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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DESIGN STUDIES
AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES
SUPPORT SCHEMES UNDER THE **SIXTH**
FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH



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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DESIGN STUDIES AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES SUPPORT SCHEMES UNDER THE SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH

(pursuant to Article 287(4), second subparagraph, TFEU)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.

The Design Studies (DS) and Construction of New Infrastructures (CNI) support schemes form part of the EU policy on the development of high-level research infrastructures of a European dimension. The contribution to projects under the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) for Research (2002–06) amounted to 140 million euro.

II.

The audit examined whether the two schemes had promoted the development of a fabric of research infrastructures of the highest quality and performance in Europe, and their optimum use on a European scale based on the needs expressed by the research community. The audit analysed in particular, if the DS scheme had been useful to decision-makers and if the CNI scheme had resulted in the construction of new infrastructures. Attention was also given to actions taken to encourage the use of complementary funding for research facilities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

III.

The Court concluded that:

- the DS scheme was positively viewed by the representatives of the research community interviewed, providing in their view, critical early-stage funding for infrastructure development and encouraging collaboration amongst would-be competitors in the European research field;
- Union support for the construction of new infrastructures had a limited impact on the emergence of a fabric of research facilities in Europe. The CNI scheme had little catalysing effect and, although the payment of CNI support led to some technical upgrading of the investment projects concerned, most projects supported would have gone ahead with or without Union support; and
- the Commission's services did not actively promote the use of different funding sources available for research infrastructures in Europe despite advocating such use in various official pronouncements.

IV.

The Court recommends that the Commission should reconsider whether CNI projects should be funded from the research budget given the findings concerning European added value. Furthermore, scheme objectives should be clear and realistic. The Commission should consider what is to be achieved through the use of complementary funding sources and if it believes that synergies can be obtained to make better use of EU funds, it should take the necessary actions.

INTRODUCTION

1. This report covers EU expenditure on Design Studies (DS) and Construction of New Infrastructures (CNI) support schemes under the Research Infrastructures (RI) activity area of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) for Research (2002–06).
2. The term 'research infrastructures' refers to facilities and resources providing essential services to the research community in academic and/or industrial areas. The infrastructure may take the form of a single resource at a single location, a network of distributed resources or even be 'virtual', with the service being provided electronically¹.

EU RESEARCH BUDGET CO-FINANCES RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES

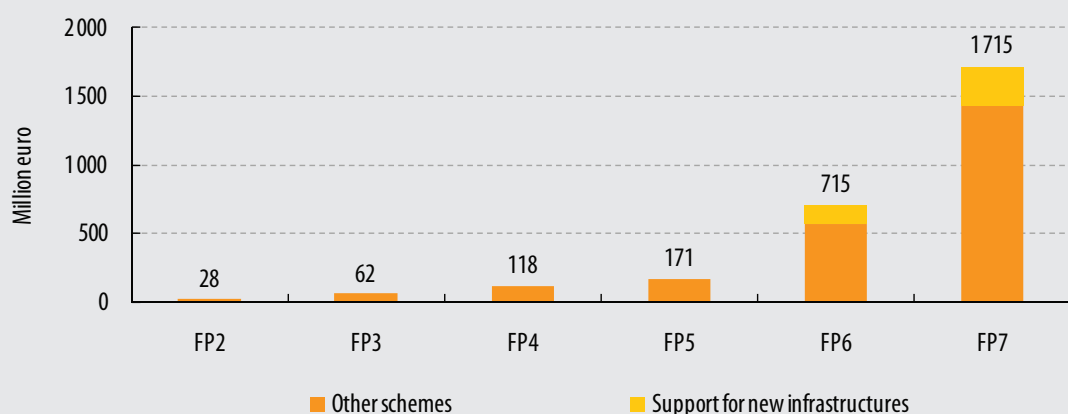
3. Community Research and Technological Development (RTD) activities have been financed since 1984 through multiannual framework programmes, which set out the scientific and technological objectives to be followed for a programming period. Specific support for research facilities started with the Second Framework Programme (FP2) (1987–91). The initial aim was to improve access for the scientific community to national research infrastructures but this was subsequently broadened to also include support for cooperation networks and for research activities to improve the quality and quantity of services provided by the infrastructures as well as for the development of new scientific equipment². Since FP2, financial support has increased considerably (see **Figure 1**).

¹ 'Support for Research Infrastructures in the FP6 Specific Programme on "Structuring the European Research Area" Work Programme 2002–03', p. 1.

² Council Decision 1999/173/EC of 25 January 1999 adopting a specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration on improving the human research potential and the socioeconomic knowledge base (1998–2002) (OJ L 64, 12.3.1999, p. 105).

FIGURE 1

SPENDING ON THE RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES PROGRAMMES



Source: European Commission.

4. The overall objective of the RI activity area of FP6 was to promote the development in Europe of a 'fabric of research infrastructures of the highest quality and performance'. This was to be based upon the needs expressed by the research community and with 'European Added Value' being created through the extension of the use of such infrastructures throughout Europe.

5. According to a Commission analysis carried out in 2000 the development of state-of-the-art research facilities in Europe was hampered by:
 - a lack of coordinated mechanisms for needs assessment and setting of priorities across countries and disciplines;
 - a lack of a coherent, European position on the participation in world-scale undertakings;
 - the difficulty to establish multinational funding agreements;
 - obstacles to transnational access to facilities; and
 - a low level of coordination among infrastructure operators and the consequent lack of critical mass in the technological development related to infrastructures³.

