

UNICE COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION COMMUNICATION

"MAKING A REALITY OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA: GUIDELINES FOR EU RESEARCH ACTIVITIES"

Introduction

When early this year, the Commission published its communication *"Towards a European Research Area"*, **UNICE** expressed its support for the new open attitude of the Commission and the general content of the communication, while insisting that much more attention should be paid to the integration of private R&D in this new strategy (in view of the fact that private R&D represents some two-thirds of research efforts in Europe) (1) .

UNICE would like to draw attention to the need for a European policy that takes account of the great involvement and interest shown by enterprises in research, development and innovation, regardless of their size, and stresses the importance of continuing a process of involvement and engagement of enterprises in European research programmes .

UNICE welcomes the fact that the Commission has tabled elements for a more in-depth discussion of the objectives, priorities and instruments which should serve as a basis for achieving a genuine European Research Area . **UNICE** notes that the 6th Framework Programme will be a major instrument of this policy . Reaching its objectives will clearly require ***"the full application of the principle of complementarity between EU research activities and Member States' research activities"***.

In the present document, **UNICE** focuses its attention on the instruments and methods that the Commission communication mentions, namely:

- networking of national programmes
- networks of excellence
- large-scale targeted research projects
- research and innovation
- research infrastructures
- human resources
- science, society and citizens.

(1) UNICE RTD Working Group Comments and Suggestions concerning the Commission Communication *"Towards a European Research Area"*, 31 May 2000

Networking of national programmes

UNICE (UNICE RTD Working Group Comments dated 31 May 2000) has already expressed its support for *"a more efficient use of public monies [...] achieved by co-ordination of public research at regional, national and European levels"* even if it is aware of existing *"limitations imposed by the subsidiarity principle, e.g. academic research in universities often backs high scientific education which is under the responsibility of Member States"*.

UNICE strongly believes that networking of the national programmes on a voluntary basis, with the assistance of the Commission would be an efficient instrument to avoid unnecessary costly duplications, to the benefit of existing and up-to-now hardly exploited complementarities and to foster synergies, bringing unquestionable **European added value**.

Networks of excellence

Well aware of the need for networking the European scientific and technical competences, **UNICE** (UNICE RTD Working Group Comments dated 31 May 2000) welcomed *" the idea of mapping and networking the centres of excellence existing in Europe "* and considers that *" the scientific community **and** industry, as the main R&D actors in Europe, should be involved"*.

While in favour of such "virtual" centres, **UNICE** is, however, strongly opposed to the setting-up of expensive new infrastructures.

UNICE expresses its firm willingness to be involved in the choice of *"the criteria used to define those networks, their permanence and the body entitled to attribute such a nomination"*. In particular, the criteria should be selected in a way that avoids any "academic bias" and that meets the requirements of industry to take part actively in these networks.

UNICE insists on the use of these networks to foster university-industry collaborations and not to limit their activities to purely academic research.

Large-scale targeted research projects

UNICE understands that, given the cited budget of *"several hundreds of millions of Euros"*, this will be the core of the 6th Framework Programme and welcomes the emphasis given to university-industry collaborations and concentration on a limited number of **priorities**.

UNICE (Preparation of the 6th Research and Technological Development Framework Programme - UNICE view on key issues to be addressed - 9 June 2000) considers that *" strong emphasis should be given to specific technology areas like:*

- *biotechnology*
- *information and communication technology*
- *energy/environment*
- *industrial technologies*

and that *"in addition, there should be a special non-thematic programme for candidacies corresponding to a needs/demand-led bottom-up approach"*.

There is thus some convergence with the priorities mentioned in the Commission communication even if **UNICE** regrets the absence in this document of any reference to a specific programme in the field of **industrial technologies** such as the present **"Growth"** programme.

UNICE is clearly ready to assist the Commission in discussions leading to the definition of

future priority research areas.

UNICE (UNICE views ..., 9 June 2000, l.c.) supports integration of *"the results of projects [...] into technology platforms in order to establish the key linkages to the R&D and product development activities of enterprise"*.

UNICE is, however, deeply concerned by the expressed willingness of the Commission to concentrate on " **large-scale projects** ", some of them being possibly *"based on the [imposed] clustering of separate components"* and

" [to move] from an approach based on individual projects to a broader approach, implemented through mechanism of a coherent group of activities with, in some cases, overall financing plans, and in which the EU contribution would represent only part of a much broader whole ; and

[to move] towards more "structuring" and longer-term schemes [...] based on forms of support mid-way between support for projects, as given as present, and permanent "institutionalised" financing ".

