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Networking the European Research Area

Coordination of National Programmes

ERA-NET Article 169



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PREFACE

Networking the European Research Area



The creation of a **European Research Area (ERA)** was launched as a major strategic goal for Europe by European heads of state and government at the Lisbon Council in March 2000. Part of an overall agenda to make Europe the “most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based society in the world”, the aim of the ERA is to improve the coordination and coherence of European research.

If Europe wants to remain competitive in a globalising economy and preserve its model of society, it has no choice but to become a vibrant knowledge society. The European research programmes are an important and essential driving force in this direction. But they are only one element of the story. At the end of the day, pooling our resources will be the most effective way to make a profound and long-lasting difference. We have to find intelligent ways to benefit from the richness of our diversity, without this diversity standing in the way of efficiency and coherence. Other nations see this as our strength – I think we should too.

Previous Framework Programmes have fostered co-operation of research actors at ‘project’ level by bringing together universities, research agencies and companies. The European research landscape as we know it today would be very different without this intensive cooperation between researchers. Under the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), the first steps have been taken to progress on coordination and co-operation at programme level by networking national research programmes and bringing together managers of Ministries and funding agencies.

The European Union is providing targeted support to this process through the ERA-NET scheme for the coordination of national and regional research programmes. The popularity, success and wide range of ERA-NETs already in operation testifies to the great interest that exists for cooperation and provides excellent examples of how we can do better and more in research by pooling and rationalising resources.

In addition, FP6 saw the first application of Article 169 of the European Treaty which provides for the participation of the European Union in research and development programmes undertaken jointly by several Member States. The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) is a first effort on the part of the Member States and regions to undertake a joint research programme, with a financial participation from the EU. In this sense, it is exploring uncharted waters and will hopefully provide a model for future European research in areas where mobilisation on this scale is required.

Our proposal for FP7 seeks to reinforce the ERA-NET scheme. We also propose the development of additional Article 169 initiatives in close collaboration with Member States, where large scale co-operation is required.

This booklet provides a brief overview of the implementation of these two mechanisms to date and the perspectives for their future development.

Janez Potočnik

European Commissioner for Science and Research



ERA-NET

Coordination and co-operation mechanisms

Over 80% of public-sector research in Europe is conducted at national level, mainly under national and regional research programmes. A major factor in achieving the goal of a European Research Area (ERA) will be the increased coordination and coherence of national and regional research programmes.

If Europe is to take full advantage of its enormous potential for scientific advancement and innovation, it needs to increase the overall resources allocated to research, mobilise resources on a wider scale by joining forces, and avoid duplication of effort by ensuring greater coherence between national programmes. The overall objective is to reach the target set in Barcelona: to invest at least 3% of EU GDP in research activities.

Over and above this, the closer coordination of national research programmes will enable a better use of the resources available and should pave the way for the emergence of a truly European research policy, integrating the positions of all Member States and the EU institutions, in key areas of common interest.

EXPLOITING OPPORTUNITIES, OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The coordination of national R&D programmes was a new field of action, tried for the first time in the Sixth Framework Programme for Research (FP6) to increase the efficiency of the overall European research system for the benefit of all. In order to fully exploit the considerable opportunities and overcome initial barriers, different types of tools were proposed to facilitate coordination and move co-operation on to the next level.

In early 2002, EU research ministers recognised the importance of the mutual opening of national research programmes¹. CREST² followed this impulse by launching five pilot actions for the mutual opening of national programmes in March 2002. During the course of 2003, CREST came to the conclusion that the exchange of good practices between national programme managers was very useful, but that there was a need for a framework for further discussion. The ERA-NET scheme was considered to be the most suitable mechanism for pursuing the first stages of coordination. By 2004, ERA-NET projects had actually been set up in four of the five pilot areas.

The main tools proposed under FP6 for promoting the coordination of national and regional research at programme level are the **ERA-NET scheme** and the application of **Article 169** of the EU Treaty.

