

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0101/04  
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to the Commission

Subject: Position of SMUs in the system for the funding of the EU's research activities

One of the objectives of the Sixth Framework Programme for Research is to enhance the competitiveness of the EU and for many years now SMUs have been recognised as the real generators of such improved competitiveness.

Nevertheless, the number of SMUs taking part in the Sixth Framework Programme has decreased substantially. The large-scale measures provided for by the Framework Programme, such as the IPs, (integrated projects) put firms off and the networks of excellence are often regarded as being primarily intended for universities and similar bodies. The Fifth Framework Programme made specific provision for SMUs in the form of the CRAFT instruments, offering undertakings a gateway to international cooperation. Unfortunately, the proportion of funding earmarked for CRAFT has been drastically reduced under the Sixth Framework Programme, giving rise to merciless competition among undertakings and needlessly raising the threshold for the award of funding.

Parliament has repeatedly urged that 15% of the funding under the Framework Programme should be reserved for SMUs, a call which unfortunately has gone unheeded. For its part, the Commission has falsified the statistics, massaging them by categorising as SMUs, for example, non-profit-making undertakings, which may seemingly also include university foundations and other similar bodies.

As a result of this window dressing, the statistics have a better look, apparently showing an SMU participation rate of more than 10% in many sectors. This clearly does not reflect either the original intention or the original spirit of the framework programmes, given that non-profit-making undertakings make no contribution whatsoever to the competitiveness of the EU.

Barely a day goes past without another fine speech being made about the brilliant future awaiting SMUs. However, their position needs to be improved here and now, given their vital importance for the competitiveness of the EU, for employment and for national economies in general.

What measures does the Commission intend to take in order to encourage participation by ordinary SMUs in European research projects?