



**European Cooperation
in the field of Scientific
and Technical Research
- COST -**

Brussels, 16 September 2003

Secretariat

COST 263/03

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Subject : 155th meeting of the COST Senior Officials Committee held in Brussels on
14 July 2003

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair informed the Committee that regrets had been received from Czech and Luxembourg delegations.

The Chair welcomed the new Spanish National Co-ordinator, Mr Esteban MANRIZUE REOL to the Committee.

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Committee adopted the agenda, as set out in Telex n° 3176 of 30 June 2003.

2. APPROVAL OF THE SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS OF THE 154th MEETING

(doc. COST 256/03)

The Committee approved the abovementioned Summary of Conclusions. with the following amendments:

page 4, first line: "Some delegations" to read "Most delegations";

page 4, third line: "These delegations" to read "Some delegations";

page 6, point 11, first bullet point to read: "The Chair proposed a one-day meeting of the CSO to be held on 2 July in Brussels to consider the contract foreseen to be concluded between the Commission and the ESF in July."

3. INFORMATION FROM

- the Italian EU Presidency

Prof. Fedi, on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Research informed the Committee of the activities during the Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the field of Research (Annex 2).

The informal Competitiveness Council meeting held on 11 - 12 July in Rome has been an opportunity to exchange views between EU delegations and acceding States on the programme of the Italian EU Presidency.

Formal meetings of the Competitiveness Council are planned for 22/23 September and 10/11 November of this year. The 3% target of GDP investment in research, which was reconfirmed by the March 2003 European Council, will receive special attention, whereas the open method of coordination and other activities identified in the Lisbon Process to further the development of the European Research Area (ERA) will also be on the agenda.

- the delegations

The Greek delegation, recalling that co-operation with Balkan countries had been one of the priorities of the Greek Presidency, informed the Committee of the results of the Ministerial Conference of the Research Ministers of the EU and the Balkan countries held on 27 June. The Conference had adopted an Action Plan for RTD activities referring to COST and other European initiatives to improve networking and collaboration. The next SIG meeting in September will have a thorough discussion to study further possibilities for co-operation in this area.

The Slovenian delegation informed the Committee of the First Congress of European microbiologists "EuroMicroDay2003" that was held in Ljubljana at the end of June 2003 to promote participation in different European research programmes and initiatives. Several representatives from COST as well as from the TCs Agriculture, Food Sciences and Biotechnology had attended the opening day of the Congress.

- the Commission

The Commission representative informed the Committee of its intention to extend the contracts of seconded national experts (SNEs) for the continued transition period. Delegations were invited to follow this up at national level.

4. TRANSITION PERIOD AND PROGRESS REPORT ON COST OFFICE

- Contract negotiations between the ESF and the Commission

The Commission representative informed the Committee on the contract negotiations between the Commission and the ESF. The future contract to be concluded would consist of several parts, the first part covering a period of 18 months with a budget of 22 M€. The CSO would be invited to give its consent to the ESF revised proposal for a technical annex presented as "Abbreviated Revised Proposal for a Grant: COST 2003 - 2007, First Part of Rolling Contract (up to December 2004)". This would facilitate the Programme Committee in giving its opinion, which was needed for a formal decision by the Commission.

The ESF representative stated that the abovementioned revised proposal tried to reflect observations from both the CSO and the results of the evaluation report. The proposal on the first contract period was based on the upper limit of the total overall budget of 80 M€ laid down in the FP6 co-decision with regard to support to COST. As to the mid-term review in 2005, it was stressed that the questions to be addressed during that exercise could not be answered by the ESF without the full support of the CSO.

The postponement of the CSO meeting originally scheduled for 2 July and the delayed timetable was regretted by some delegations (IT, PL, SW) during the ensuing discussion. Also reference was made to the difficulty to take position on a contract in a not yet final version.

With regard to the SNEs currently seconded to the Commission the Norwegian delegation, stressing the human elements involved, suggested the CSO to recommend to the ESF that all current personnel should be taken onboard to the new COST Office, with equal contract conditions as they have at present, and this decision should be communicated to the persons involved as soon as possible.

The Chair recalled that questions related to staff would be an ESF responsibility and that, due to different legal status, identical conditions offered by the Commission could not be guaranteed by the ESF.

In reply to delegations' questions, the Commission clarified the rules for a specific support contract, which impose a division between Direct Science costs and Direct Management costs, whereas so-called indirect costs are covered by a standard overhead rate of 20%. Concerning accountability and liability it was clarified that this line was between the two contract parties involved. Especially the Irish delegation questioned about the CSO role on the process and called for further legal advice on this aspect.

