

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
RESEARCH COMMITTEE

– CREST –
Secretariat

CREST 1205/03

NOTE TO CREST DELEGATIONS

**Subject : DRAFT SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS OF THE 290th MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH COMMITTEE (CREST)
HELD IN GENOVA, ITALY, ON 27 AND 28 OCTOBER 2003**

The meeting was chaired by Dr. MITSOS (European Commission, Director General, Research).

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA

The Committee adopted the agenda as set out in telex n° TX04635EN of 20 October 2003, with the modification that point 7 (Any other business) was moved to 27 October and taken before point 6 (The 3% Action Plan: Application of the omc), which was exclusively discussed on 28 October.

Ireland agreed to move the scheduled point concerning the opening of national programmes in the field of Marine sciences to the next CREST December meeting

2. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS OF THE 289th MEETING

The Committee approved the summary conclusions as set out in doc. CREST 1204/1/03

REV 1. A clarification was given by the Chairman regarding the contact points for OMC 3%: CREST remains the body responsible for OMC and, of course, delegations can be assisted as they see fit.

3. INFORMATION FROM THE PRESIDENCY AND THE COMMISSION

a) Mr. FONTI (Italian Presidency) informed the Committee on the results achieved so far during the Italian Presidency, in particular the Competitiveness Council on 22 September; and the state of play in preparation of the two November meetings of the Competitiveness Council:

- The 22 September Council meeting achieved an important success through the political agreement on the EC-ESA Framework Agreement, which opens the way to its subsequent adoption as an "A"-point and its signature which is foreseen to take place in the margins of the 27-28 November Competitiveness Council. The Council also adopted a Resolution on "Investing in research for European Growth and Competitiveness", which include an explicit invitation to "use CREST as an operational interface to define and oversee the implementation of the open method of co-ordination in respect of the 3% objective, with a view to it becoming rapidly operational, recognising that the work of CREST in this respect will need active links with other ongoing actions to strengthen competitiveness". Conclusions on the biotechnology strategy and roadmap, on chemicals policy and on the pharmaceutical industry were also adopted. Some progress was achieved in the negotiations on the Community patent, which might result in a political agreement in one of the November meetings of the Competitiveness Council.

- The 11 November Competitiveness Council will, as far as research policy is concerned, mainly deal with the development of human resources and the improvement of researchers' careers. A text for a draft resolution already is in an advanced stage of maturity, with further discussions foreseen for the Genova meeting of the Research Working Party taking place in the afternoon of 27 October.
- ITER: Efforts to reach agreement on a European site for ITER by the 27 and 28 November Competitiveness Council, with a view to the international negotiations scheduled to take place in December this year, in Washington, D.C.
- Embryonic stem-cell research: the draft of the LIESE report is currently being discussed in the ITRE Committee, with a vote foreseen on 4 November. The vote in the Plenary of the European Parliament (EP) is scheduled for 17 November. A substantial discussion of the Commission's proposal for a Council Decision amending the specific programme "Integrating and strengthening the European research area" and of the Opinion of the EP is foreseen at the 27-28 November Competitiveness Council, with a view to achieving agreement.

In addition, the following activities organised by the Presidency will take place:

- Infrastructures - conference in Trieste, 20-21 November 2003 (see point 5 a) below)
 - Gender issues in science - conference in Rome, 5 December 2003
- b) Mr. ESCRITT (Commission services) informed the Committee on further progress in the implementation of FP 6, following the conclusion of the first calls for proposals. Over 12.000 proposals of mostly high quality have been received, which has resulted in the average success-rate of proposals of 20%, with large variations between the individual thematic priorities. The average size of proposed projects has increased. Among the New Instruments, Integrated Projects has been the instrument of choice, with more uncertainties for Networks of Excellence.

STREPS have again proven very popular. Participation by SMEs and by Acceding and Candidate Countries needs to be improved. Research centres and universities have strongly participated, while industry participation needs to be improved. The new evaluation mechanisms have worked well.

The Commission is currently introducing ideas to bring SME's fully in the Framework Programme; being attentive in the negotiations to treat SME's fairly, will organise co-ordinated calls targeted to SME's, might enlarge participation in on-going projects, etc. Accession Countries are not held up as high as expected, point to be discussed at the next meeting of personal representatives of Ministers of R&D of candidate countries (October 28th).