1 Informal ministerial meeting of Girona in early 2002.

2 CREST – the EU's scientific and technical research committee.



ERA-NET

A major element of the FP6 specific programme 'Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area', the ERA-NET scheme was designed to provide targeted support for the coordination and mutual opening of national and regional research programmes. It also aims at establishing long-term co-operation between national programmes, ultimately leading to joint transnational research programmes.

The ERA-NET scheme is based on a 'bottom-up' approach: it is open to all areas of research, even those not specifically covered by the EU Framework Programmes. The initiative therefore lies with the Member States. It espouses a step-by-step approach which allows the gradual development from exploratory actions to the establishment and implementation of joint research programmes.

An open call for ERA-NET proposals was published in December 2002, with a budget of €148 million. It is expected that by the end of FP6, some 75 ERA-NET projects will be up and running. The response has been very positive. The first ERA-NETs are already changing the landscape of European research in a wide range of fields. Some of them are in the process of launching the first joint transnational programmes and joint calls.

ARTICLE 169

Article 169 of the EU Treaty allows for the participation of the European Union, as an equal partner, in new research and development programmes undertaken together by several Member States. The main objective here is to go beyond mere coordination of national programmes to achieve an integration of the different national and regional programmes in a single joint one. Article 169 programmes must be initiated by a relevant number of Member and Associated States, to ensure a sufficient critical mass. They will be jointly implemented and funded by integrated financial support. In this case, the EU will contribute to this integration by funding the joint research programmes.

A first Article 169 action, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), was launched in June 2003. Under FP6, particular efforts have been made to activate this mechanism as a means of reinforcing European research collaboration, and half a dozen programmes are being proposed by Member States to be funded under FP7.

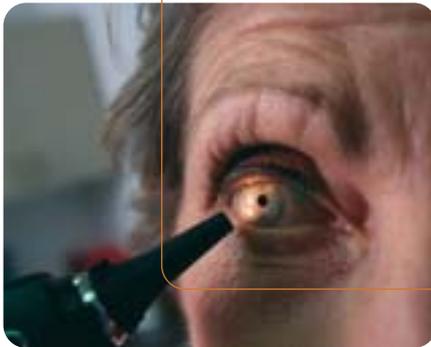


Why ERA-NET?

ERA-NETs are adding value to European

ACHIEVING CRITICAL MASS

The ERA-NET scheme enables national systems to collectively take on tasks that they would not otherwise have been able to tackle independently – those where the ‘critical mass’ of a particular challenge, in terms of financial and human resources, exceeds the means of a single country. Pooling resources in this way contributes to the advancement of European science and helps Europe go further, faster.



COMBINING ‘RARE’ RESOURCES

Many Member States of the EU have national research programmes on the treatment of rare diseases. Many of these programmes lack a critical mass since individual diseases may affect relatively few people. However taken together there are between 6 000 and 7 000 different ones affecting 5% of the population – some 20 million European citizens. The **E-RARE** network is seeking to build a Europe-wide platform to mobilise funding and pool resources and knowledge in this important field through synergistic co-operation between national programmes.

PROVIDING COMMON ANSWERS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Many problems faced by today's society are not specific to a particular country or region but are of direct relevance to all of us. It makes sense that we tackle these challenges together.



research in many different ways:

CONFRONTING GLOBAL ISSUES

In today's global society, many of the issues facing us affect humanity as a whole, not just Europe, and need to be addressed at a global level. Likewise, finding solutions to these problems will require co-operation, not just within Europe, but also on an international scale.

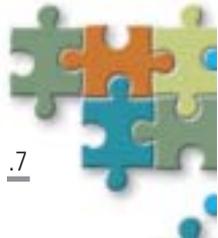


CREATING A CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Climate change is a global phenomenon producing effects on a global, continental, national and regional scale. Research into the impact of climate change tends to be organised locally to focus on local problems, although some of the lessons learned could equally be applied in many regions. This is just one argument for greater co-operation between Europe's various climate research programmes. The **CIRCLE** project is presently preparing the ground for a coordinated information network on climate change, which will serve as a base from which joint research activities can be proposed.