As to the suggestion for the CSO to move towards a supervisory role, several delegations considered that a change in the functioning of the CSO should not decrease its powers as an intergovernmental decision-making body of COST. The Committee felt that a clear definition of the term "supervisory" should be elaborated during future meetings.

The Austrian delegation reiterated its view that, since the contract is between the Commission and the ESF, there would be no further need to seek the Committee's approval, as decisions had been taken at the recent Ministerial Conference. It asked to enter its statement in the summary of the meeting (Annex 3).

Following the request of the Austrian delegation, the delegations of France, Hungary, Italy and Portugal also stated their intention to forward a written statement in this respect to be included in the Summary of Conclusions of the meeting (Annex 3).

The Chair concluded the discussion with the following Conclusions:

The Committee has taken note of the document received from the ESF¹, which is the result of the negotiations that the ESF has held with the Commission and which will be transformed into the technical annex of the contract to be concluded between the Commission and the ESF.

The Committee emphasises that all relevant changes suggested to the *modus operandi* of COST are to be presented for the CSO for its decision.

The Committee recommends to the ESF that it establish contracts with the SNEs beyond 31 December 2003 under conditions, if possible, equal to the current contracts.

The Committee stresses the need to clarify the role of all stakeholders as soon as possible.

The Committee's assent on the ESF proposal will be transmitted to Mr Mitsos, Director General, Commission DG Research, in a letter from the CSO Chair.

¹ Document including the amendments as agreed at the meeting, as set out in doc. COST 262/03.

5. REQUESTS FOR PROLONGATION OR EXTENSION OF THE DURATION OF COST ACTIONS

The Committee took note of the decision of the Bureau to approve requests for extension of the following COST Actions:

COST A15: Reforming Social Protection Systems in Europe (6 months)

COST A17: Small and Medium Enterprises, Economic Development and Regional Convergence in Europe (12 months)

COST B12: Radiotracers for in vivo assessment of biological function (12 months)

COST B15: Modelling during Drug Development (9 months)

COST B17: Insulin resistance, obesity and diabetes mellitus in the elderly (12 months)

COST B19: Molecular cytogenetics of solid tumours (12 months)

COST 830: Microbial Inoculants in Agriculture and in the Environment (12 months)

COST 845: Brucellosis in Animals and Man (12 months)

COST 840: Bioencapsulation innovations and technologies (12 months)

COST E15: Advances in the drying of wood (12 months)

COST E20: Wood fibre cell wall structure (6 months)

COST E22: Environmental optimisation of wood protection (4,5 months)

The Committee agreed to the recommendation of the Bureau to agree to

- the 2nd extension of COST Action B14: Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (6 months),
- the prolongation of COST Action D14: Functional Molecular Materials (15 months).

In this context it was observed that as soon as the new COST Office is set up, proposals for extensions of Actions should be submitted for approval towards the end of an Action accompanied by a justified motivation.

6. MANDATE OF JAF CHAIR/VICE-CHAIR OF THE CSO

The Chair reminded the Committee that the mandate of the present JAF Chair would expire in October 2003. During the transition period, the possibility of prolongation of the present mandate was referred to in the event of absence of candidates.

With a view to reaching a decision on this point at the next CSO meeting in October, the Chair invited delegations to forward candidatures for JAF Chair/CSO Vice-Chair to the Council Secretariat by e-mail by 12 September 2003.²

7. INFORMATION ON THE JOINT COST - ESF MEETING

The JAF Chair informed the Committee that contacts with the ESF Standing Committees had been favourable towards the initiative to hold a joint meeting on 2 October and some tentative information on the level of participation was already received.

The Italian delegate, Prof. Fedi, observed that the main objective of the meeting would be to get together with the ESF Standing Committees, stating that COST TC Chairs were strongly in favour of this planned joint meeting.

The Chair concluded the discussion by stating that there was a strong support to organise the joint meeting on 2 October. As to the participation it was decided not to involve the different ESF Boards at this stage. The JAF Chair, in consultation with Prof. Fedi when necessary, was invited to continue with the preparations.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- The Committee decided to extend the contract of Mr Gérard RIVIERE, seconded French national expert to the COST Secretariat, by a period of six months (01.10.2003 - 31.03.2004).

The Chair recalled that the terms of detachment would stay unchanged: only a monthly indemnity to be covered by the COST Fund. He thanked the French authorities for agreeing to continue the above arrangement on these terms.