UNICE fears that this could lead to a fully top-down approach imposed by the Commission; it recalls that successful research in enterprises as well as in public programmes is based on the co-existence of short-, medium- and long-term and on portfolios of small, medium-sized and large projects. Mega-projects would probably be a negative incentive for SMEs to participate as demonstrated quite recently by the problems encountered by the EUREKA initiative, while imposed "clustering" would hardly be accepted by competing enterprises.

On the contrary, **UNICE** would strongly support actions aimed at improving the participation of SMEs such as a further generalisation of CRAFT-type actions.

While in favour of a "flexible continuity" of Commission support for programmes and projects, **UNICE** also fears that *"permanent institutionalised financing"* could be detrimental to the medium- and long-term quality of European research. On the contrary, it strongly supports the statement by the Commission that: *"The implementation of the Union's research programmes is based on a number of fundamental principles which guarantee the quality of the research carried out with EU support and the credibility of what the EU is doing in this area . In particular, **projects** are selected on the basis of public calls for proposals and evaluation is based on peer review"*.

Incidentally, the requirement that *"EU intervention would be linked to a **commitment to get a result** in terms of technological achievements and economic and social impact"* even if wishful thinking, is purely in contradiction with the definition of research; therefore it is suggested that the term "commitment" be replaced by "perspective".

Research and innovation

UNICE approves the intention of the Commission to improve *"European backing for regional and national efforts in support of technological innovation, the dissemination and exploitation of knowledge and results, research for and in SMEs and the setting-up of technology companies..."* and the instruments that are evoked to do so, even if the role of *"European industrial associations or groups of national associations"* needs to be clarified.

However, **UNICE** deeply regrets that the creation of a **Community patent** is not even mentioned among these instruments.

As a matter of fact, *"**UNICE** considers the development of effective European tools for the protection of intellectual property as one on the priorities of any innovation policy in Europe. The present system for obtaining and enforcing patents in Europe is less supportive of*

innovation than in the USA, in particular in terms of costs and time to obtain patent protection. The major drawback of the patent system in the EU is the lack of unitary title covering its whole territory" (UNICE RTD Working Group Comments, 31 May 2000).

Research infrastructures

There is certainly a need for a clear definition of what the Commission calls "research infrastructures". **UNICE** wishes to recall its opinion that *"Co-ordination of building and operating research infrastructures in areas of potential European scientific strength can be a good application of the subsidiarity principle allowing to avoid unnecessary duplications of public research expenditures. Worldwide co-operation should also be sought for programmes expanding beyond EU resources (fusion,...)".* The European Union should anyway be very conscious of cost-effectiveness before starting large investments in "big science" on its own.

Human resources

UNICE strongly encourages *"a substantial increase [...] in the volume of mobility grants for researchers in the EU countries, candidate countries and third countries "* and (especially) all *" initiatives [...] to stimulate the development of employment in science and technology in Europe"* and *"to encourage young people to take up scientific studies and join the world of research"*.

Science, society and citizens

UNICE strongly supports the Commission's willingness, expressed in several recent documents on **"Science and Governance"**, to base its policies on sound science and scientific advice rather than on biased, emotional or even doctrinaire messages, especially in the fields of the precautionary principle and the sustainable development principle. Starting from that point of view, networking *"the Joint Research Centre in its specific areas of competence [with] national research bodies or specialised institutions in the Member States"* is certainly an initiative to be encouraged.

" [Basing] policy options and decisions [...] on more solid scientific knowledge and a full and proper understanding of the economic and social aspects surrounding the problems in question (Commission communication Towards a European Research Area)" requires, in a democratic system, to be strongly backed by the opinion of the citizens.

Therefore, **UNICE** considers that a special priority should be given, in all Member States and adhering countries, to the education of the citizens, from their early age on, in the fields of science and technology in order for them to be able to exercise their democratic rights in a rational and fully informed way.

For the short term, **UNICE** specially welcomes the expressed intention to simplify the administrative procedures under the 5th Framework Programme and reiterates its earlier comments on simplicity, fairness and transparency.

UNICE also supports the stimulation to *"use [...] large-capacity electronic networks by various scientific communities, in particular on the basis of the GRID concept of high-performance distributed computing"* and wishes to reiterate its opinions that *"full use of the potential offered by electronic networks for the dissemination of science and technology is a pre-requisite to efficient networking and to the creation of a real European (and world-wide) research area"* and its statement that *"European business must be given access to these*

electronic networks" (UNICE RTD Working Group Comments, 31 May 2000)

UNICE wishes, however, to express some reservations about starting "*the integrated project concept based on the clustering of research projects*" without any prior consultation of the real actors, even if such "pilot experiments" could lead to interesting lessons for the future.
