

CREST meeting on 21-22 January 2010; Suggestions of the Commission for the discussion on simplification

1 Context

As stated by the European Commission (EC) in its recent Communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on the progress made under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research (COM (2009) 209 final), to guarantee the overall performance of the Framework Programme (FP), management processes, procedures and tools need to be simple and effective to ensure responsible and accountable investment of the Community funds and to avoid administrative burden.

In this perspective the Commission announced its intention to issue by early 2010 a Communication on possibilities for simplifying the implementation of the European Research Framework Programmes.

2 Questions

In order to prepare efficiently the session dedicated to the Simplification, the Commission would like to submit to the CREST members a series of questions, inviting them to contribute to the preparation of the Communication.

Multiplicity of links between policy objectives and intervention mechanisms/funding schemes/instruments

The multiplicity of policy objectives pursued with the Framework Programme and their links with intervention mechanisms/funding schemes/instruments is an intrinsic source of its complexity. Focus and concentration, i.e. the setting of clear (positive and negative) policy priorities and clearer links between policy objectives and intervention mechanisms would be a powerful means for reducing complexity. Reducing this complexity requires choices, i.e. frustration of some legitimate interests.

What is the opinion of CREST on streamlining the portfolio of policy objectives and related intervention mechanisms?

"One-size-fits-all" versus "tailor-made" approach

Another source of complication is the tendency to cover an ever increasing number of special situations and types of participants with specific conditions and provisions. This leads to the fact that the legislative acts, the guidance documents, the ex-ante and ex-post checks and all related IT systems become increasingly complex, requiring more training for personnel and slowing down the processes. For a reversion of this tendency, in certain situations the return to a "one-size-fits-all" instead of a "tailor-made" approach seems appropriate. This could for example apply to the number of combinations between funding rates, activity types and organisation types, the number of methods for determining indirect costs or the special provisions for third parties.

What is the opinion of CREST on reverting the tendency of introducing ever more special conditions for special circumstances?

Actual cost based funding versus lump sums, flat rates and scales of unit costs

The current funding model based on actual costs contains already options of lump sums and flat rates for certain categories of costs (e.g. for indirect costs, subsistence costs for business trips, participation of ICPC beneficiaries, Marie Curie bursaries). This approach could be extended to other cost categories, e.g.; in the form of scales of unit costs for personnel, lump sums for travel costs etc.

What is the opinion of CREST on the extension of lump sums, flat rates or scales of unit costs to other cost categories?

Result-based versus input-based funding

A radical alternative to the current input-based funding with the related focus on financial ex-ante and ex-post checking would be a system with lump sums for whole projects and payment against output/deliverables/demonstration of best effort, without the need for ex-post checking of the details of costs incurred. This would shift the control focus from the financial side to the scientific-technical side.

What is the opinion of CREST on a fundamental change from an input-based EU research funding to a result-based funding?