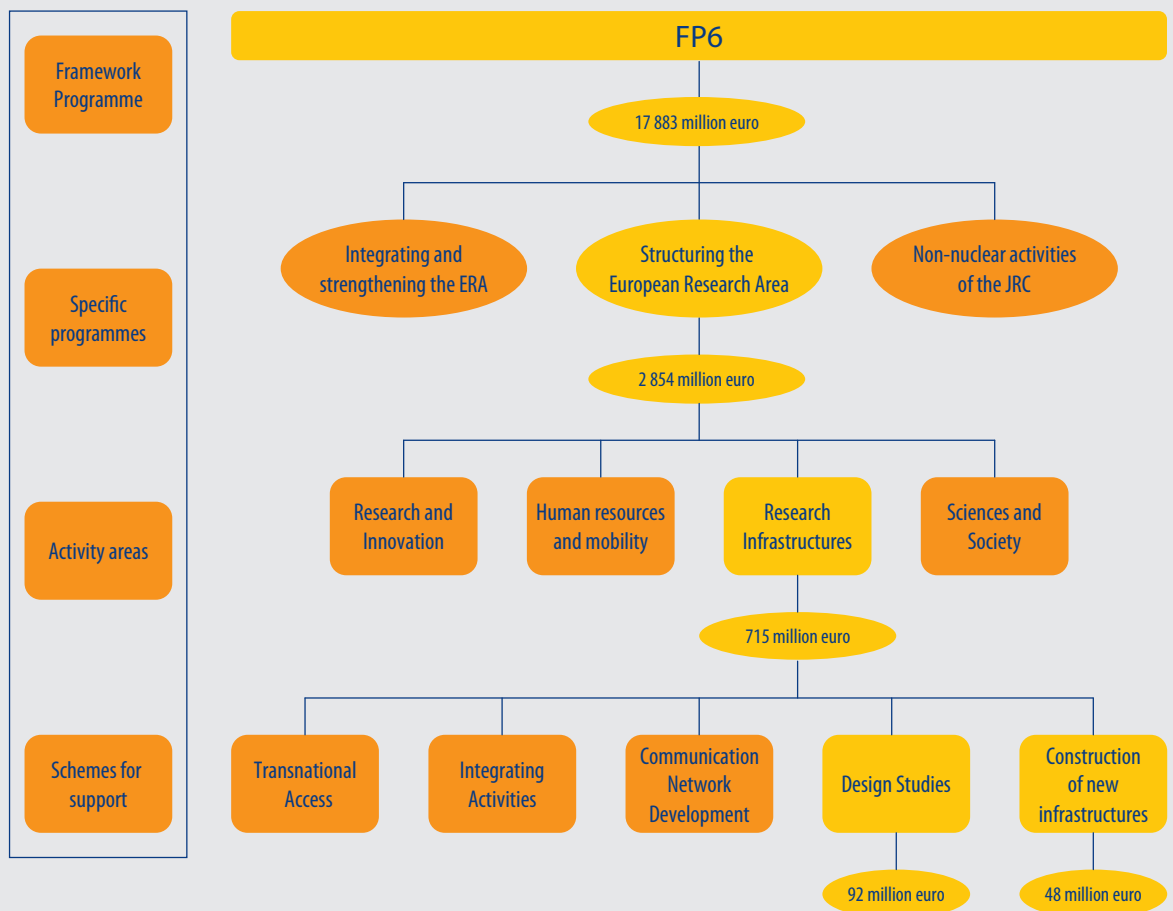
6. To help resolve known difficulties in the setting up of new research facilities the Commission proposed for FP6 an approach centred on support for large-scale research facilities in Europe. Five support schemes were defined covering:
 - Transnational Access,
 - Integrating Activities,
 - Communication Network Development,
 - Design Studies,
 - Construction of New Infrastructures.

³ See Working document of the Commission services 'A European Research Area for Infrastructures', SEC(2001) 356 of 27.2.2001.

7. For FP6, a budget of 140 million of the 715 million euro available for infrastructure support was allocated to the DS and CNI support schemes (see the overview in **Figure 2**).

FIGURE 2

'DESIGN STUDIES' AND 'CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES' SCHEMES IN FP6



DESIGN STUDIES

8. Design studies projects are intended to test the feasibility of potential future research facilities (including the development of new equipment). The DS scheme was to support feasibility studies and technical preparatory work for new infrastructures which were to have a clear European dimension and interest. Support could also be given to facilities of worldwide relevance located outside Europe but in which European organisations intended to participate.
9. The DS projects audited by the Court (see **Annex I**) deal with topics such as free electron light sources, accelerator/colliders, large optical and infrared telescopes and the construction of aquaculture centres. An example of a design study can be found in **Textbox 1**.

TEXTBOX 1

THE SKADS PROJECT

One of the objectives of the 'Square Kilometre Array Design Study' (SKADS) was to develop cost-effective technology for future radio astronomy. The total amount of EU financial support was 10,4 million euro, approximately one third of the total cost of the project. The grant contractor, SKADS consortium, was composed of 26 participants from nine EU Member States, South Africa, Canada, Australia and Russia.

This design study confirmed that the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a giant radiotelescope distributed over several continents, could be built using simpler and cheaper structures than the hundreds of conventional dish antennae originally foreseen.

Subsequently the SKA project was included in the 'European Roadmap for Research Infrastructures' (see paragraphs 16 and 17). Its Phase 1 construction is planned for 2012–16.

CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES

10. The objective of the CNI scheme was to support the development of new or enhanced infrastructures. As with Design Studies, support could also be given to facilities of world-wide relevance located outside Europe but in which European organisations intended to participate. Eligible projects could take the form of traditional buildings but could also include for example a system of antennae in the Atacama desert in Chile or a virtual infrastructure, such as a distributed digitised archive to improve linguistic research (see **Annex II** for CNI projects audited). An example of a CNI project is given in **Textbox 2**.

TEXTBOX 2

CEMACE PROJECT

The Tjärnö Marine Biological Laboratory (TMBL) is a marine biology field station in Sweden. Together with Akademiska Hus, Sweden's main owner of university property, the TMBL is building the Centre for Marine Chemical Ecology (CeMaCE). This multidisciplinary facility will provide European researchers with access to laboratories, equipment and scientific expertise. The Centre, with a direct access to the sea from the banks of Koster fjord, integrates molecular biology, ecology and evolutionary biology — a combination that should provide an innovative approach to marine ecological chemistry.

The European financial support for this project, amounting to over 900 000 euro, was mainly used for the construction of a marine ecotron — a facility offering ecologically relevant experimental conditions with control of several environmental factors — and contributes to the creation of marine ecology laboratories. The overall costs of the project amounted to 9 million euro.

SELECTION OF PROJECTS

- 11.** DS and CNI projects under FP6 were selected following a call for proposals published in November 2003⁴. The maximum rate of co-financing for DS and CNI projects under FP6 was 50 % and 10 % respectively. The call was open to projects in any field of science and technology and the Commission received 121 proposals, in total amounting to 387 million euro. As the Commission, in agreement with the Programme Committee composed of representatives of the Member States and Associated States, considered that many good proposals would be excluded if the call's indicative budget of 70 million euro⁵ was maintained, it increased the budget for this call to 140 million euro.

- 12.** The project proposals were evaluated by a multidisciplinary panel of 62 independent experts according to four criteria:
 - European added value;
 - scientific and technological excellence;
 - relevance to the objectives of the scheme; and
 - quality of the management.

- 13.** Seventy-seven projects were judged as being of an appropriate standard and thirty projects received financial support, with 92 million euro being awarded for 19 Design Studies and 48 million euro for nine CNI projects⁶.

⁴ Call for proposals FP6-2003-Infrastructures-4.

⁵ The evaluators noted, that 'The oversubscription for this call was about six times the indicative budget (70 M €). Even on the level of very good proposals, according to the consensus marks, the oversubscription is two to three-fold.' Call FP6-2003-Infrastructures-4 Panel Report, 7 May 2004.

⁶ The call for proposals was also eligible for another category of projects ('accompanying measures') which is not the subject of this audit. In this category two projects were selected.

RESEARCH FACILITIES CAN ALSO BE CO-FINANCED BY THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS

14. In addition to funding from the research budget managed by the Commission, under the various Framework Programmes, the development of research facilities can also be financed through the EU's Structural Funds which are financed by the EU budget but managed by Member States. As a source of potential funding, the 3 billion euro available under the 'Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) Infrastructure' area of the Structural Funds for the 2000–06 period was significantly greater than the 715 million euro allocated for research infrastructures under FP6. **Figure 3** presents the amounts involved and the maximum co-financing rates relevant to the various sources of funding.

