

Privileged partnership with Japan to be explored on ITER

[26-11-2004 | Press releases | Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry and Research)]

The Competitiveness Council of 26th November mandated the European Commission to do its utmost to finalize the negotiations between the six partners of ITER, the international thermonuclear reactor project, in the very near future. To this end, the concept of a privileged partnership with Japan will be explored.

The European Ministers for Research welcomed the report by the Commission on the positive atmosphere in the international ITER negotiations. The prospect for a consensus by all six parties (EU, Japan, China, Russia, United States and South-Korea) was facilitated by the 'broader approach' which includes the development and upgrading of supportive facilities to the ITER – reactor itself. Given the joint commitment to fusion energy, a privileged partnership with Japan is sought.

The Council confirmed its previous orientations on the ITER negotiations and stressed that, because of the global importance of fusion research; the international cooperation should be on the broadest possible basis and should involve all the six parties currently negotiating on ITER as well as further partners who wish to contribute to the project.

The Council reaffirmed its strong support to the European candidate for the host site, Cadarache in France, because of the advantageous position from the scientific and environmental point of view.

European research

The Council debated the case for funding investigator-driven basic research, with a view to supporting research in Europe so as to achieve the highest level of excellence and creativity in research. European basic research should achieve maximum visibility, by encouraging more competition on the basis of excellence in a wide range of sectors and disciplines.

The Presidency invited the Commission to develop a new mechanism, as part of its proposal of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), on the basis of consultations with national authorities, the European scientific community and national funding agencies. Such a mechanism should take into account a number of principles such as scientific autonomy, complementarity with national research systems, flexibility and user-friendliness.

The Council welcomed the European Commission's intention to bring forward its proposal for FP7 in April 2005, and stressed the need for this proposal to ensure coherence and synergy between the major objectives of the new programme and user-friendliness of administrative and financial procedure.

One of the new elements of FP7 are European Technology Platforms which should bring together key stakeholders, especially from industry, around a common strategic research agenda in order to mobilise efforts of public and private investors in areas vital for European growth and competitiveness.

Furthermore the Council stressed the need for a more coherent European strategy in the field of infrastructures. The European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) will give important input to this strategy, by setting out a European roadmap that will describe the scientific needs for research infrastructures for the next 10 to 20 years.

Ministers considered that in order to promote European competitiveness transnational collaborative research should stay at the core of FP7, as it was in FP6, but with improved and simplified administrative and financial procedures in order to make it more user-friendly in particular for small and medium sized enterprises. The Commission was

encouraged to explore further possibilities to increase the participation of research-performing small and medium sized enterprises, possibly through a bottom-up scheme.