, covering a phase of three years, which will enable the Commission to apply the results of its previous experimental period on a broader and more systematic basis.

