

The use of structural funds in science and technology

EASAC applauds the Slovenian Government for its move during its EU Presidency to encourage the use of Structural and Cohesion Funds to support more science and technology projects. We urge regional and national governments and the private sector to recognise how investment in S&T infrastructure assists economic growth and to be imaginative and ambitious in the expansion of their R+D and innovation infrastructure and work by utilising the full range of funding available from the EU.

The European Union is committed to being an economically competitive player at the global level. It is also committed to the view that, in order to achieve this goal, it must be globally competitive in science and technology. These ambitions are enshrined in the declarations of the European Council at the March 2000 Summit in Lisbon and the March 2002 Summit in Barcelona, and are endorsed by the European Parliament. They signify direct recognition at the highest political level of the central role of science and technology in economic prosperity. More specifically, the Lisbon Summit set 'a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. The Barcelona Summit spelt out what this meant for R&D:

In order to close the gap between the EU and its major competitors, there must be a significant boost of the overall R&D and innovative effort in the Union, with a particular emphasis on frontier technologies. The European Council therefore agrees that overall spending on R&D and innovation in the Union should be increased with the aim of approaching 3% of GDP by 2010. Two-thirds of this new investment should come from the private sector.

It is obvious that these are challenging targets. The 3% target challenges national governments and the European Union itself as the channels of public funds to S&T; even more, it challenges industry and commerce as the channels of private funds to S&T. And it challenges the research community to make good use of the funding it receives, and industry to work much more closely with academe¹.

The use of Structural Funds to fund this expansion is a logical and welcome contribution.

Innovation is not only research of course, development of new products in existing companies and the start-up of new companies will be supported as well. EASAC welcomes the recent move that all National and Regional Operational Programmes under the Structural Funds are screened for innovation, scientific research, technical development in order to refer to the Lisbon goals.

¹EASAC, Towards 3%: attainment of the Barcelona target, 2004, www.easac.eu

EASAC also fully supports the aim over coming years to increase the budget of the Structural Funds by 10-20%. €5-10 billion per year, would be available for research; more than the budget of FP7. In the long run the percentage for research could increase to 30-40%, corresponding to €15-20 billion per year.

EASAC supports the use of Structural Funds to increase the EU's science and technology capabilities and urges institutions and governments to consider what projects they could help finance with this money.

The provision of new facilities and institutes is a key part of enabling the EU to meet this target. Structural Funds have been used to finance some ambitious projects, such as the "Strengthening Regional Development Potentials" in Slovenia and a development project in Saxony, Germany.

Examples of projects that have boosted R+D are given below.

1 A regional development programme for the Free State of Saxony, Germany had an overall budget of €4.24 billion, EU assistance from the ERDF amounting to €3.091 billion. Among other goals, the programme seeks to create 24,760 jobs (including **760 in the field of R&D**) and to safeguard a further 26,570 (including 7,170 R&D jobs), to support **836 company led R&D projects**.

2 The Operational Programme "Strengthening Regional Development Potentials" for the period 2007-2013 in the Republic of Slovenia has a total budget EUR 2.01 billion with €1.71 billion of that coming from the EU. The programme will enhance the competitiveness of the country by including among its effect the creation of 11,500 new jobs, 2,100ha of new business zones, 23 technological centres and centres of excellence, 150 extra innovations and patents per year, **700 new research man-years** including 500 in the business sector and 800 projects for small and medium enterprises.

3 A state of the art Environmental and Aeronautical Engineering building has improved opportunities for the University of Limerick by catering for rising student numbers and extending the range of

specialised research options open to post graduates. In addition, new partnerships with industry have raised the profile of the university locally and nationwide.

The University raised €4.2 million with a further €5.7 million granted by the European Union. With the security of the European Union backing, the University was able to attract funds from other sources to provide major items of scientific equipment necessary for research.

The university is now capable of a much greater scope of research activity. The Environmental Technology section has entered areas such as clean technologies, environmental management, catalysis and sensors. The Aeronautical Engineering sector is active in jet engine gas dynamics, aircraft aerodynamics, jet engine heat transfer and aircraft composite materials.

The Lonsdale Building project has so far allowed the University to **employ an additional 100 researchers**, 80 of whom are located within the Lonsdale Building itself and a further 20 elsewhere on campus. In addition, the new building is making a major contribution to the training and education of undergraduates, including final year students of Science and Aeronautical Engineering.

EASAC

The European Academies Science Advisory Council is formed by the national science academies of the EU Member States to enable them to collaborate with each other in providing advice to European policymakers. It thus provides a means for the collective voice of European science to be heard. Its mission reflects the view of academies that science is central to many aspects of modern life and that an appreciation of the scientific dimension is a prerequisite to wise policy-making.

EASAC's activities include substantive studies of the scientific aspects of policy issues, reviews and advice about policy documents, workshops aimed at identifying current scientific thinking about major policy issues or at briefing policy-makers, and short, timely statements on topical subjects.

For further information

EASAC Secretariat

The Royal Society, 6-9 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AG

Tel: +44 20 7451 2697 | Fax: +44 20 7925 2620 | easac@royalsociety.org | www.easac.eu