

Simplify or Die - "ICT 2010: Digitally Driven"

27-09-2010 Brussels

Simplifying the Implementation of the Research - Framework Programs

Maria da Graça Carvalho, MEP

Good afternoon

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking you for your invitation

I would like to take this opportunity to say how grateful I am for all the work and commitment that the Belgian Presidency has put into the field of research and the question of simplification in particular. Benoît Cereche has expended an enormous amount of effort in this field and I would like to thank him particularly.

PURPOSE

As Albert Einstein once said: "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler". The research community has called for urgent harmonization of rules and procedures and a general simplification of financial accountability requirements.

Recently, 13, 000 researchers put their name to a petition urgently requiring more simplification and trust in EU research funding. This is a generalized feeling amongst researchers, academics and industry members. In other words, there is a real demand for improvement in the streamlining of research funding and administration.

I am the rapporteur for the Simplifying the Implementation of the Research Framework Programmes. The report that I am responsible for is the result of a wide ranging public consultation programme including Universities, Research Centres, Enterprises and, in general, a whole range of stakeholders, experts and politicians.

Our work here has genuine relevance and urgency and is particularly timely, given that we are now just about to begin the interim evaluation of the FP7 and to start on the preparation for the FP8. Hopefully, our report will provide a firm foundation upon which we can subsequently build.

The report will go before the ITRE Committee this Thursday and will be voted on in the Plenary Session in October or, at the latest, November.

MAIN POINTS

The report is based on three general principles:

1. simplification is in the interest of all stakeholders
2. it is necessary to provide stability and legal certainty
3. there is also a need for trust-based and risk-tolerant approaches without sacrificing procedural rigour

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In so far, as my own draft report is concerned, there are four main aspects that I should like to bring out:

Firstly, the question of administrative and financial simplification;

Secondly, the need for improvement of quality, accessibility and transparency;

Thirdly, I should like to suggest some of the benefits of enhanced synergy between programmes and instruments;

And finally, I would like to say a few words about the future FP8.

1) So, firstly with regard to administrative and financial simplification.

In the first place, this supposes clear definition of what needs to be changed, how it needs to be changed, and at what speed.

Secondly, greater clarity, in this respect, can be achieved by further simplification in the rules governing funding and costing methodologies. For example, funding rates and costs calculation methods should be identical across the different instruments. Furthermore, the beneficiaries should be allowed to apply their usual management and accounting principles.

Finally, clarity in the definition of such things as eligible costs and taxes is of utmost importance. It is just as important to promote consistency in the application of rules across all the commission departments and audits.

2) Turning now to my second main point, improvements in quality accessibility and transparency, there are three topics, I should like to stress:

a) "One" I am in favour of a science-based approach. Such an approach promotes excellence whilst simplifying financial controls. This being said, the result-based approach has certain advantages. Before pursuing a "result-based approach" pilot tests should be carried out for research and demonstration projects in specifically challenging areas.

b) "Two": Minimizing time to grant is of course to be encouraged. However, it is important that Member States retain their power of scrutiny. In addition, I support the two-stage application procedure provided that evaluation is undertaken thoroughly in the initial stage.

c) "Three": I recommend the full integration of grants, evaluations and proposals into a unique IT platform. This should be sound, flexible and easy to use. The same platform should be used across all commission services and agencies.

3) With regard to the third main point, improved synergy of programmes and instruments, we need to reduce the complexity of programmes and instruments.

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This entails introducing uniform interpretation and application of rules and procedures. It also supposes harmonization across all the EU bodies involved. This will contribute to greatly enhancing synergy.

4) Finally, the fourth main point concerns the future of the FP8 programme. There are 3 basic aspects:

a) "One" I consider administrative simplification to be a central priority in the future FP8. The number of instruments should be reduced and greater coordination between them should be achieved.

b) "Two" The FP should take into consideration the whole chain of innovation from frontier research, technological development, demonstration, valorisation of results and rapid integration of research results into markets.

This should strike a balance between top-down impact-driven and bottom up, science driven research.

c) "Three" I also believe that further internationalization is desirable and this should include developing countries.

The report has reached its final stages and we will soon have the Council's conclusions, which are very much in line with the conclusions of the report. Generally speaking Parliament, the Council, the Commission and all the other different bodies involved are all in basic agreement. The task now is to make sure that the recommendations contained in the report are taken up and implemented by the Commission.

This could serve as a template for other programmes such as the Structural Funds and through the structural funds it could also be a way of influencing the Member States. Hopefully, it will be a way of eliminating red tape and will lead to simplification and harmonisation across the EU-27.

By way of conclusion, perhaps I could offer another quotation, this time from Charles Mingus: "Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, that is creativity."