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

Population ageing is among Europe's most pressing problems: history shows it is difficult to remain globally competitive and innovative with an ageing population. In particular, ageing represents a huge challenge for health care, social services and pension systems, as well as for the medical profession. Policy-makers and practitioners require more transnational and interdisciplinary research to extend understanding of the genetic, biological and psychological processes of ageing, to develop new medicines and technologies for the old, and to improve the capacity of society to satisfy the needs and wants of a category which will soon represent a third of the EU population. The US, whose citizens are ageing at a slower pace than Europe, identified this major issue 30 years ago, and the 2005 budget for the National Institute of Ageing surpassed US\$1 000 million. The **ERA-AGE** project brings together the national research programmes from 14 European countries to help Europe address age-related problems in a concerted way.

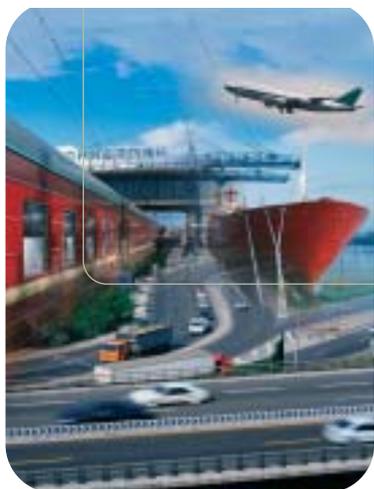




ERA-NETs are adding value to European

DEVELOPING COMMON APPROACHES

Ensuring coherence between the EU's different national and regional research programmes is a major goal and will help to better focus European research and mobilise potential synergies. At the European level, greater coherence in research policies is particularly important in areas where the research links in with the Union's priorities and implementation of its policies.



TRANSPORTING EUROPEAN RESEARCH INTO THE FUTURE

Efficient transport systems are crucial to the efficient functioning of the single market. However, transport research and policy are still too often seen from a national perspective. **ERA-NET TRANSPORT** seeks to promote closer co-operation between national transport research programmes, leading to economies of scale and greater overall effectiveness. It should also help inform transport policy at European level.



ADDRESSING SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHICAL ISSUES

Many areas of research are of common interest to several European countries located in a specific region. In such cases, it makes sense to pool resources and address the issues at hand in a coordinated way. This could apply to shared resources (marine, water, biological, etc.), or to common environmental problems, such as flooding or the protection of biodiversity, or even to shared areas of expertise.

research in many different ways:

SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE

International co-operation is an important element of European research policy and there are clear advantages to improving scientific collaboration at an international level. The better Europe is able to coordinate its research programmes, the more coherent its approach towards the rest of the world will be. This will make it easier to broaden global co-operation and the exchange of information and resources.

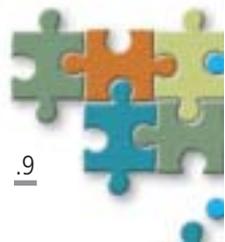


'MADE FOR CHINA'

Many EU Member States have bilateral science co-operation programmes with China. The **CO-REACH ERA-NET** is dedicated to developing coordination between these programmes. One of the largest ERA-NET initiatives, it encompasses research programmes in all science and technology disciplines. The partners are scientific bodies with existing bilateral links with China, creating a solid foundation for analysis of successes and problems in building transnational co-operation.

IN THE SAME BOAT

The Baltic Sea is Europe's largest internal body of water and represents an important natural resource. Ensuring sustainable development requires regional policies based on sound scientific knowledge. The **BONUS** network brings together 11 organisations involved in the funding and organisation of Baltic marine science to pool their research funding and coordinate the use of infrastructures.