FIGURE 3

STRUCTURAL FUNDS AND RTD FRAMEWORK PROGRAMMES — A COMPARISON

	FP6	SF 2000–06	FP7	SF 2007–13
Programming period	2002–06	2000–06	2007–13	2007–13
Budget for RTDI (million euro)	17 883	38 815	53 272	49 744
Budget for RTDI infrastructures (million euro)	715	3 128	1 715	9 758
Eligibility	EU and Associated Countries	Objective 1: 2 412 Objective 2: 681 EU initiative: 35	EU and Associated Countries	Convergence regions: 7 363 Regional competitiveness and employment regions: 2 247 European territorial cooperation: 148
Maximum co-financing rates	DS: 50 % CNI: 10 %	Objective 1: 75 %–85 % Other objectives: 50 %	DS: 50 % CNI: 3–6 million euro per project	Convergence regions: 75 %–85 % Regional competitiveness and employment regions: 50 %–85 % European territorial cooperation: 75 %–85 %

SOME CHANGES IN THE COMMISSION'S APPROACH FOR FP7

15. The Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)⁷ (2007–13) introduces some changes in the area of Research Infrastructures in comparison to FP6. The approach adopted for the DS scheme has generally remained unchanged but changes have been made to the CNI scheme in the area of project selection and a shift of funding emphasis from the construction to the preparatory phase.
16. For project selection, the FP7 approach is more 'top-down' and the projects selected for support are mainly those included in the 'European roadmap for new research infrastructures'. This is a list prepared by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).
17. ESFRI is a forum which seeks to provide a coherent approach to research policymaking in Europe and is composed of appointees of the Ministers responsible for research in the Member States and Associated States and a Commission representative. The 'Roadmap' sets out the scientific needs in the area of research infrastructures in Europe for a 10–20 year period and identifies projects considered as being vital to the development of science and innovation in Europe.

⁷ Decision No 1982/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 412, 30.12.2006, p. 1).

AUDIT SCOPE AND APPROACH

18. The purpose of the audit was to assess the CNI and DS funding schemes and their contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the RI activity during the FP6 period (2002–06).

19. The audit approached this through the following questions:

- (a) Did the Design Studies scheme result in feasibility studies and preparatory work which were useful to decision-makers in the creation of new research infrastructures?
- (b) Did the CNI scheme effectively catalyse the construction of new infrastructures?
- (c) Did the Commission take action to promote the use of complementary funding, as included in the FP6 decision, within the DS and CNI schemes?

20. The audit involved:

- an analysis of the legal basis of the RI area and specifically the establishment of the DS and CNI schemes;
- a review of the project selection and monitoring procedures (including all relevant evaluation reports);
- interviews with staff of the Commission and with representatives of the principal European research organisations and of research ministries in eight Member States (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom);
- on-the-spot audits of a sample of nine of 19 Design Studies and all nine CNI projects; and
- an online survey of all unsuccessful applicants.

The audited period was that of FP6 (2002 to 2006). The audited projects are listed in **Annex I** and **II**.

OBSERVATIONS

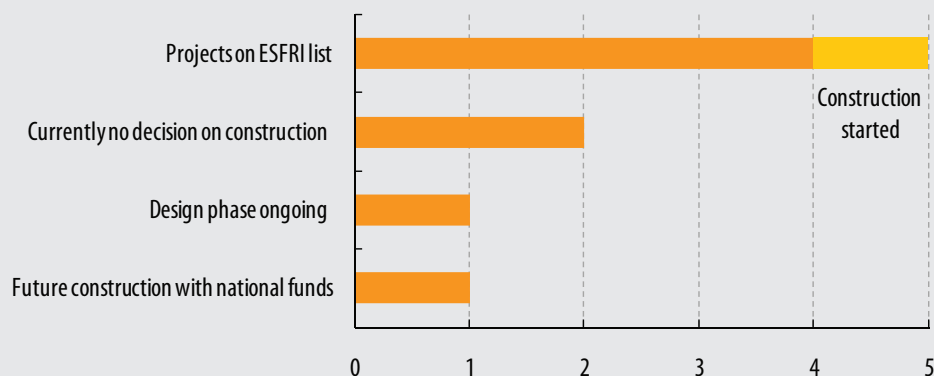
THE DESIGN STUDIES SCHEME

OBJECTIVES MAINLY ACHIEVED

21. The objective of the Design Studies scheme was to contribute to feasibility studies and technical preparatory work for new infrastructures with a clear European dimension. The scheme was judged by the Court as being successful if:
- EU funding facilitated studies which led, in the medium-to-long term, to the enhancement of a fabric of research facilities of a European dimension and;
 - the co-financed studies exhibited European added value.
22. Following the various audit interviews carried out, the Court noted that participants generally had a positive view of the Design Studies scheme and thought that the existence of a 'Design study' resulted in an increased level of awareness and support on the part of national decision-makers. A majority of the projects were subsequently included in the ESFRI list (see paragraphs 16 and 17), increasing the likelihood of construction (see **Figure 4**).

FIGURE 4

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NINE DS PROJECTS AUDITED BY THE COURT



23. During interviews, project coordinators and Member States' representatives also stated that EU support for Design Studies had been of importance in bridging the gap between the elaboration of an idea and the actual implementation of a project. The support had given scientists an opportunity to demonstrate and work out their proposals in a structured way. Most project coordinators were also of the opinion that the possibility for a number of institutions to collaborate together in joint undertakings was a valuable and worthwhile aspect of this support scheme. **Textbox 3** contains an example of cooperation between major European research institutions who otherwise would have been competitors.
24. Beneficiaries and the representatives of research organisations stated that, in terms of securing funding, the design phase of an infrastructure project is the most difficult one. This is especially the case when international cooperation is necessary. The DS scheme, with a financial involvement of the Commission of up to 50 % of total cost, was therefore considered by interviewees as being important in that it provided a framework for the development of large-scale European projects. The interviewees thought that pan-European collaboration is difficult to set up through mechanisms with a more national or regional programme emphasis.

TEXTBOX 3**THE EUROFEL PROJECT**

The EUROFEL Design Study was a joint effort on the part of 16 European research institutions to prepare for the construction of the next-generation of free-electron laser light sources, to be built as a distributed infrastructure in seven European centres.

Originally, there were seven different, competing projects for constructing free electron lasers in five European countries. However the Commission advised the individual institutions to submit a joint proposal thereby enhancing European collaboration in the area. For some participants, the main benefit of the project was the collaboration of different institutions, which would normally be competing against each other.

The success of the Design Study can be gauged from the inclusion of the construction project in the 'European Roadmap for Research Infrastructures' and is scheduled to be constructed in the next 8 to 12 years.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES (CNI) SCHEME

THE CATALYSING EFFECT AND EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

- 25.** The criteria for the payment of EU funds under the Construction of New Infrastructures (CNI) scheme are insufficiently specific. Council Decision 2002/835/EC⁸ stipulates that the scheme was to provide the minimum funding necessary ‘to catalyse’ the activity, with most of the construction and operational costs assured by national or other sources of finance. A catalyst is something that accelerates or promotes a reaction or process. In the Court’s understanding, this implies that the payment of CNI funding should result in projects going ahead which would otherwise not have been undertaken.
- 26.** Decision 2002/835/EC goes on to say that funding should be provided on the basis of a detailed justification ‘based on European added value’. The Commission’s 2002–03 work programme for FP6 interprets the CNI eligibility requirement to say that CNI support will be available ‘where such support could have a critical catalysing effect in terms of European added value’. This could be demonstrated, as mentioned in the work programme, in terms of an improved attractiveness for, and/or improved services to, the research community in Europe, by way of:
- a wider accessibility of the proposed infrastructure,
 - a more advanced technology,
 - a more flexible adaptability to interdisciplinary studies,
 - a better connectivity to the research community.
- 27.** The Court examined all CNI projects and considered how the Commission had applied the abovementioned eligibility requirements set out in Decision 2002/835/EC and elaborated on in the Commission’s 2002–03 work programme.

