

**UNICE RTD Working Group comments
following the first calls for proposals
under the 5th RTD Framework Programme**

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An urgent need for drastic improvements

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UNICE regards the RTD Framework Programmes of the European Union as essential instruments of its strategy that have, up to now, successfully achieved such goals as the initiation of European research networking, bringing together partners from industry, universities and research centres of all Member States as well as financial encouragement to industry to undertake R&D in more innovative and more high risk areas.

After the experience of the first calls for proposals under the 5th Framework Programme (FP), **UNICE** considers it its responsibility to relay alarming information coming from its member federations as well as from directly involved industrial circles. This information appears to **UNICE** as essential for the Commission, not only in order to improve the situation for the continuation of the 5th FP but also in view of the start of preparation of the 6th RTD Framework Programme.

Despite the good intentions expressed in the numerous Commission documents issued in the period preceding the launch of the 5th Framework Programme, it is to be deplored that the announced reduction of administrative burdens, simplification of procedures and improvement in transparency and flexibility are far from being achieved.

On the contrary, an increasingly dirigiste top-down approach can be observed not only in the choice of priorities but also in inappropriate contractual conditions for the exploitation of research results that could lead to a mismatch between the requirements of Commission civil servants and the actual needs of European enterprises.

In particular, proposers are faced with :

- increased complexity of the Commission documents regarding the criteria for the selection of the projects presented for the different thematic programmes. Even the content of the Key Actions of these programmes is defined in an increasingly complex way. All this reduces considerably the transparency and the accessibility of these programmes.

- increased administrative burden for paperwork of proposals leading to unacceptable preparation costs (including more and more frequent recourse to professional project drafters) which, given the unacceptably poor statistical chances of success, discourage companies, especially SMEs, from participating.
- unrealistic demands concerning the socio-economic aspects of the projects, especially for early research projects, such as : months to market introduction, net effect on employment, etc., that can only be used as *ex post* evaluation criteria.

Realistic demands could be elaborated with the assistance of companies' R&D managers, while project evaluators should be skilled to use these criteria as well as those related to scientific quality and relevance.

- the latitude for unilateral reduction by Commission civil servants of the project budget leading either to initial overestimations or to subsequent cancellation of (important parts of) the projects or the removal of some partners (often SME sub-contractors).

The UNICE Working Group is also deeply concerned with aspects related to industrial participation to External Advisory Groups (EAGs) and project evaluation teams.

While understanding the political necessity to keep some national or gender balances in the composition of the EAGs, **UNICE** considers that these should only be second to real expertise and effectiveness; the poor participation of industrial experts to some EAGs is certainly a major reason for concern as is also a lack of clarity on the real role and efficiency of the EAGs, leading to even greater lack of interest on the part of industry.

The very heavy procedures imposed on experts willing to serve as evaluators of proposals have led to an important withdrawal of real industrial experts and a loss of their special expertise in the potential socio-economic importance of projects. Evaluation teams are further overloaded with lengthy guideline documents showing another example of the recent tendency of the Commission towards more and more administrative complexity.

UNICE considers that the interruption of the consultation processes between the Commission and industry, exemplified by the dismantling of IRDAC, is one of the important factors that have led to the observed shortcomings and **urges** the new Commission to re-establish the dialogue; **UNICE** is clearly willing and ready to bring its support and collaboration to the new Commission in this perspective.