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De Donnea welcomes EU support for FP6 thematic priorities
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The president of the EU Research Council, François-Xavier de Donnea, has welcomed the broad support given by the Council for the thematic priorities of the next RTD (research, technology and demonstration) Framework programme, FP6. The Council, meeting in Luxembourg on 30 October, reached a broad consensus on the Commission's proposals for FP6 without reaching a political agreement on the programme as a whole.



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A spokesperson for Mr de Donnea said that while broad support was given for maintaining the eight thematic priorities proposed by the Commission, agreement was reached on three thematic priorities which Member States would like to see amended. Delegates agreed that the 'genomics and biotechnology for health' thematic priority should be broadened to include research on animals and plants as well as human health, although this should remain the keystone of the research programme under this priority. It was also agreed that the whole theme should be enlarged to include research on diabetes and allergies.

The ministers also agreed that the budget for the 'Sustainable development and global change' key priority should be widened to include further research on a variety of areas where different Member States would like to see further emphasis, particularly energy, transport and marine and agricultural research.

The Council also discussed the 880 million euro earmarked under the Commission's proposals for forward looking and more flexible research. Some Member States expressed concern that such a large amount of funding should be given to unforeseen research.

While there was a wide consensus on the need for new instruments such as integrated projects, networks of excellence and the networking of national programmes, a number of countries called for older instruments to be maintained, such as smaller research networks, alongside the large-scale instruments foreseen for FP6. Mr de Donnea emphasised that there will be no exclusivity in the implementation of the new instruments, and that older instruments will be allowed to continue if they can justify their role on the new Framework programme.

Another development which emerged from the Council was an agreement to establish a subcommittee for each thematic priority, in addition to a programme-wide committee covering all eight thematic priorities. Ministers also agreed on the budget for FP6 as a whole, but not on the specific allocation of funds to each priority of the research programme. It was agreed that funding should focus on high performance tools other than tangible investments like buildings, such as communication networks between research centres.

French research minister Roger Gerard Schwarzenberg used the Council as a platform to announce that France is putting itself forward as a candidate for the ITER nuclear fusion reactor. The minister said that France hoped to host the reactor site, which Canada and Japan are also hoping to host, in Cadarache, France. Mr Schwarzenberg said that work must start as soon as possible on the fusion reactor, as fusion energy could prove an invaluable future energy source and it is anticipated that it will take decades for workable results to emerge.

The adoption of a common Council position on FP6 is now expected at the next meeting of the EU Research Council on 10 December this year. Mr de Donnea has said that one of the priorities of the Belgian Presidency is to ensure as smooth a transition as possible between the current and next framework programmes.

For further information, please consult the following web addresses:

<http://www.eu2001.be>
<http://www.cordis.lu/belgium>
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/nfp.html>

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