² By the above date the Secretariat had received the candidature of the Czech Republic, Mr. Milos Chovjka.

- The Slovak delegation reminded the Committee of its Minister's invitation to hold the CSO meeting on 4-5 December in Bratislava. Preparations for the meeting were underway and detailed information would be forwarded to COST delegations.

- The Swiss delegation informed the Committee that COST had been given a one-hour slot to present its activities in this field at the planned NanoFair Conference on 9-11 September 2003.

- The Commission representative, in reply to the Polish delegation, reported on the situation of the 5 Meuro (originating from the contributions by third countries to the 5th FP) foreseen to cover expenses occurred during the transitional period. He stated that commitments were made continuously, estimating their present level being about 60% of the total amount.

The Commission would provide statistics on ongoing and finishing COST Actions at the next JAF/SIG meeting in September.

List of participants**CHAIRMAN:** Mr Gösta DIEHL

- AUSTRIA** : Ms Helga MIELING
Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology

Mr. Florian LORENZ
Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- BELGIUM** : Mr Hendrik MONARD
OSTC
- CROATIA** : Mr Bozidar BIONDIC
Institute of Geology
- CYPRUS** : Ms Georgiana GEORGIOU
Mission of Cyprus to the EU
- DENMARK** : Mr Gorm BRAMSNAES
Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
- ESTONIA** : Ms Ülle MUST
Archimedes Foundation
- FINLAND** : Ms Eili ERVELÄ-MYREEN
Academy of Finland
- FRANCE** : Mr Bertrand BOUCHET
Permanent Representation of France to the EU
- GERMANY** : Mr Helmut LÖWE
Federal Ministry of Education and Research
- GREECE** : Mr John G. BARTZIS
NCSR Demokritos
- HUNGARY** : Ms Márta KISS MARJAY
Ministry of Education
- IRELAND** : Mr Liam BRADLEY
Enterprise Ireland

Ms Mary GRANT
Dept Enterprise, Trade and Employment

<u>ITALY</u>	:	Mr Francesco FEDI Ministry of Education, University and Research
		Mr Fabio FIORENTINO Ministry of Education, University and Research
<u>NETHERLANDS</u>	:	Mr Dick SCHOOREL SENER/EG-Liaison
<u>NORWAY</u>	:	Mr Jan ASKEROI Ministry of Trade and Industry
<u>POLAND</u>	:	Mr Marek ZDANOWSKI Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology
<u>PORTUGAL</u>	:	Ms Maria Fernanda SOUTO SEPULVEDA GRICES
<u>SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO:</u>		Mr Dragan MILUTINOVIC COST National Coordinator
<u>SLOVAKIA</u>	:	Ms Sona STRAKOVA Ministry of Education
<u>SLOVENIA</u>	:	Ms Marija SKERLJ Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
<u>SPAIN</u>	:	Mr Esteban MANRIQUE REOL Ministry of Science and Technology
		Mr Julio GUZMAN RODRIGUEZ Ministry of Science and Technology
<u>SWEDEN</u>	:	Mr Stefan CAIREN Ministry of Industry and Trade
<u>SWITZERLAND</u>	:	Ms Eva KLAPER BBW
<u>UNITED KINGDOM</u>	:	Mr Chris DARBY Department of Trade & Industry
		Mr Chris REILLY Department of Trade & Industry

COMMISSION

: Mr Robert Jan SMITS
DG Research

Mr Markku WARRAS
DG Research

Mr. Wolfgang OBERT
DG Research

Mihail PASCU
DG Research

Mr. Emil FULAJTAR
DG Research

Mr. Günter SIEGEL
DG Research

Mr. Denis NEIBECKER
DG Research

Mr. Jan SPOUSTA
DG Research

Mr. Pavol NEJEDLIK
DG Research

Mr. Arne BEEN
DG Research

Ms. Bjorg OFSTAD
DG Research

Mr. Petrus LADISLAV
DG Research

Mr. Bouktje STOL
DG Research

Ms. Anna DANTI
DG Research

Mr. John WILLIAMS
DG Research

Mr. Ilias SAMARAS
DG Research

Mr. Klaus PITHAN
DG Research

**EUROPEAN SCIENCE
FOUNDATION**

: Mr Tony MAYER
Head of Secretary General's Office

COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

: Mr Erwin van RIJ
DG "C"

Ms Ulla MESIÄ
DG "C"

Mr Gérard RIVIERE
DG "C"

ITALIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
- PRIORITIES IN THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

The goal set by the Lisbon process of modernising the European economy by increasing flexibility and integration, promoting research and new technologies and creating more and better jobs for European citizens requires new impetus.