ERA-NET

Putting Article 169

into practice – the EDCTP project

The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) represents a groundbreaking research initiative in Europe as it is the first time that use has been made of Article 169 of the EU Treaty. Unique at both European and global level, EDCTP brings together 14 European Member States and Norway, as well as their partners in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a concerted joint programme to combat the three major communicable diseases linked to poverty: AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The number of people affected, infected or dying from HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (TB) is still on the increase in developing countries. Worldwide, it is estimated that 19 000 lives are lost each day to these major health scourges. Yet, despite the international consensus on the urgent need for action, the challenges faced in addressing these problems in developing countries require large-scale concerted action and mobilisation of resources. The recent enlargement of the EU has also brought the impact of HIV/AIDS and TB in the European Neighbourhood Policy partner countries in Eastern Europe higher up the European agenda.

The EDCTP programme integrates the research and clinical intervention experience of all the participating countries into a joint programme on extensive, coordinated and *in-situ* clinical trials for the development of new drugs, vaccines, microbicides and diagnostic tools, thereby addressing one of the principal bottlenecks in the fight against these diseases.

The total budget for the first five years (2003-2007) of the implementation of the programme is set at €600 million, a third of which is allocated from the EC budget (FP6) under the provisions of Article 169. A further €200 million is provided by the participating European States, and the remaining third will be raised from industry, charities and private organisations.

EDCTP is a long-term initiative spread over ten to 20 years and managed by an independent legal entity, enabling it to operate in a flexible and entrepreneurial way. It provides a unique opportunity for the creation of a long-term, sustainable and genuine partnership, not only between European and developing countries, but also between the private and public sectors. It is also a valuable model for the multinational coordination of research efforts to address global issues of major importance.

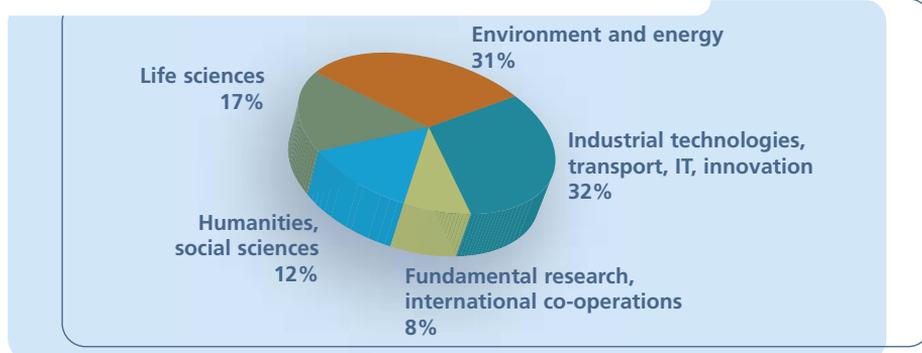


Lessons learned

The ERA-NET scheme has proved to be an opportunity responding to the needs of European research programme 'owners' and 'managers'³ for exchanging "good practices" and developing joint collaborative research programmes. This is evidenced by the enthusiastic response registered following the open call for proposals. More than 200 proposals have been submitted for ERA-NETs covering all areas of FP6. In addition, the bottom-up nature of the scheme allows Member States to decide in which areas to coordinate their programmes. The projects funded therefore cover all fields of science and technology including social sciences and the humanities. Partners from all Member States and Associated States, as well as several third countries, are involved in these projects, effectively networking the European Research Area.

ERA-NET has proved an extremely effective way of stimulating the pooling of national programmes, with 96.2% of organisations in selected proposals being governmental, international or non-profit making bodies. However, it is now clear that further incentives are necessary for the organisation of joint calls. These projects have shown the exchange of best practices on programme management, peer review processes, calls for proposals and the selection of experts organised at the national level can be pursued collectively for the benefit of all.

