



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Regional Development

2011/2107(INI)

12.7.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

on the Green Paper 'From challenges to opportunities: towards a common strategic framework for EU research and innovation funding'
(2011/2107(INI))

Rapporteur: Hermann Winkler

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Recalls that research and innovation are motors vital to the EU in order for it to maintain and strengthen its competitive position, and stresses the considerable contribution of cohesion policy in developing research and innovation in regions; emphasises, in this respect, that regional aid for innovation, research and entrepreneurship has, rightly, grown in significance over the decades; notes that some EUR 86 billion in cohesion policy funds – around 25% of the whole cohesion policy budget – has been earmarked for these purposes, and asks the Commission to analyse whether innovation projects funded under the structural funds could be ensured the same level of visibility as those funded under the Framework Programmes; considers that, in line with the principles and objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the ‘Innovation Union’ flagship initiative, this trend should in any case be maintained, with sustainable (including environmentally and socially sustainable) development being reflected in the allocation of funds – a strong and well resourced regional policy being a precondition in that regard; calls for clear coordination between existing and new initiatives under the Europe 2020 Strategy, encouraging, *inter alia*, innovations in society based on ‘public-private-people’ partnerships;
2. Stresses that greater coordination and synergies need to be encouraged between the future common strategic framework for regional policy and the future common strategic framework for research and innovation programmes in order to strengthen European innovation cycles; calls on the Commission to ensure complementarities, setting out how they are to be achieved in practice; highlights, in this respect, the possibilities for creating synergies between the two policies, ensuring each other’s enforcement; stresses that a major challenge for Member States and regions is to create synergies between different funding instruments for research and innovation, in both the public and private sectors, and for financing follow-up to disseminate the results of such projects and make them visible; invites Member States to pay attention to the implementation of these policies at national and regional level, especially where responsibility for different EU funds rests with different national authorities, in order to improve the complementarities between the relevant programmes;
3. Points out that, at times when financial resources are scarce, it is crucial that funding is allocated to intelligently selected priorities in the regions so as to reach a critical mass;
4. In the light of the future gearing of cohesion policy to the Europe 2020 Strategy, calls for the ‘innovation’ priority to be binding on both Objective 1 and Objective 2 regions, and for that priority to be reflected in the funding allocated at all levels; points out, however, that setting targets for increased research, development and innovation spending will not in itself lead to results, unless such measures go hand in hand with overall structural development in societies;
5. Calls on the Commission to propose, alternatively, further incentives for the use of Structural Fund subsidies in the field of innovation;

6. Advocates a ‘bottom-up’ approach to innovation and stresses the need for the active participation and involvement of all local and regional stakeholders in the design and execution of their regional innovation strategies;
7. Calls on the regions, in line with the ‘smart specialisation’ approach, to develop tailored innovation strategies that are based on regional competences, current strengths and assets; recommends that regions specify how potential synergies between Structural Funds assistance and the future research and innovation programmes can be put to practical use with a view to establishing strong, competitive international clusters and regional poles of excellence and to catching up with other regions, thus strengthening the regional economy;
8. Points out, however, that in addition to the individual regions’ interest in economic growth, the EU as a whole should be seen as an innovation area with a view to greater complementarity between regions, the aim being to boost international competitiveness; calls in this regard for better articulation and coordination not only between regional stakeholders and authorities, but also between Member States and European authorities; welcomes, in this regard, the assistance of the Commission, which can provide the regions with valuable support and can ensure that the strategies are of a high quality, without calling into question the principle of subsidiarity; stresses in this context that territorial cooperation and funding for it must be further developed;
9. Calls for stronger intergovernmental participation in Joint Programming measures and under Interreg III B with a view to strengthening cooperation in research, development and innovation throughout Europe and increasing and enhancing new Member States’ participation in all European research programmes;
10. Believes that local and regional authorities should be encouraged to innovate, notably via the continuation and strengthening of initiatives of the type ‘Regions of Knowledge’, ‘Living Labs’ and ‘Smart Cities’, in which the territorial dimension of Research and Development is fostered;
11. Stresses that a fundamental requirement for such a synergy-generating, integrated strategy is for all authorities involved to be aware of all the funding possibilities; points out that awareness-raising in this regard is also financed from the Structural Funds;
12. Points out that innovation is a broad concept which, above all, is demand and user based as it originates from interaction with the market; is aware of the gap between new knowledge in the research field and the act of putting it into practice; recommends, therefore, as the necessary complement to excellence in technological research, that regional support is focused not only on developing regional excellence, principally at universities and research centres, but also on support for applications, in order to encourage companies to develop innovative methods, to make innovations marketable, and to foster transfers of technology and exchanges of know-how, for the benefit of the community;
13. Stresses the need to establish the concept of the ‘stairway to excellence’, which must entail improving regional networks linking research institutes, universities, SMEs and other relevant stakeholders, so as to create clusters, regional technology platforms and

