



The Association of Geological Surveys of the European Union
(EuroGeoSurveys)
in their position as
custodians to their national natural resources
and
guardians of their terrestrial environment

present their contribution to the
European Parliament working document
(DT/427181en.doc of 4 December 2000)
'On making a reality of the European Research Area'

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The remarks in this paper are structured to follow the headings in the document referred to above. They are based on our members' experience and many different working contacts with the EU institutions.

A. General considerations

'To the European 6th Framework Programme – and beyond'

Para 2. We agree that all 'Member States and their policies, agencies and programmes must become more directly involved in the European research policy process'.

In general our best and most active scientists find EU research policies, the opportunities and procedures for developing them, the language in which they are expressed and the way in which they are advertised,

- too vague
- too heavy with EU jargon
- too remote from national objectives
- too long-winded and complicated

to be interesting, relevant or attractive.

Over the last seven years we have held hundreds of meetings over the 15 Member States in order to explain the above points directly to geoscientists so that they can bid into EU research programmes on environmental, natural hazard and Earth resource issues. While some successful contracts have resulted from these efforts, about 90% of the staff in our member organisations find it more productive to bid into national or other non-EU international programmes and they have little interest in learning how to frame EU bids. They also feel that non-EU programmes provide faster start-ups and prompter release of funds for project work.

These obstacles, plus the perceived arbitrariness of the FP 5 evaluation system, effectively discourage a high proportion of talented scientists (in all disciplines) from bidding into EU research programmes. This means that Europe is losing the efforts of a huge and talented resource.

Objectives of the ERA

Para 1: 1st comment: If the ERA is to be a long term structure and the Framework Programmes are to be in-depth, focused, problem-solving exercises, the two do not necessarily need to be related (e.g. 'problems of today' versus 'foreseeable problems'). The ERA will need fixed research plans with long-term financial commitments that are however conditional on the successful completion of 3-4 year workplans.

Para 1: 2nd comment: If the ERA is to be a space 'in which there should be no arbitrary obstructions to the pursuit of knowledge and the conversion of that knowledge into a precious economic and social capital for the benefit of the EU as a whole', we think it would be clearer to define it as the **arena** in which the Framework Programmes (or their future equivalents) are organised. But the last paragraph of *'To the European 6th Framework Programme – and beyond'* (top of page 3/10) says that 'The ERA measures cannot be a parallel set of instruments to the Framework Programme. They must be defined within it, always bearing in mind that they are the stepping stones towards a long-term perspective: that of the knowledge-based economy and society.'

Para1. 3rd comment: We agree strongly that laws and standards need to be better defined, for example our members' own research has focused for many years on introducing clear **standards** for the gathering and exchange of data and information on **technical** parameters to enable hands-on work on environmental, Earth resource and natural hazard issues (e.g. quality and quantity of groundwater resources; precise definition of asbestos minerals fit for use in construction; urban areas at risk from subsidence or radon gas).

Para 4: Our GEIXS and EUMARSIN projects, both set up with partial EU funding, are Internet gateways and major information exchange networks which provide information and knowledge transfer across all 15 Member States and worldwide, thus helping to remove barriers within the geoenvironmental information space. The Commission rated GEIXS among the top 100 DG Information Society projects for 1999 and EUMARSIN receives 30,000-40,000 user enquiries worldwide each month. This shows that there is a great need for the EU to provide 'initiating funds' in order to remove regional and technical barriers.

B. New instruments

Variable geometry and coordination of or with the national research level

Para 3: We agree that the Commission should take the role of a facilitator. In this role it should act transparently and openly to inform those who express interest in specific actions. At present it does not do so evenly or consistently within or between DGs.

Para 4: Facilitation by the Commission of cooperative actions among research councils in the different member states should not duplicate the work of the European Science Foundation, which is already a network of Member State research council bodies.

Patents

We agree that a Community patent should be available as soon as possible. Like the EEIG it could prove to be very popular. The Commission should produce an explanatory paper to explain to Member State research directors how filing patents can be as valuable a performance indicator as publishing research papers.

Enhanced consultation of the scientific community

We agree that enhanced consultation of the scientific community is needed.

The Joint Research Centre

The Joint Research Centre should be given a facilitating role but should not in our view be allowed to supplant or duplicate the already excellent Member State research organisations and the targeted networks which they have set up (e.g. EuroGeoSurveys).

Budgetary implications

Para 3: Coordination on the inter-governmental level should receive some enabling funds from the Framework Programme. We know from our own experience that setting up and running efficient networks (e.g. involving 16 and 24 partner countries) costs money – however it is an important investment in building true European research capacity.

C. FP6 priorities

Parliament's priorities

We agree that some research fields should be prioritised in FP 6. However with increasing pressures on living and leisure space in Europe the Earth resource, environmental, land use, pollution/contamination and natural hazard fields should be made an integral part of the precautionary principle and sustainable development fields. For the same reason the ICT field must include the development of standardized, baseline information systems on geoenvironmental and natural hazard issues.

Selection criteria and procedures: the need for trans-disciplinarity

The Commission must be more transparent in future concerning the selection criteria and procedures under the specific programmes.

More openness to risk

The Commission needs to support more 'exciting' science. It must allow scientists to develop forward vision and it should take a realistic view of the risks of research. The users who take up science will decide what is worthwhile.

Small and medium-sized enterprises

All entry points to the Framework Programme and to the ERA should be open to SME participation, with the possible exception of project technical coordination, which should not become a 'business'.

'Orphan' programmes

The Commission should formulate a strategy for fields of research which may not have the backing of large lobbies but which promise considerable European added value. Such fields frequently result from far-reaching vision by scientists and should be encouraged – European science lacks vision compared with the US. In addition to coastal mapping for environmental purposes, research should also include other fields in which urgent action is needed to benefit society - like urban geoenvironment, utilisation of natural Earth heat (geothermal, heat exchange), etc.

Dissemination and public communication

The Commission needs to replan its methods for the dissemination of research results, and for public communication in general on science and technology.

Scientific careers: human capital and mobility

The EU should also provide means for many more visiting researchers to be attached to the JRC, to help researchers develop international European careers and to 'cross-fertilise the JRC so that it develops into an internationally prestigious institution.

We agree that increased support is needed for actions to encourage young people to take up careers in science and technology when they leave university.

D. Public debate, democratic accountability, parliamentary scrutiny and codecision

Public debate and democratic accountability in science and technology

Para 1: We agree that the ERA should be a major arena of the new 'knowledge-based economy and society'. However to be valuable Commission conferences on themes such as "Science and governance in a knowledge society: the challenge for Europe" (October 2000) should be advertised more openly, with longer previous notice periods and details should be sent to organisations on

interest lists. Too many potentially valuable EU conferences are advertised too late for even those on interest lists to participate and some Commission e-mail booking lines do not function.

Para 3: The public and democratic dimension is largely missing from the documents on the ERA because the Commission's PR and outreach towards the public are not very effective and do not arouse general interest. Remediation of this situation is a long term political challenge for the EU.

E. Next phase: the Draft Report and Resolution

Future developments

EuroGeoSurveys intends to send comments to both the Commission and Parliament on the Communications on 'Research Infrastructures' and on 'Mapping of Excellence' as well as the Commission proposal on the Sixth Framework Programme.

Other topics of concern to the European Parliament

In general, it will be important to integrate the geosciences into EU research programmes because of their essential role in developing holistic understanding and protection of the environment and Earth resources.