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## Dutch Presidency stresses the wish for international agreement on ITER in november

In the Competitiveness Council of 24th September EU-ministers gave a strong signal on the line to take in the international negotiations on ITER, the international thermonuclear reactor project. Following the exchange of views, the Dutch Presidency (Maria van der Hoeven, Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science) concluded that the Commission is encouraged to pursue actively the international negotiations with a view to enabling the Council to reach agreement on the main elements of the future international agreement. The Competitiveness Council will have its next session on 25/26 November 2004, where it aims to arrive at an appropriate decision.

The Presidency noted that the Council reaffirmed its strong support to the European candidate for the host site of ITER, Cadarache in France, because of the advantageous position from the scientific and environmental point of view. The European Commission, which acts as negotiator on behalf of the European Union, was invited to elaborate a clear roadmap for the final phase of the international negotiations. The global character of the project should have the broadest possible basis and include as many partners as possible.

Following the initiatives of former Commissioner Busquin, the Council concluded also on the future of the European support for research. These future action lines should build upon of the mid-term evaluation by an expert group on the new instruments of the sixth framework programme (2002-2006). This evaluation was foreseen as these new instruments (Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence) in the Sixth Framework Programme had a considerable larger size giving research consortia more autonomy than before.

These conclusions highlight the need for a number of corrective measures in the design of these instruments and for further improvement and simplification of administrative and financial procedures in the 6th Framework Programme. The Council demanded a more user-friendly Framework Programme in particular for small and medium sized enterprises. The Dutch Presidency aims at more in depth conclusions at the next November Council on essential features of the future EU-policy to support research and technological development, like transnational collaborative research, fundamental research, research infrastructures, European Technology Platforms and Human Resources Management.

During this council there was a public debate on nanotechnology. Following this exchange of views on this important issue on the basis of the Commission communication "Towards a European strategy on nanotechnology", the Council concluded on the important role and potential of nanosciences and nanotechnology in many areas, such as health care, manufacturing, energy, security and space, and thus their significance for quality of life, sustainable development and the competitiveness of European industry.

The Council also underlined the importance of a responsible approach to the development of nanotechnology, and the importance of an international dialogue with the important stakeholders. The Council called upon the European Commission to develop an action plan on the basis of the action lines identified in the above mentioned communication and the outcome of the Council debate.