⁸ OJ L 294, 29.10.2002, p. 44.

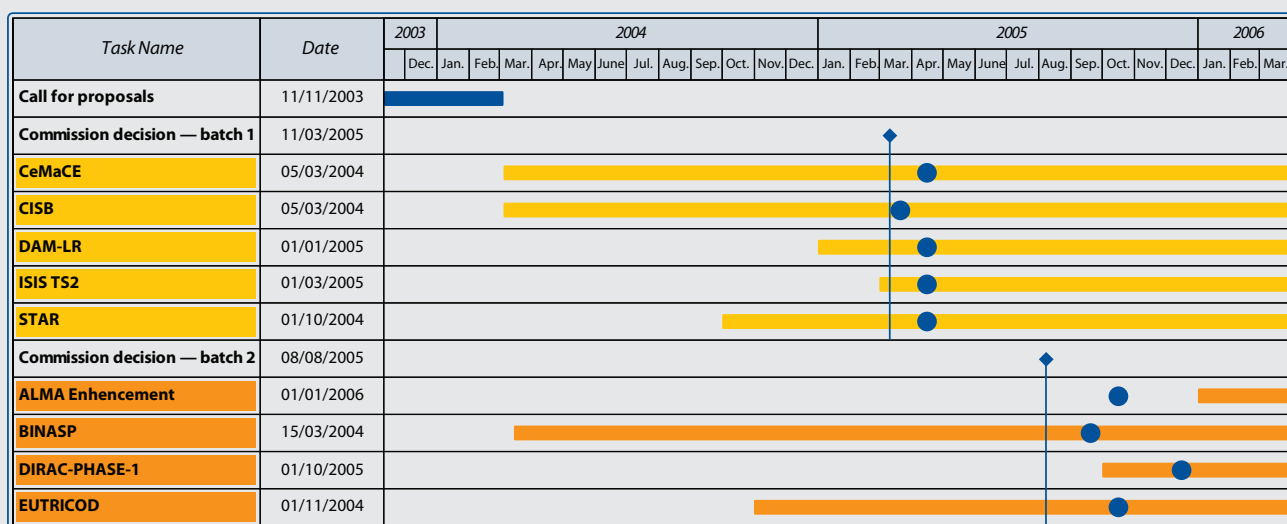
28. In the important matter of the access of European researchers to infrastructures, the Court found that Commission financing focused on the funding of the construction or the purchase of equipment without sufficiently securing access for researchers.

LITTLE 'CATALYSING EFFECT'...

29. In order to assess whether Construction of New Infrastructures (CNI) support had a 'catalysing effect' the Court examined:
- the relationship between the starting date of projects and the date when contracts with the EU were signed, which would indicate the importance of the funding to the undertaking of the project;
 - whether the decision to grant or refuse funding for projects was determinant for the project going ahead or continuing; and
 - perceptions of the main stakeholders regarding the extent to which EU investment served as a catalyst for other investment in projects.

FIGURE 5

TIMELINE OF PROJECT START AND CONTRACT SIGNATURE



● = Contract signature

- 30.** The Court's audit found that seven of the nine CNI projects had starting dates in advance of the relevant Commission decisions and subsequent signing of contracts (see **Figure 5**). An eighth project started after the Commission decision but before the contract had been signed.
- 31.** As in most cases the projects were up-and-running before contracts were signed and as EU support for CNI projects was limited to a maximum of 10 % of the total project cost⁹, there was no evidence that EU-funding was a determining factor in the decision as to whether projects went ahead or not (see example in **Textbox 4**).
- 32.** During interviews, the representatives of European research organisations and Member States' ministries stated that the CNI scheme did not 'catalyse' the activities for which support was granted because of the low level of funding available and the fact that, by definition, the provision of only 10 % of total project cost is insufficient for the production of a catalysing effect.

⁹ CNI special clause No 34: 'The reimbursement of costs for other specific support activities, incurred by contractors applying the FC, FCF or AC cost-reporting models, shall not exceed 10 % of the total eligible costs'.

TEXTBOX 4

PHASE 1 OF THE DIRAC PROJECT

The aim of the construction of the International Accelerator Facility at the Darmstadt Ion Research and Antiproton Centre (DIRAC) in Darmstadt is to upgrade the existing accelerators for future research on the origin of the universe. This project, to be co-financed by 14 partners (11 EU Member States, China, India and Russia), includes both new infrastructure (magnet) and upgrades of existing infrastructure (synchrotron accelerator and spectrometer).

EU funding amounting to 10,4 million euro was intended to support the first phase of the project, which was estimated at 104 million euro. The total investment is expected to be in the region of 1,2 billion euro. When the contract with the Commission was signed, the project was already under way.

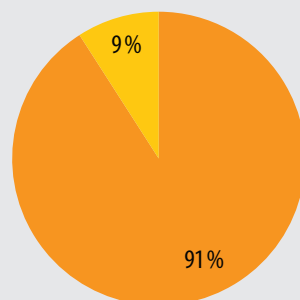
33. A similar observation was made in the Evaluation Panel Report: '(...) the experts felt that EC funding was having a higher impact for Design Studies compared to Construction projects since the construction would happen anyway and the benefit of the 10 % help from the EU was sometimes not very clear'¹⁰.
34. In replying to the audit survey, 9 out of 10 responding non-successful applicants confirmed that the Commission's decision on funding did not have a substantial influence on the realisation of projects and most of the applicants continued with their projects despite having been rejected, although sometimes with a reduction in scope (see **Figure 6**).
35. When a similar question was put by the Court to the coordinators of successful CNI projects, three out of four replied that a negative decision of the Commission would not have prevented their projects from going ahead (see **Figure 6** also).

¹⁰ Research Infrastructures Action — Call FP6-2003-Infrastructures-4: Panel Report, p. 4.

FIGURE 6

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL PROPOSALS

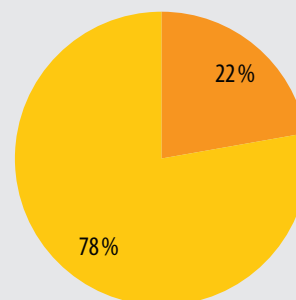
Have you proceeded with the implementation of the project despite the negative decision on EC funding?



■ Yes ■ No

Survey of unsuccessful proposers

Would a negative decision on EC funding have held up project implementation?



