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Common Position of the Alliance of the German research institutions

To the attention of Mr. Ramón Marimón,
Chairman of the high level panel for the evaluation
of the new instruments of the 6th Framework Programme

The German Alliance appreciates the establishment of a high level panel to evaluate the new instruments in FP 6. The Alliance would like to give its main concerns and recommendations to the attention of the panel and would welcome if the following issues could be considered.

General remarks to the instruments

The German Alliance welcomes the contribution of the new instruments in the 6th Framework Programme to shaping the European research area and improving European's competitiveness. With this comment, the alliance wants to contribute to the further development of these instruments.

It has to be stated that the launch of the new instruments in the 6th FRP and the introduction in the European Research Community did not come up to its objectives. Especially universities, small and emerging research groups as well as partners from industry, notably SMEs, have been deterred by the increased emphasis on longer-term and larger-scale research and administrative burdens. Barriers include the costs of putting a proposal together, increased administrative and management requirements on project coordinators, and low success rates. Suggested improvements:

- A **clearer definition of** the new instruments is necessary, e.g. through the allocation of specific objectives to each instrument.
- A better balance between the old and new instruments is absolutely necessary: the Commission should facilitate a **broader use of the instrument STREP** instead of the new instruments IP and NoE.
- The aim of European research activities should be excellence. This should not be mixed with cohesion objectives. The alliance recommends using the **European Structural Funds** towards building S&T capacity in countries with lower GDP per capita. This would consequently give a stronger focus on promoting scientific and technological excellence to the Framework Programme.
- There should be **no internal measurements** about the share of every instrument; the partners of a proposal should decide themselves about the best-fitting instrument to their research objective.

- The Commission should improve its information services and provide **better guidance** concerning application, evaluation and project management. In addition, a more homogenous implementation throughout the Commission's services should be ensured.

Network of Excellence (NoE)

This instrument does not fulfil its expectations and the inconsistent Commission's communication led to a lot of confusion. If NoE are further used, the following should be improved:

- A **clearer definition** of scope and objective of the instrument should be provided.
- A different **financial mechanism** is needed as the headcount led to confusion.
- **Guidelines** with indicators concerning **integration** as well as for **excellence** should be provided by the Commission.

Integrated Projects (IP)

IP have been received more positively, despite some lack of clarity over the required size of the projects. Some recommendations for improvement:

- **Critical mass** should not be understood in terms of quantity, meaning a high number of partners, but rather as a measurement for solving complex tasks.
- In order to achieve impact, a **significant budget share per partner should be** ensured.
- Considering their complexity, IP should be stronger focused on **interdisciplinarity**. The implementation can only be guaranteed by an increasing interaction between the Commission's services.

STREP

STREPs are more suitable in some research topics, as they are **more short-term-oriented** and have less complex management structures than IP. Furthermore they facilitate cooperation with smaller partners.

Application procedure

The Commission should ensure **more user-friendly conditions** by providing more **streamline administration** and delivery. It is not further acceptable that with every new research framework the administration significantly increases in spite of the Commission's promise to reduce administration and management tasks for the project partners. Suggested improvements:

- The **costs** and the complexity of the application procedure have to be decreased.
- **Delays** in the availability of key documents, changes to them and **inconsistent application procedures should be avoided**.
- **The two-step application procedure** with a clear defined and limited first step should be introduced.
- The **time** taken to agree projects and the management/bidding should be as short as possible.

Evaluation

- **More transparency** and a clear definition of criteria concerning the choice of evaluators are necessary: Evaluators from overseas should be carefully selected, especially when the exploitation of ideas is concerned. Furthermore, the Commission should refrain from using consultants as evaluators.
- **More attractive conditions** for evaluators should be provided.

Contract negotiations

- **Efficient time management** until the project start should be guaranteed. That means simplification and shortening of negotiation procedures, including minimum notice periods for meeting registration and document preparation.
- The Commission should refrain from **cutting down budgets** with the intention of improving its success rate. Significant budget cuts turn into obstacles for fulfilling the proposed research objectives and lead to troubles within the consortium.

Project implementation

The shift from administrative tasks to the scientific community has resulted in too much bureaucracy and has become an unacceptable burden to the research activities.

- The Commission should ensure **flexibility and autonomy** in the new instruments, as promised in the participations rules, and not counteract it by a micromanagement approach.
- The need for reporting to the Commission should be reduced.
- The **EU grant of 7 % for management** is not sufficient, considering the increase of administrative tasks in the new instruments, including the expensive costs for audit certificates,
- The **interval for submitting audit certificates** should be left up to the consortium.

Preliminary Conclusions for FP 7

The Alliance strongly pledges for avoiding a further paradigm shift and to rather guarantee **continuity**:

- Existing instruments should be improved; further instruments should rather not be introduced. A good research funding will be possible with **less but well-defined instruments**.
- **European Technology Platforms** (ETP) should not be introduced without a clear definition and a **justified proof for need**. A pre-defined organisational and management structure as well as free access to the platform must be guaranteed.
- The German Alliance welcomes the Commission's proposal for an increased institutional and financial support of basic research activities and calls simultaneously for a **significant financial promotion** of the **thematic priorities**.