Commission has set up principles for the two-stage evaluation process, with a light first stage that would help to manage over-subscription. The necessary updates of the Work Programmes will take place in the middle of November for the Euratom specific programme, and in the middle of December for the others.

Outside the FP 6 context, Mr. ESCRITT informed the Committee on

- the start of implementation of the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Platform against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (EDCTP) in Africa;
- two successful examples of Science Weeks, namely the Festival of Science currently taking place in Genova (which was visited by CREST participants), and the forthcoming Marie Curie week in Brussels.

Delegations raised a number of issues for further discussion, including user problems with the complexity of the new instruments, oversubscription, problems for small Member States and acceding countries participating in Integrated Projects, ways for improving the attractiveness of the Networks of Excellence, the need for more flexibility regarding project size, and the need to distinguish clearly between SMEs and non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs). It was also suggested to launch additional calls in favour of SMEs, to somewhat revise the concept of the Network of Excellence and to monitor the evolution of the Networks, so that scientific excellence being present at the start of a Network is not subsequently lost through changes in the participants. The Commission was also asked to provide more detailed data.

The Chairman welcomed the interest of delegations and announced its intention to provide the Committee with more comprehensive information as it becomes available. He underlined the need to get the message of deep and long-lasting integration as the key distinguishing feature of the Network of Excellence better across. He also informed the Committee that a High-Level Working Group, chaired by Prof. MARIMÓN (Spain), has been created to suggest to the Commission possibilities for improvements to the new instruments. The final report is foreseen for June 2004.

The Chairman concluded that the point "general lessons from the first calls of FP 6" will be included in the agenda of the 5 December meeting of CREST.

4. THE ITALIAN RTD POLICY

Mr. BELTRAME (Italian Presidency) informed the Committee on current initiatives and priorities in the Italian RTD policy. The current national RTD strategy covers a three-year planning period and understands itself as a strategy for transition to the knowledge-based (and largely biotechnology-based) economy. RTD intervention is conducted along four axes, namely basic research, oriented basic research (with the priority areas nanotechnology, biotechnology, ICT and space), industrial research and technological development, and RTD promotion at regional level.

5. RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES

- a) Mr. FONTI (Italian Presidency) informed the Committee on the Conference on European research infrastructures organised by the Italian Presidency in Trieste, Italy, on 21 November 2003. This conference is intended as a follow-up to the Strasbourg Conference held in 2001 under the French Presidency, with a view of achieving concrete results.

Several delegations highlighted the importance of improved European cooperation in maritime research infrastructure

- b) Mr. MALACARNE (Commission services) presented to the Committee the First Annual Report of the “European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures” (ESFRI). He also reminded CREST that the Commission intends to submit a Communication on Research Infrastructures to the Council in early 2004. This Communication will take due account of the policy debate at the Trieste Conference, which the ESFRI debate will hopefully stimulate.

Following expressions of interest from several delegations from associated countries, the Chairman concluded that associated countries, like candidate countries, should be invited to take part in ESFRI.

6. THE 3% ACTION PLAN: APPLICATION OF THE METHOD OF OPEN CO-ORDINATION (OMC)

The Chairman welcomed the Israel delegate, M. Shaton.

The chairman introduced the presentation stating that this exercise was a test case for CREST to play its role (mandate given by the Council to be the operational interface for OMC). It will be assessed through its ability to deliver concrete results. Commission is ready to make a major effort to support the process but its success will depend on the actual commitment and involvement of national administrations who should drive the process.

Mr. SARAGOSSI (Com. services) presented Commission suggestions regarding the work of the 5 expert groups (expected results, working method and organisational aspects) and gave an overview of the constitution of the expert groups. The speaking brief on the Commission's suggestions for the work of the expert groups and a list of the experts designated so far for the 5 groups were distributed. Chairman invited the Committee to discuss on operational aspects, bearing in mind the need for flexibility across the different groups.. Electronic copies of the slides have been sent to delegations by the CREST Secretariat.

Delegations indicated their support for this approach and willingness to cooperate actively in the exercise. Hungary wished that work should begin taking into consideration the information already available (such as benchmarking, etc.); UK asked how this exercise would be integrated with other initiatives to strengthen competitiveness.