■ Yes ■ No

Interviews with project coordinators

...BUT CNI SUPPORT RESULTED IN THE PURCHASE OF ADDITIONAL OR BETTER EQUIPMENT

- 36.** Although EU funding, adding 10 % on top of project costs agreed at a national level, had little 'catalysing effect' so far as projects as a whole were concerned, it enabled the purchase or development of additional equipment not foreseen in the initial project proposal. This funding therefore complemented national funding and in this sense, EU funding allowed the infrastructures to have more or better technology. In some cases it also facilitated the interdisciplinary use of facilities.

COMPLEMENTARITY OF FUNDING

THE COMMISSION ADVOCATED COMPLEMENTARY FUNDING BUT TOOK ONLY LIMITED ACTION

- 37.** As already mentioned in paragraph 14, in addition to funding infrastructures through the research budget, EU support can also come from the Structural Funds in support of regional and cohesion policies. The EIB may also finance research infrastructure projects which have a European dimension.
- 38.** Double financing or submitting the same item of expenditure for support from different schemes is prohibited. The co-financing of a project from different EU financing mechanisms is rarely possible due to the specific rules on co-financing for each instrument. The complementary use of funding sources is however allowed. Complementarity of funding means using different sources of funding for different project activities, which are carried out in a related or consecutive manner¹¹.

¹¹ 'Competitive European regions through research and innovation. Practical Guide to EU funding opportunities for research and innovation', Rev. 2 02/12/2008, pp. 12–13.

- 39.** The possibility of using complementary funding from different European sources has been advocated in various Union documents. In its report of May 2000¹² the European Parliament strongly encouraged the complementary use of funding under the Framework Research Programme and other EU policies, in particular the Structural Funds. The Commission's Communication 'Towards a European Research Area'¹³ announced that, in the area of research infrastructures, the potential to combine Structural Funds, EIB loans and FP6 funding should be exploited.
- 40.** The use of complementary funding in respect of the DS and CNI schemes was also treated in the decisions establishing FP6¹⁴ and the specific programme 'Structuring the European Research Area'¹⁵. Design studies were to be undertaken on the basis of a systematic exploration of 'the possibilities of contributions from other sources, including the EIB or the Structural Funds for the funding of these infrastructures'. Support from the CNI scheme 'may supplement contributions from the EIB or the Structural Funds for the funding of these infrastructures'. The use of complementary funding was also mentioned in the Research Infrastructures Work Programme¹⁶.
- 41.** Combining the use of structural, cohesion and other funding sources, with research funding, is specifically intended to realise the potential of the EU's convergence regions in terms of industrial and research development.
- 42.** Despite advocating the use of complementary sources of funding in the Decisions and documents mentioned above, the issue was not actively addressed by the Commission during FP6. There was no guidance material established to help project coordinators search for potential funding synergies and indeed no CNI projects benefited from either Structural Funds financing or EIB loans during the period. Most of the unsuccessful applicants surveyed stated that they had not been informed about the possibility of using complementary funding sources (see **Figure 7**).

¹² Report on the Communication from the Commission 'Towards a European research area' (COM(2000) 6 — C5-0115/2000 — 2000/2075(COS)).

¹³ '... the opportunity should be taken to negotiate on the structural assistance planned for the years 2000 to 2006 in order to examine how best to combine projects implemented within this framework (i.e. Structural Funds) with projects undertaken in the European programmes.' COM(2000) 6, p. 18.

¹⁴ Decision No 1513/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 232, 29.8.2002, p. 1).

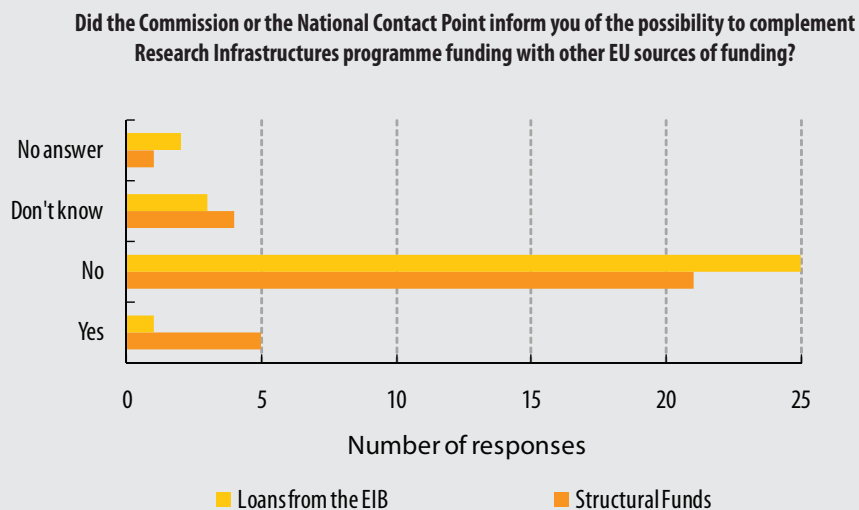
¹⁵ Council Decision 2002/835/EC of 30 September 2002 adopting a specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration: 'Structuring the European Research Area' (2002-06).

¹⁶ Work Programme (2002-03): Support for Research Infrastructures in the FP6 Specific Programme on 'Structuring the European Research Area', first update June 2003.

- 43.** There would also be a need for practical steps to be taken by the Commission to adequately administer the complementarity aspect e.g. checks for double financing or ineligible co-financing. However it was noted that:
- (i) the relevant DGs (RTD and REGIO) did not establish a common definition of a 'Research Infrastructure',
 - (ii) the two DGs did not have the means of cross-linking information on projects eligible for both FP6 and Structural Funds, and
 - (iii) under Cohesion policy, no specific tools and databases to manage and coordinate the complementarity of funding have been developed.

FIGURE 7

INFORMATION ON COMPLEMENTARITY OF FUNDING — RESULTS FROM THE ECA SURVEY OF UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

44. The Court considered the DS scheme to have mainly met its objectives whereas the CNI scheme was judged to have provided low added value.

WAS THE DS SCHEME A USEFUL TOOL FOR DECISION-MAKERS?

45. Representatives of the research community were generally positive about the Design Studies scheme. They thought that it provided an opportunity for scientific ideas to be developed in a structured way by testing the feasibility of potential future research facilities. The possibility provided for different institutions to collaborate together was particularly welcomed. The process helped decision-makers identify which projects were worthy of support and the majority of the DS projects audited were included on the ESFRI list.

DID THE CNI SCHEME CATALYSE THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES?

46. Funding through the CNI scheme did not have a determining effect on project implementation. Payment of CNI assistance made possible some technical upgrading of the investment projects concerned, with the acquisition of new or better equipment. However the CNI scheme did not result in the construction of new infrastructures but rather provided additional financing to projects which would have gone ahead irrespective of the existence of the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Commission should reconsider whether in future Framework Programmes, CNI projects should be funded from the research budget given the Court's findings concerning the European added value and catalysing effect.

The Commission should ensure that scheme objectives are stated in terms that are clear and understandable to all and should be realistic given the intended level of project funding involved.

DID THE COMMISSION TAKE ACTION ON COMPLEMENTARY FUNDING?

47. Despite including in the FP6 decision, the possibility of funding DS and CNI projects from complementary EU budgetary sources, the Commission did not actively promote this possibility and consequently it was not used.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Commission should clarify what it intends to achieve by including in the legislation the possible complementary use of funds. It should consider the advantages and disadvantages of such funding and the associated costs and benefits. If it believes that useful synergies can be achieved through combining earmarked EU funds, EIB loans and national financing, it should actively promote the use of complementary funding sources, whilst ensuring that adequate controls are put in place to prevent and detect any misuse of this option.