In this respect, the Italian Presidency will give priority to the following actions:

- (a) increasing investments in research and innovation with a wide and privileged participation of SMEs;
- (b) developing and diversifying the centres of excellence and their networks, in view of a multi-centred approach to the European Research Areas;
- (c) ensuring appropriate training and mobility of researchers, paying specific attention to the development of their careers and to women's participation in science.

In order to achieve the target of increasing R&D investment to 3% of GDP by 2010 - with private funding covering two-thirds of total R&D spending - the EU and Member States will need to adopt a two-step approach: increasing public investments to attract private funding and, once private investments have reached a substantial level, gradually phasing out public funding.

In order to reach these objectives, the Italian Presidency promotes specific initiatives and the technical conferences on the Presidency agenda.

Informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers

(Rome, 11-12 July 2003)

The Italian Government, during its presidency, will give new impetus to the decisions reached at the Seville Council in order to integrate different policy areas and create the basis for a real and effective Competitiveness Council, capable of combining research issues with industry expectations, governed by the market.

The Informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers has brought together, for the first time, European decision-makers responsible for research, industry and internal market to discuss the following topic: "Which policies for a competitive Europe in a global market".

The successful experience of Technological Districts, which were set up by a number of member countries to support the introduction and dissemination of innovation-enabling technologies in small and medium-sized enterprises, in cooperation with high-tech enterprises, universities, research bodies, financial operators and local authorities, could serve as a model for territorial development.

During the informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers, the Italian Presidency aimed to define common objectives and consistent tools for R&D investment growth, in support of the Resolution proposal of the Italian Presidency on the theme "**Research and development for SMEs in view of reaching 3% European GDP**".

Conference "Networks of excellence: the large research infrastructures"

(Trieste, 21-22 November)

The purpose of this technical meeting is to analyse the issue of networks of excellence in connection with the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructure (ESFRI).

The Conference will assess the progress of these initiatives in order to propose appropriate measures to consolidate and develop research infrastructure, in view of EU enlargement. The Italian Presidency intends to include the results of the debate in a Declaration on "Network and centres of excellence: the large research infrastructures".

Conference "The research career within the European Research Area"

(Florence, 18 July)

The harmonisation of the research career within the European Research Area is the central issue of this technical conference.

The debate will highlight the proposed strategy aimed at creating a favourable environment for the mobility of researchers within the European Research Area, in order to enhance, attract and retain highly skilled human resources in research and innovation.

The aim of the conference is to pave the way for an official document which provides the framework for a resolution on "The career of researchers within the European Research Area", to be submitted to the EU Council in November.

Conference "Women, Science and Society"

(Rome, 3-5 December)

The Conference will focus on the need to promote wider participation of women in scientific research as part of the process aimed at developing a more balanced relation between science and society.

Too many obstacles and too many stereotypes still keep women out of science, thus preventing them from increasing their contribution in all aspects of political, social and economic life, in view of growing social cohesion.

The underlying idea of the Conference is that this is not only a matter of gender equality, but a crucial element to achieve the following strategic goals in keeping with the Lisbon strategy and the creation of a European Research Area: human capital development, increased innovation, competitiveness and attractiveness of the European research system.

The Conference will examine women's participation in research with reference to specific issues - recently analysed by the Commission and the Helsinki Group - relating to competence, innovation and interdisciplinarity of knowledge and women's visibility in the research world.

Reaching a 40% female presence in research at various levels and with different tasks is the final objective of this Conference, which could be included in the Presidency Conclusions.

STATEMENTS TO THE SUMMARY

1. The Austrian delegation states that:

- the relevant decisions had been taken by the COST ministers on the occasion of the COST Ministerial Conference in Dubrovnik, as recorded in the Dubrovnik Declaration, thus providing the basis for all further proceedings.
- the COST Member States are not parties to the contract, which is being concluded exclusively by the European Commission with the European Science Foundation, and which has not been brought in its entire and final text to the knowledge of the COST CSO.

Therefore, in this situation, there is no need for Austria as a COST Member State to give its agreement to the text of the proposed contract to which it is not a party.