centres of excellence, with a view to helping such networks take part in EU cooperation projects and programmes for research and innovation;

14. Calls for an action plan for the ‘stairway to excellence’ for the establishment of research infrastructure, under the Cohesion Fund and the ERDF, so as to boost participation in the countries concerned in the next Common Framework Programme on Research and Innovation;
15. Stresses that SMEs are important to local and regional development and economies in the EU and to the industrial competitiveness of the Union as a whole, and that they are its main providers of employment; given the need to ensure that SMEs benefit to a greater extent from support for research and innovation, considers that regional support for innovation should focus on SMEs, that the burden of bureaucracy on beneficiaries should be reduced and that the funding programmes should be made more flexible; stresses, in this regard, the added value of the cohesion policy in making regionally oriented SMEs in traditional business fields more innovative by offering greater access to research focused on practical application, transfer of technology and innovation, development of skills, encouragement of an innovation culture and, especially, internationalisation or promotion of entrepreneurship of various types, by means of wider-ranging advisory services and easily accessible support, including in the form of ‘one-stop shop’ initiatives to encourage SMEs to consider new opportunities and make better use of the regional resources available to them; stresses too, in this regard, the potential added value of enhanced SME participation in knowledge and innovation communities (KICs);
16. Stresses that, in the interests of cohesion and of making Europe’s economy more competitive, measures – inter alia to simplify participation procedures and raise awareness – should be taken to improve access to research and innovation for SMEs, including those located in underdeveloped, remote and rural regions;
17. Acknowledges the validity of both the centrally managed approach of FP7 and CIP and the decentralised approach of the Structural Funds; emphasises, however, the need to harmonise rules processes and methods insofar as possible, while ensuring the necessary flexibility, despite the differences in systems of governance; stresses that funding for research and innovation at national and EU levels needs to be more efficient and effective and that there should be a commitment to optimising it, with a view to developing a strategic European research and innovation agenda; considers excessive administrative requirements to be a serious impediment to achieving cohesion policy objectives, and therefore calls for effective action to simplify the processing of grants and the monitoring systems;
18. Welcomes the Commission’s and the EIB’s ambitions to make further use of modern financing instruments such as revolving funds – in addition to risk-sharing facilities – with a view to attracting more private investors and using available public funding more efficiently; expressly recommends that regional stakeholders make use of these possibilities;
19. Calls on the Commission to strengthen synergies between different instruments and funds, to encourage a multi-funds approach, to examine new possibilities for mixed financing and to extend cross-financing from the Structural Funds;

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	12.7.2011
Result of final vote	+: 41 -: 2 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	François Alfonsi, Charalampos Angourakis, Catherine Bearder, Victor Boştinaru, Zuzana Brzobohatá, John Bufton, Alain Cadec, Francesco De Angelis, Tamás Deutsch, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Elie Hoarau, Brice Hortefeux, Danuta Maria Hübner, María Irigoyen Pérez, Seán Kelly, Mojca Kleva, Petru Constantin Luhan, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Riikka Manner, Iosif Matula, Erminia Mazzoni, Miroslav Mikolášik, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Franz Obermayr, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Monika Smolková, Georgios Stavrakakis, Nuno Teixeira, Michael Theurer, Michail Tremopoulos, Oldřich Vlasák, Kerstin Westphal, Hermann Winkler, Joachim Zeller
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Andrea Cozzolino, Karima Delli, Ivars Godmanis, Karin Kadenbach, Marek Henryk Migalski, Vilja Savisaar-Toomast, Elisabeth Schroedter, Derek Vaughan
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Norica Nicolai