This report was adopted by the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg at its meeting of 5 May 2010.

For the Court of Auditors



Vítor Manuel da Silva Caldeira
President

ACHIEVEMENTS OF 'DESIGN STUDIES' PROJECTS

Class	Project acronym	Project title	Main project achievements*	Main impact of EU funding*	Prospects for construction*
Free Electron Lasers	EUROFEL	European FEL Design Study	Preparation of the construction of the next-generation free electron laser light sources. The project's impact is mainly technical in terms of solving engineering problems (designs of critical components).	Cooperation on technical aspects between several institutions preparing similar infrastructures.	Net of distributed infrastructures, included in the ESFRI roadmap.
Other — Accelerators	EUROTeV	European Design Study Towards a Global Linear Collider	Participation in an international project (ILC Global Effort). The work consists primarily of research on collider sub-systems and other critical issues identified by an international evaluation team.	Involvement of several European organisations in the consortium (the co-ordinator would participate in the global ILC project also without EU funding, albeit at a smaller scale).	Technical Design Report of the global project is planned for 2012, a possible construction would take place in late 2010s.
Astrophysics	ELT DESIGN STUDY	Extremely Large Telescope Design Study	Development of enabling technologies and concepts required for a possible construction of a European large optical and infrared telescope.	In the DS almost all biggest European institutions are involved. The project reflects a consensus of the entire European astronomical community.	There are several similar competing projects around the world. Only one of those projects will be finalised. Therefore the construction of the telescope remains uncertain. Preparatory activities for construction funded under FP7.
Nuclear Physics	EURISOL DS	European Isotope Separation On-Line Radioactive Ion Beam Facility	Solving of major technical problems expected in the creation of the new facility, feasibility study, site and user issues.	The project would not be executed without EU funding; synergies with other European projects.	Not yet on the ESFRI list.
Structural Engineering	L-SURF	Large Scale Underground Research Facility on Safety and Security	Feasibility study, technical specifications, business plan with financial options for different business scenarios, assessment of the foundation of a legal entity.	Overview of safety and security activities in Europe.	At the time of the visit the legal entity has not been created. Funding for potential construction is not secured.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF 'DESIGN STUDIES' PROJECTS

Class	Project acronym	Project title	Main project achievements*	Main impact of EU funding*	Prospects for construction*
Environment	DesignACT	Designing the Aquaculture Centre of Technology – facing the unmet needs in European aquaculture	Inventory of aquaculture infrastructure and definition of needs, content specifications, cost calculations, environmental survey, management, operation and financial plans, construction plan and development strategy, funding of a new legal entity.	Fundaments for a unique large-scale experimental sea-based aquaculture facility, open to researchers from abroad with a strong ICT component and training possibilities for students.	Not included in the ESFRI list, but prospects for national funding.
Nuclear Physics	DIRAC secondary-Beams	Internal Target experiments with highly energetic stored and cooled secondary beams at the International Accelerator Facility, Darmstadt Ion Research and Antiproton Center (DIRAC)	Development of technologies, prototypes and accelerator components, testing and proof of feasibility.	The project mobilised the participation of many institutions worldwide. As the design phase did not receive sufficient financing by national funding mechanisms the preparations of the facility would not have been possible to this extent.	The construction has started and is expected to be ready by 2016.
Astrophysics	SKADS	Square Kilometre Array Design Study	Establishment of cost-effective technology and system concept.	The project has mobilised many new radio astronomy groups throughout Europe in contributing and being involved in SKA developments.	Project included in the ESFRI-list.
Other — Astroparticles	KM3NeT	Design Study for a Deep Sea Facility in the Mediterranean for Neutrino Astronomy and Associated Sciences	The main deliverable is a technical design report for a deep sea neutrino telescope and a platform for sea sciences. Siting issues have also been analysed.	Significant impact of the EU funding: an approach towards the construction of the facility would be weaker and would have lacked convincing perspectives.	Project included in the ESFRI list, some additional commitments at national levels are becoming visible.

* Conclusions from audit interviews.

EU CONTRIBUTION FOR CNI PROJECTS

Project acronym	Grant agreement signature date (Commission)	Project start date (and duration)	Total budget after negotiation (euro)	EU contribution (euro)	EU contribution/cumulative funding (%)	Project description	EU contribution allocation
ALMA Enhancement	19.10.2005	1.1.2006 (60 months)	284 015 100	8 518 360	3,00 %	<p>Alma Enhancement is part of the large ALMA (Atacama Large Millimeter Array) project, a joint European–North American project. ALMA is currently the world's biggest terrestrial astronomy project. The building of ALMA infrastructure in Chile began already in 2003 with full completion planned for 2012.</p> <p>The EU ALMA Enhancement project allows building of additional hardware and software components to ALMA by adding a fifth waveband in the millimeter and sub-millimeter range which allows access to higher fidelity images and measurements of the water lines at high resolution.</p>	<p>The EU contribution targets all Work Packages.</p> <p>Most WP deal with the design, production, assembly and verification of band five receivers.</p>
BINASP	27.9.2005	15.3.2004 (60 months)	20 869 204	1 912 120	9,16 %	<p>The BINASP project consists of the building up of a system of bio-nanotechnology RIs and facilities in the AREA Science Park in Trieste.</p> <p>This will be achieved by implementing seven tasks (among others, an animal house, an advanced microscopy and nanoscopy unit, an optical molecular imaging lab, etc.). These mainly consist of developing new techniques and purchasing the necessary equipment.</p>	<p>EU contribution of approx. 7 % targets all proposed tasks to be carried out in this project.</p> <p>EU contribution of 20 % was requested only for Task 1 (management) and Task 10 (establishing a nanobiophotonic facility).</p>

EU CONTRIBUTION FOR CNI PROJECTS

Project acronym	Grant agreement signature date (Commission)	Project start date (and duration)	Total budget after negotiation (euro)	EU contribution (euro)	EU contribution/cumulative funding (%)	Project description	EU contribution allocation
CeMaCE	18.4.2005	5.3.2004 (36 months)	8 996 302	937 432	10,42 %	<p>The CeMaCE project aims at extending the current investments in laboratory facilities and specialised equipment in order to establish a centre for integrated science in marine chemical ecology.</p> <p>Main tasks are the construction of a marine ecotron and a marine chemical ecology lab, and the upgrading of the molecular biology lab and hosting facilities.</p>	EU contribution is requested for all tasks except for the upgrading of the hosting facilities. For task 1 (construction of a marine ecotron) the contribution requested amounts to 100 % of its cost, whereas funding requested for the two labs is less than 10 %.
CISB	21.3.2005	5.3.2004 (48 months)	18 866 474	1 730 000	9,17 %	<p>This project aims at setting up a new infrastructure, the Centre for Integrated Structural Biology (CISB), which will combine resources of three leading international institutes (EMBL, ESRF and ILL) together with the Université Joseph Fourier.</p> <p>Apart from construction and equipping of a new laboratory (Tasks 1 and 2), the project aims at providing new or enhanced technical platforms to promote post-genomic structural biology (Tasks 3 to 9).</p>	<p>No EU-contribution was requested for tasks 1 and 2 (construction and equipping).</p> <p>More than 60 % and 68 % contribution (425 000 euro and 200 000 euro) were asked for the construction of a diffractometer for neutron protein crystallography LAD III and the establishment of a high-throughput electron microscopy platform respectively.</p>