2. The Italian delegation states that, in the Technical Annex the description of COST is not fair and the outstanding merits of COST are not recognised. For more than 30 years the scientific community has utilised COST as a unique framework for cooperation in research at the European level even after the launching of other research initiatives as the ESF, the Framework Programmes or EUREKA. The constant increase in the number of COST Actions from the 7 Actions in 1971 to the about 200 Actions in the year 2000 is indeed a sign of the vitality of COST. The increase in quantity has been accompanied by the high quality of the results obtained. Italy believes that the success of COST is due to its unique characteristics not only bottom-up approach or à la carte participation but also spontaneity, flexibility and equality of access. Consequently, although convinced that some reforms are indeed necessary to increase the efficiency of COST, Italy will oppose to any change that may tend to abolish these characteristics and transform COST into something different.

The above considerations notwithstanding, Italy does not wish to stop the process of the signature of the EC-ESF Contract in view of the consequent detrimental effects of delays in this process on COST Actions whose activities already risked to be jeopardised by the decision of the EC DG Research not to provide anymore the scientific secretariat to COST and by the uncertainties of the subsequent transition period. On the other side, while recognising that some of its earlier comments had been taken into account and the many positive aspects of the Technical Annex, Italy cannot ignore that some of the proposals contained in the Technical Annex to the Contract are not in line with the Dubrovnik Declaration and with the COST spirit, tradition and characteristics. **Consequently Italy endorses the proposal for a Grant “ COST 2003-2007” with the above reservations and under the binding conditions that each and every “reform” to the procedures currently adopted in COST be presented and explicitly approved by the COST CSO and that the continuation of the contract after the first 18 months will be possible only after a positive assessment from the COST CSO.**

3. The Hungarian delegation states that Hungary finds it a great opportunity for ESF and COST to work out real synergy and strong cooperation in the fields they have common interests.

However, in our opinion the proposed annex contains elements that may alter COST cooperation basically (we refer to propositions like future supervisory role of the CSO, establishing Core Groups for MCs - to act on behalf of the MC. etc.). We have to keep in mind, that COST has not only been operating successfully in networking the scientific and technical research since its foundation, but the growing number of its actions shows that the European research community needs this kind of cooperation. We find it is of great importance that COST co-operation should keep its own identity, own features, benefits and its unique way of contributing to the European Research Area. Accordingly all propositions of the ESF for changing COST structure in any way should be subject to the approval of the CSO.

Our position to the proposed supervisory role for the CSO is the following:

COST is an intergovernmental cooperation and the CSO consists of the representatives of the governments. The research behind the activity in COST is financed nationally. The suggested supervisory role is a reduction in tasks compared to the present role of the CSO. Consequently the CSO should remain the main decision-making body of COST. Any decision concerning

devolution of certain tasks of the CSO should be made only after the agreement of the CSO members is sought.

Hungary has no intention to stop the signing procedure of the ESF-Commission contract, but we ask that the above considerations should be noted.

4. The Portuguese delegation states that it supports the statement of the Italian delegation.

Also, like Hungary, the Portuguese delegation does not agree with the reduction of the role of the CSO in the COST process. The CSO must remain the decision-making body in COST and not only a supervisory one. The Portuguese delegation thinks that the COST cooperation should keep its own identity and its own features for the benefit of ERA;

Concerning the issue of "competition" between COST Action Proposals, a procedure utilised in the ESF modus operandi, the Portuguese delegation does not agree with it. The Portuguese delegation thinks that we can make the quality control of Actions selected using the traditional COST procedure.

5. The French delegation stated the following:

- (a) France objects to the fact that there was no simultaneous interpretation into French at this meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials.

Regarding the draft contract between the European Commission and the European Science Foundation for the transfer of COST secretarial functions:

- (b) France recalls COST's intergovernmental nature, which should not be compromised now that another body will be responsible for its scientific secretariat. Accordingly, the power of decision should remain with the Committee of Senior Officials, on which COST Member States are represented.

France would point out that at the meeting of the COST Committee of Senior Officials, the European Science Foundation representative agreed to amend the draft contract submitted to the Commission so as to specify that the Committee of Senior Officials would continue to be COST's strategic decision-making body.

The Committee of Senior Officials also approved the proposal to enter in the minutes of the meeting on 14 July 2003 that this strategic decision-making function "means that any relevant changes to COST working methods or procedures will have to be agreed by the Committee of Senior Officials".

- (c) Consequently, proposals in the draft contract between the European Commission and the ESF, such as the widespread introduction of competitive bidding and calls for proposals for the selection of proposals, for example, can only be adopted by decision of the Committee of Senior Officials.