RUNNING COORDINATION ACTIONS AS OF SUMMER 2005



The promising implementation of the pilot Article 169-based initiative – the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) – has paved the way for future large-scale European research programmes of this type. This may, indeed, be a final goal for a number of selected and mature ERA-NETs. However, the approval procedure for an Article 169 initiative is lengthy, as any such action must be submitted to both the European Parliament and the Council according to the co-decision procedure. The concept and the nature of the mechanism are such that they are limited to high-profile areas of research with clear strategic importance and where the mobilisation and the commitment (political and financial) of a sufficient number of Member States are ensured. On the basis of the experience gained with the EDCTP the Commission has developed the following criteria for the identification of future Article 169 initiatives:

- Relevance of the initiative to EU objectives
- Clear objective and its relevance to FP7
- European added value
- Critical mass and similarity of programmes involved
- Article 169 as the most appropriate means to reach the objectives

³ Programme owners are public bodies, often ministries, defining and funding research programmes. In many EU countries, different organisations – mostly public, but sometimes private – 'manage', in practice, the implementation of the programme, organising calls for tender, evaluating and managing research projects and activities.



ERA-NET

Perspectives for the future

In the Commission proposal, the Seventh EU Framework Programme for Research (FP7) would run for a period of seven years (2007-2013). Supporting greater coordination of national research programmes is an even higher priority than in FP6. The actions coordinating national and regional research programmes under FP6 provided a significant impulse to the building of the ERA. This has raised the ambition to have these actions reinforced and extended under FP7.

ERA-NET

Given its considerable success in FP6, the Commission is proposing to continue and to expand the ERA-NET scheme. Existing projects will be encouraged to go further and ERA-NET consortia could be enlarged to include new partners.

The participation of national and regional ministries, who are in the process of preparing research programmes in a particular field, will also be encouraged to anticipate in the ERA-NET Scheme, even if their programme is not fully developed at the time of submitting a proposal. The aim is to encourage less present countries, in particular the new and future Member States, to participate actively in the development of the ERA by joining ERA-NET projects. This should help stimulate the exchange of information and foster potential future transnational programme co-operation with these countries.

ERA-NET PLUS

In addition, a new element of the ERA-NET scheme is being proposed under FP7. Called the ERA-NET 'Plus' module, its objective is to encourage the pooling of funds in joint calls from national programmes on a call-by-call basis. The Commission will support this pooling of funds by providing a 'top-up' contribution to transnational calls for proposals organised jointly by the programmes participating in the ERA-NET. Through this new mechanism, the Commission could provide up to an additional 25%-30% of the total of national contributions.

ARTICLE 169

The EDCTP pilot action has demonstrated both the unique features of Article 169 and the challenges that are involved in preparing and implementing action under it. In view of its potential, it is planned to make more extensive use of this mechanism under FP7 in cases where it can be clearly established that it is the most appropriate instrument to be used. It is foreseen that up to three or four Article 169 initiatives could be launched in areas still to be identified in close association with the Member States, the European Parliament and the EU research community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More detailed information on ERA-NET can be found in the Background Document '**Provisions for implementing the ERA-NET scheme**' which can be downloaded from the following website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/coordination/era-net_en.html

For further information about the ERA-NET scheme and the related calls, please consult the following websites:

Coordination: <http://www.cordis.lu/coordination/home.html>

Infopack: <http://fp6.cordis.lu/coordination/calls.cfm>

National Contact Points: <http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/coordination.htm>

Evaluators: <http://www.cordis.lu/experts>

For more information on Article 169 initiatives:

<http://www.cordis.lu/coordination/art169.htm>

Other useful links

For a broad range of information about FP6 and ERA, consult the following websites:

Sixth Framework Programme

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/index_en.html

<http://www.cordis.lu/fp6/>

European Research Area

http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/era/index_en.html

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The reinforcement of the coordination of national research programmes has been recognised as a major priority for the future of European research, and constitutes one of the six axes identified in the Commission Communication *"Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research"* (June 2004). This booklet provides an overview of the two principal mechanisms available to the EU for the promotion of greater co-operation between national and regional research programmes – the ERA-NET scheme and the application of Article 169 of the EU Treaty.



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