EU CONTRIBUTION FOR CNI PROJECTS

Project acronym	Grant agreement signature date (Commission)	Project start date (and duration)	Total budget after negotiation (euro)	EU contribution (euro)	EU contribution/cumulative funding (%)	Project description	EU contribution allocation
DAM-LR	11.4.2005	1.1.2005 (36 months)	3 596 000	382 000	10,62 %	The DAM-LR project is a fully distributed and virtual infrastructure. It consists of the development and deployment of an infrastructure for the European research community that should provide an easy management of and access to linguistic resources of all kinds such as large (multimedia) corpora, lexicons, grammar descriptions and others. DAM-LR is integrating the language resource archives (LRAs) of the partner institutions so that they appear to users as one single large repository.	The project consists of 12 tasks. The first seven tasks deal mainly with local infrastructures and no EU contribution is requested. The remaining five are devoted to establishing the distributed infrastructure and this is where the EU contribution is targeted (in the range of 35 to 55 %).
DIRAC-PHASE-1	9.12.2005	1.10.2005 (48 months)	100 951 660	10 405 360	10,31 %	This project is the first construction stage of the International Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research (FAIR), an around 1,2 billion euro project. DIRAC PHASE-1 has as its objective a major advance in facility performance and research capability at the UNILAC/SIS18 accelerator system at the GSI Laboratory in Darmstadt to deliver higher beam intensities and energies. This is achieved by two upgrades of the heavy-ion synchrotron SIS18, the adaptation of the infrastructure with the R3B-Magnet and the upgrade of the HADES-Spectrometer.	The EU contribution is allocated in a similar proportion to all tasks except one (defined as 'overall construction: All other construction tasks within the project duration period') for which no contribution has been requested.

EU CONTRIBUTION FOR CNI PROJECTS

Project acronym	Grant agreement signature date (Commission)	Project start date (and duration)	Total budget after negotiation (euro)	EU contribution (euro)	EU contribution/cumulative funding (%)	Project description	EU contribution allocation
EUTRICOD	19.10.2005	1.11.2004 (48 months)	21 814 400	2 060 000	9,44 %	The objective of this project is to sustain and extend research capacities and achieve international recognition as a European Training and Research Centre for Imported and Highly Contagious Diseases.	The bulk of the EU contribution is requested for three specific work packages: the construction of the BSL 3 and the BSL 4 units and the upgrading of a research campus in Ghana.
ISIS TS2	21.4.2005	1.3.2005 (48 months)	165 015 111	11 000 000	6,67 %	ISIS TS2 is an upgrade of the ISIS spallation neutron source, offering the possibility for 18 new neutron scattering instruments with improved and optimised performance. The project aims at developing the first seven instruments.	The EU contribution is requested mainly for three tasks implying the design and construction of three instruments (Task 1. LET, Task 5. NIMROD and Task 7. WISH); some funding is also requested for the remaining instruments. There is only one task (Target: Design and Construction of Extracted Proton Beam, Buildings and services) for which EU contribution has not been requested.
STAR	18.4.2005	1.10.2004 (36 months)	103 925 000	11 000 000	10,58 %	The project's aim is to contribute to the establishment of a worldwide recognised and unique European-based Research Platform for advanced silicon research and development. This will be done by extending the infrastructure within the 300 mm compatible process driven research pilot-lines under construction at IMEC, CEA/LETI and FHG with mainly complementary equipment, and by cross-linking the three new research facilities for an optimised wafer exchange enabling the operation of a so-called 'virtual processing facility'.	EU funding is requested for all work packages: 10 % is requested for the first three (consisting of the extension of the 300 mm infrastructure in each of the three sites) whereas 100 % is requested for management and dissemination activities.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

II.

The role of the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6) research infrastructure actions in developing new research facilities more rapidly and effectively than under the past tradition has been clearly acknowledged by the experts who carried out the evaluation of the Sixth Framework Programme¹.

III. First indent

The Commission welcomes the positive assessment of the Design Studies (DS) scheme.

III. Second indent

As regards the Construction of New Infrastructures (CNI) scheme, given a budget of less than 50 million euro, it could not be expected that this action would in itself result in the construction of new infrastructures, but rather enhance their European dimension. As such, the CNI scheme is to be considered as a pilot exercise that allowed the Commission to better define future actions through a more strategic approach.

III. Third indent

Information actions aimed at potential beneficiaries organised by the Commission as well as by the RTD National Contact Points regularly pointed out the possibility of using complementary funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Structural Funds. However, since Structural Funds are managed at national level, Member States and regional authorities had the main responsibility for providing appropriate information to potential beneficiaries.

¹ 'Evaluation of the Sixth Framework programme for research and technological development 2002–06', Report of the Expert group, February 2009.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

IV.

The Commission has already reconsidered the support for construction of new research infrastructures. Drawing on the lessons learnt from the CNI projects as a pilot experience, support for the construction of new infrastructures has been further developed in the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and put on a different footing. The support under FP7 is provided through a strategic top-down approach based on the list of projects identified in the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) European roadmap for new research infrastructures. This support is intended mainly for the preparatory phase.

The Commission acknowledges that clear and realistic objectives are essential for the success of the scheme. For further developments, the Commission will carefully consider all elements in order to get the best value for money.

The Commission agrees with the Court that the benefits of using complementary funding should be clearly documented. Significant progress has been made under FP7.

The Commission published, in 2008, a Practical Guide to EU funding opportunities for research and innovation² and invited the Member States to improve the arrangements for coordinated use of funding. Workshops on the regional development of research infrastructures have also been organised under the Slovenian and the Czech Presidencies³.

Further developments will be considered in the light of a report by an Expert Group on synergies between Research, Innovation and Cohesion Policies that is being set up in 2010 with the objective of making concrete recommendations (a) on synergies of action in the implementation of policies for the remainder of the current programming period (2007–13) and (b) on synergies of design of policies for the next programming period (from 2014).

² Competitive European Regions Through Research and Innovation — Practical Guide to EU Funding Opportunities for Research and Innovation — 2008, available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/eu-funding-guide/home_en.html

³ Research Infrastructures and their Structuring Dimension within the European Research Area (Infrastructure-ERA), 5–6 March 2008, Brdo, Slovenia; Research Infrastructures and the regional dimension of ERA (RIC 2009), 24–25 March 2009, Prague, Czech Republic.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

OBSERVATIONS

22–23.

The Commission welcomes the positive assessment of the DS scheme by the stakeholders and by the Court itself.

25–26.

The Commission emphasises that the catalysing effect has to be considered in terms of European added value. The objective of the CNI scheme was to optimise 'European infrastructures by providing limited support for the development of a restricted number of projects for new infrastructures in duly justified cases where such support could have a critical catalysing effect in terms of European added value'⁴.