Delegations made a number of suggestions: in particular to make the widest possible use of data and results of previous efforts in OMC; to integrate the work of CREST on the OMC 3% with the wider issues of competitiveness and growth, using its results as inputs for to the Spring European Council in 2005; to include experts from the private sector; and to involve other Commission services beyond DG RTD. The Commission was asked for assistance in the organisation of kickoff meetings in Brussels as early as possible.

UK, Germany, Netherlands expressed concerns about the expression "indicators appropriate for setting targets at EU and national levels" as indicated in the deliverables.

The Commission (I. Saragossi) emphasised that it was not an academic exercise, that the aim is to make progress in implementing identified actions from the Action Plan and that it would be up to the groups and CREST to determine whether the use of indicators for setting targets would be appropriate, but it should not be excluded a priori from the list of possible deliverables. He mentioned, as an example, the target set in FP6 for the participation of SMEs and the action plan inviting Member States to consider the setting of such targets in national programmes.

Portugal indicated that it would organise meetings with its national experts participating in the groups to ensure internal coordination and suggested that a meeting, bringing chairpersons and rapporteurs of the 5 groups together, would help ensure consistency between the group reports and their integration by CREST.

Belgium asked the Commission to organise kick-off meetings of the groups and to send to delegations, in electronic form, the documents presented at the meeting.

The Chairman reminded that the Commission will give support and that kick-off meetings were planned for November 20th and 21st. An exchange of views followed on working methods.

The Chairman, Dr. MITSOS emphasised that the OMC was an operation driven by Member States and the Commission was offering its assistance as a facilitator. The Chairman reminded that the groups are the follow-up to the Commission Action Plan exercise. The list of objectives is long and quite complex. It is up to Member States to decide how it will organise its work in order to produce concrete results by June, starting with the actions most likely to produce results. Regarding the articulation of this exercise with the Competitiveness Council, he indicated that the report of CREST will be an input to the Council and the Commission. To the extent that concrete conclusions are to be drawn from the work of the groups, the CREST Consolidated Report will be an important input to the Competitiveness Council and the Commission's Spring Report for the European Council in 2005.

The Chairman thanked delegations for their support and valuable suggestions, and concluded that:

- Following the suggestion from delegations, and in addition to the financial assistance already offered, the Commission will provide additional support to the holding of kick-off-meetings of the five groups on 20 and 21 November 2003 in Brussels;
- Delegations are urgently invited to complete their nominations of experts taking into account the need to limit as far as possible the number of experts participating in a group to one per country. For groups 3 and 5 Member States may designate up to two delegates when necessary (to answer the need to reflect different competences or have different Ministers represented).

Information should be sent before 31 October in order to allow the first meetings of the 5 groups to take place on 20/21 November;

The Commission will pursue assistance in the informal consultations for confirming and completing the designations of chairpersons and rapporteurs for all of the expert groups. CREST agreed on the broad principles concerning the organisation, working methods and expected deliverables of the expert groups suggested by the Commission at the meeting. The speaking points that were circulated had to be taken as suggestions from the Commission with the necessary flexibility that had to be kept and the following timetable:

- The Commission will convene the first meetings of the 5 expert groups in Brussels on 20/21 November in agreement with the Chairpersons.
- The Chairpersons will present the roadmaps and working methods of their respective groups at the next CREST meeting on 5/12.
- A meeting will be organised around 5/12 with all Chairpersons and Rapporteurs to ensure coherence of approaches.
- The 5 expert groups will report on progress achieved by April 2004.
- The 5 expert groups will finalise their first reports by June 2004.
- These reports will be discussed in CREST in July/September.
- CREST will adopt a consolidated report in September 2004.
- all expert groups are encouraged to use modern means of electronic communication to the widest possible extent, in order to limit the number of necessary meetings.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Ms. DE LA TORRE (Cion. services) briefed the Committee on the work of the High Level Group on increasing human resources for science and technology, chaired by former Portuguese Research Minister Prof. Mariano GAGO.

She reminded delegations to complete the nominations of contact points . She also referred to the wide-ranging consultation which was undertaken (300 scientific organisations were contacted, of which 100 replied). Preliminary findings were presented to Commissioner BUSQUIN on 30 September.

A report is currently being drafted for discussion at a conference planned to take place on 2 April 2004. Close co-ordination with the human resources cluster in the context of the "Science and Society" Action Plan has been achieved.
CREST will be kept fully informed of the proceedings of the GAGO-Group.
