

EUROHORCs' view on Joint Programming

Goal of this document

In their effort to strengthen the European Research Area, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission (EC) are preparing a new initiative named **Joint Programming (JP)** which aims at stimulating research cooperation in Europe in areas of central importance for mankind in the decades to come.

As the details of the JP scheme are not yet known, EUROHORCs, the association of the Heads of European research funding and research performing organisations, cannot make a final statement on the merits of the concept. However, during the preliminary discussions on JP it became evident that **the new scheme needs a strong involvement of national research organisations**. Based on their experience both in managing European-level schemes (e.g. EURYI grants and the "Money follows Researcher" scheme) as well as on their members' combined depth of expertise in the national research systems, EUROHORCs is in a unique position to have a practitioners' view of both levels which should be combined through Joint Programming.

Therefore, on 8 October 2008, the General Assembly of EUROHORCs created a Task force to prepare and conduct the dialogue between the EC and the national research organisations. This statement is intended to assist the Council of Ministers and the European Commission to finalise the concept of JP.

EUROHORCs wishes to emphasise the following points:

(1) The design of Joint Programmes

EUROHORCs strongly supports the efforts to get researchers in Europe to work together on scientific themes meeting the needs of the society and finds this to be a potentially important addition to the current schemes for researcher driven and industry driven programmes. In fact, in many European countries both (national) programmes and research organisations working on such themes already exist, but participation is usually limited to the national research community. This strongly limits the size, comprehensiveness and competitiveness of these programmes. Furthermore, there may be "white spots" in the research landscape, i.e. areas where societal needs are not supported (or not supported strongly enough) by European research organisations.

Joint Programming would thus have two aims:

- (a) combining and strengthening existing national efforts;**
- (b) filling existing gaps by creating new programmes.**

In addition, based on the documents currently available, EUROHORCs has identified a number of issues related to the design of JP that still need to be worked out in detail and which subsequently will determine the nature of the scheme.

First, a number of **key elements of Joint Programming need to be defined more clearly**. They include the definition of the **partners of JP** (national governments, ministries, national research organisations and/or

national programmes, research institutions, individual research groups etc.) and – depending on the type of involved partners – the **governance** of the programme.

Second, once partners, structure and governance of JP are defined, the **question of the magnitude of the added-value and concrete improvements brought along by JP** regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of research compared to either the addition of national uncorrelated and competing programmes or existing collaborative schemes such as FP7, ERA-Nets, EUROCORES or the new Lead Agency-procedure¹ should be addressed.

(2) Identifying the right topics for Joint Programmes

EUROHORCS would like to emphasise that initially the numbers of Joint Programmes be limited to **extremely few** (3-4), **highly attractive** (in terms of visibility, funding conditions and infrastructures) top-research programmes with a **long-term perspective** (10-15 years) to produce the **necessary conditions for a decisive research impact**.

EUROHORCS strongly recommends the definition of a mechanism for the selection of a few pilot topics involving strong interaction between governments and research organizations. **Governments and ministries would propose research areas while EUROHORCS and the national research organisations would assess the feasibility of proposed projects, the added value of working together and analyse their scientific value. Only topics which are both relevant and of high scientific value would be launched.**

Many EUROHORCS member organisations are mission-oriented agencies that are addressing societal needs on the national level, and a significant fraction of the research supported by all EUROHORCS members is spontaneously oriented towards societal concerns. EUROHORCS is **prepared to contribute actively to this process** (e.g. by providing information on nationally funded research, setting up of expert panels and general quality control from a scientific point of view). Given the importance and long-term character of JP, enough time should be allotted to the evaluation process – whether top-down or bottom-up.²

3) The funding and running of Joint Programmes

In view of the societal expectations on the outcome of Joint Programs EUROHORCS would like to stress that it is imperative that **fresh funding inciting participation be put forward by both national governments and the European Commission** in order to give these Programmes the means to achieve their ambitious goals. National research funding and performing organisations can link together their national research communities through incentive measures, following consultation with EUROHORCS.

¹ The Lead-Agency procedure is an agreement between research funding organisations to delegate the peer review process of projects involving research groups from several countries to one organisation.

² Although developed under considerable time pressure, EUROHORCS believes that Alzheimer research could be an adequate topic for a pilot Joint Programme.

4) Concluding remarks

EUROHORCs, as the voice of Europe's research funding and performing organisations, is committed to play a key role in shaping the European Research Area. Well-conceived programmes with a strong embedding in Europe's research community could be a decisive contribution towards linking European research and the needs of society. EUROHORCs offers to play an **active role in further exploring the possibilities concerning Joint Programming**.

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