EU funding under the CNI scheme was not meant to trigger any decision to build new infrastructure but rather to enhance the European dimension. It is clear that the EU funding was not the determinant factor allowing projects to go ahead but rather a factor determining that these projects would become more European.

28.

In order to be selected, CNI projects had to demonstrate how European researchers would benefit from accessing the proposed new infrastructure.

The access activities as such were not supported under the CNI scheme. Some of the facilities stemming from the CNI projects have been funded by the European Commission under FP7, such as the Centre for Integrated Structural Biology (CISB). Within the FP7 PCUBE project, access is provided to European researchers to installations constructed at CISB.

29.

The Commission considers that the 'catalysing effect' has to be analysed 'in terms of European added value'. The CNI scheme did not aim at catalysing the actual construction. EU funding under the CNI scheme was intended to enhance the European dimension of new research infrastructures developed by Member States.

30.

Most of the CNI projects did indeed have a starting date preceding signature of the contract. This possibility was clearly announced in the Guide for Proposers.

31.

Applicants had to demonstrate (see Guide for Proposers) that 'support has been established, on the basis of sources other than EU funding, for the construction and the subsequent operation of the infrastructure'. Therefore, it is obvious that construction of the infrastructures supported through the CNI scheme would have taken place anyway.

⁴ Council Decision 2002/835/EC.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

42.

Information actions aimed at potential beneficiaries organised by the Commission as well as by the RTD National Contact Points regularly pointed out the possibility of using complementary funding from the EIB and the Structural Funds. It should be noted that since Structural Funds are managed at national level, Member States and regional authorities had the main responsibility for providing appropriate information to potential beneficiaries.

43.

Research and Structural Funds have been better coordinated since 2007.

The Regulations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Structural Funds and the Commission's implementing Regulations are the baseline documents for using Structural Funds. Implementation of the Structural Funds is decentralised at Member State level. In order to facilitate complementarity of funding, the Commission invited the Member States to improve the arrangements for coordinated use of funding and, in 2008, published a Practical Guide that should contribute to achieving this objective.

An Expert Group on synergies between Research, Innovation and Cohesion Policies (also covering the FP7 Regions of Knowledge and Research Potential actions) is being set up in the first half of 2010 with the objective of making concrete recommendations (a) on synergies of action in the implementation of policies for the remainder of the current programming period (2007–13) and (b) on synergies of design of policies for the next programming period (from 2014). The expert group's report is expected to be delivered in the first half of 2011.

43. (i)

The Regulations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Structural Funds and the Commission's implementing Regulations did not include a specific definition of the different categories of expenditure.

43. (ii–iii)

Coordination action is taking place under FP7 to facilitate the use of complementary funds. Systematic screening of potential funding opportunities for projects on the ESFRI roadmap has been undertaken by DG REGIO. Co-funding by Structural Funds is under consideration for the construction of new infrastructures in relevant countries for several ESFRI projects: BBMRI, ELI, LIFEWATCH, NEUTRON ESS and SPIRAL2.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

44.

The CNI support made it possible to upgrade the facilities as pointed out by the Court. The Commission considers that the CNI scheme started the process leading to the creation of new facilities of pan-European interest.

46.

Given the limited budget (less than 50 million euro) allocated to the implementation of the CNI scheme, it could not be expected that this action would in itself result in the construction of new infrastructures. The objective was to provide the new infrastructures with a European dimension. As such, the CNI scheme is rather to be considered as a pilot exercise that allowed the Commission to better define future actions through a more strategic approach.

Recommendation 1

The Commission has already reconsidered the support for construction of new research infrastructures. Drawing on the lessons learnt from the CNI projects as a pilot experience, support for the construction of new infrastructures has been further developed in FP7 and put on a different footing. The support under FP7 is provided through a strategic top-down approach based on the list of projects identified in the ESFRI European roadmap for new research infrastructures. This support is intended mainly for the preparatory phase.

The added value and catalytic impact of the support thereby provided for the construction of new infrastructures is acknowledged by Member States, in Council Conclusions relating to research infrastructures and the ERA⁵.

The Commission recognises the importance of clearly defining scheme objectives.

⁵ Competitiveness Council Conclusions on 'Research Infrastructures in the European Research Area' of 22 May 2007; Competitiveness Council Conclusions on 'European Research Infrastructures and their regional dimension' of 30 May 2008; Competitiveness Council Conclusions on the 'Research Infrastructures and the regional dimension of the European Research Area (ERA)' of 29 May 2009.

REPLY OF THE COMMISSION

47.

Information actions aimed at potential beneficiaries organised by the Commission as well as by the RTD National Contact Points regularly pointed out the possibility of using complementary funding from the EIB and the Structural Funds. Since Structural Funds are managed at national level, Member States and regional authorities had the main responsibility for providing appropriate information to potential beneficiaries.

It should also be noted that the use, in FP6, of complementary funding for the development of new infrastructures was hindered by the fact that operational programmes for the allocation of Structural Funds had already been defined since 2000, before the start of FP6.

Recommendation 2

The Commission agrees with the Court that the benefits of using complementary funding sources should be made clear to potential applicants and further promoted. Significant progress has been made under FP7.

The Commission published, in 2008, a Practical Guide to EU funding opportunities for research and innovation⁶ and invited the Member States to improve the arrangements for coordinated use of funding.

⁶ Competitive European Regions Through Research and Innovation — Practical Guide to EU Funding Opportunities for Research and Innovation — 2008, available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/eu-funding-guide/home_en.html

Workshops on the regional development of research infrastructures have also been organised under the Slovenian and the Czech Presidencies⁷.

Furthermore, systematic screening of potential funding opportunities for projects on the ESFRI roadmap has been undertaken by DG REGIO. As a result, co-funding by Structural Funds is under consideration for the construction of new infrastructures for several ESFRI projects.

The possibility of loans provided by the EIB is also being explored, through the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF) or normal loans: several projects are currently under negotiation, including ESFRI projects.

Further developments will be considered in the light of a report by an Expert Group on synergies between Research, Innovation and Cohesion Policies that is being set up in 2010 with the objective of making concrete recommendations (a) on synergies of action in the implementation of policies for the remainder of the current programming period (2007–13) and (b) on synergies of design of policies for the next programming period (from 2014).

⁷ Research Infrastructures and their Structuring Dimension within the European Research Area (Infrastructure-ERA), 5–6 March 2008, Brdo, Slovenia; Research Infrastructures and the regional dimension of ERA (RIC 2009), 24–25 March 2009, Prague, Czech Republic.

European Court of Auditors

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THE DESIGN STUDIES (DS) AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW INFRASTRUCTURES (CNI) SUPPORT SCHEMES FORM PART OF EU POLICY TO DEVELOP HIGH-LEVEL RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES FOR EUROPE. IN THIS REPORT THE COURT EXAMINES WHETHER THE TWO SCHEMES HAD RESULTED IN SUCH DEVELOPMENT AND, IN PARTICULAR, WHETHER THE DS SCHEME HAD USEFULLY AIDED THOSE MAKING DECISIONS CONCERNING INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS AND WHETHER THE CNI SCHEME HAD ACTUALLY RESULTED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'NEW' INFRASTRUCTURES.



EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS



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