

“I rely mainly on dialogue”

Interview with Dr. Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), Member of the ITRE Committee



Dr. Jorgo Chatzimarkakis

What kind of support do MEPs expect to receive from research organisations for their research policy activities?

European parliamentarians are all-rounders who need to be able to familiarise themselves quickly with complex topics. Given the many thematic areas that are treated in Parliament, however, we nonetheless require the input of reliable experts. In the field of research policy, I am particularly keen to learn about what researchers need and what general conditions they require to produce excellent results. In this, I predominantly rely on the exchange of ideas.

How do you intend to incorporate this science and research expertise into the EP's decision-making processes?

Actually, this question refers to the previous one. I mainly rely on dialogue and

on a truly constructive exchange of ideas. Let me illustrate this with a concrete example. Health policy questions are one of my focal points in EU politics. I am currently planning an initiative on ‘Rare Diseases’ that aims to interlink politics and research. Specifically, I want to initiate a European group of experts on primary immune deficiencies that will support the development of basic principles for future EU legislation in this complex area. A recommendation from the experts would provide an excellent starting point and would lead to improving the handling of such diseases in the EU and its member states.

How can EU research funding be made more attractive for the scientific community and so strengthen the innovation process in the European Research Area?

One of the main problems of EU funding lies in the complicated nature of the application procedure. I have close ties with medium-sized businesses and am often told that such companies simply lack the resources to complete this process internally. The same applies for research funding and scientific organisations, respectively. Here too, criteria and processes need to become more transparent. This is essential if funds are to be used effectively in this area and if Europe is to continue to foster innovation.

Dear reader,

Following the European elections at the beginning of June, the European Parliament officially took up its work on 24 August 2009. Important decisions concerning research and innovation policy are on the agenda for the current legislative period, in particular the vote on the budget for the upcoming Eighth Framework Programme. It is the most important single budget line on which the European Parliament will co-decide during this legislative period. The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) play decisive roles in this process.

With the present publication, we would therefore like to provide an overview of the responsibilities and work of the ITRE committee and present the fourteen German representatives through short résumés. In addition to the views of an experienced member of the ITRE committee on the cooperation between Parliament and science, you will also find statements by the Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control and the European Commission on the current discussion concerning the simplification of EU research funding and the respective cooperation of the European institutions.

It is with great pleasure that KoWi remains at your disposal for any questions concerning EU research funding.

Best regards,
 Dr. Jens-Peter Gaul
 Director of KoWi

Field testing EU research funding

Dr. Inge Gräßle, Spokeswoman of the EPP-ED Group in the Committee on Budgetary Control

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Dr. Inge Gräßle

EU research funding has failed to pass the field test. Grand statements on the importance of research for the future of Europe face numerous practical problems. I believe these are increasing, rather than diminishing.

Although the Commission received more research funds for the period up to 2013, its self-imposed restrictions on recruiting more staff have made it difficult to distribute the money. In July, some 54 million euros were transferred from energy research to other budget lines. In mid-May, unassigned research funds amounted to a record of 8.614 billion euros – there's money in abundance but no way to get to it! The complex application procedure continues to have a success rate of under 20%. The European Research Area is thus deprived of considerable funds. And there is an additional problem. Many recipients relied on Commission-approved audits, but now face new checks and demands

for back-dated budget reconciliations, refunds and contractual penalties. This could set off an avalanche. If the financial management of EU projects calls for additional accounting, administrative costs will rise. This in turn means that large businesses and research organisations could pull out, which would represent a real danger for the European Research Area.

As early as in April, the Parliament called on the Commission to accept the accounts for average personnel costs, as approved by external auditors, and to reconcile this international business practice with the rules governing the Framework Programmes.

It's impossible to simplify the procedures without flat rates and clear audit structures. The greatest simplification would be a European Commission that evaluates results instead of investing considerable resources in checking the input. And so the European Court of Auditors could also be won over!

Further information:

- [European Commission, Proposal for Transfer of Appropriations DEC 19/2009, 30/06/09](#)
- [European Parliament, Discharge for Implementation of the General Budget for 2007, Commission, P6_TA\(2009\)0289, items 116-118](#)
- [European Court of Auditors, Special Report No 9/2007, 'Evaluating the EU Research and Technological Development \(RTD\) Framework Programmes — Could the Commission's approach be improved?'](#)

Responsibilities and competencies of ITRE

In order to prepare for parliamentary decisions in the plenary sessions, the 736 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are assigned to 20 permanent thematic committees.

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) of the European Parliament is responsible for questions pertaining to the areas of industrial policy, research policy, space and energy policy as well as information and communication technologies. It therefore plays a central role in the adoption of the EU Framework Programmes, which are subject to the co-decision procedure between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

ITRE is made up of 110 members and deputies, and reflects the political composition of the Plenary Assembly. It investigates and discusses legislative initiatives of the European Commission, draws up so-called "own initiative reports" and reports to the Plenary Assembly. Under the coordination of the committee chairman, the MEPs can vote on requests for amendments. The committee meetings are public and are held in Brussels once or twice a month. Cooperation and dialogue between the permanent and non-permanent committees is coordinated in the Conference of Committee Chairs.

Commission and Parliament – delivering on the bottom line

**Clara de la Torre, European Commission, DG Research,
Director “Inter-institutional and Legal Matters – Framework Programme”**

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Clara de la Torre

It's a simple but sometimes overlooked fact that in the field of research there is a strong and effective working relationship between the European Commission and the European Parliament. That the work doesn't always reach the headlines should not obscure the truth that both institutions cooperate closely at multiple levels. It simply can't be any other way if the work is to get done.

From the Commission side the dialogue with the Parliament and the interactions in its various committees not only serve the legislative process but also provide one of the main connections to European citizens - at the end of the day the real stakeholders.

One example of the many routine types of cooperation which take place involves the Commission's systems for evaluat-

ing, in effect measuring and assessing, the impacts of research and the implementation of the Framework Programme. The Parliament has taken a keen interest over recent years in steps taken to improve this system, stressing, amongst other things, the importance of adaptable, learning research programmes.

There has always been evaluation of the Framework Programme and indeed DG Research was in the vanguard of initiatives to develop the use of evaluation in public policy making. Recognising that the time was right for a rethink, as part of the launch of FP7, the system for research evaluation was changed quite substantially. This meant bringing in new types of assessment exercises, particularly so that the results were clear and well-targeted. A new exercise for monitoring FP implementation, now based mostly on indicators, was one of the changes.

Signalling the important role of the Parliament in this area, on 5 October the Director General for Research, Mr Silva Rodríguez, was invited to make a presentation to ITRE, including the latest FP Monitoring Report. This provided a snapshot of overall activity levels, such as the fact that in the first two years of FP7 more than 25,000 proposals for funding were received, involving almost 160,000 applicants. Strikingly, 136 countries are currently actively involved in FP7 activities. The report also sheds light on topical concerns, such as women in science, the participation of SMEs and the checks on projects which are sensitive on ethical grounds. The high-quality of discussion which followed revealed, I believe, both an appreciation of the report's quality but also the deep-down

strength of this partnership between the Parliament and Commission. This will be essential as we together face the important future challenges for European research.

The 2008 Monitoring Report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/reports/2009/pdf/second_fp7_monitoring_en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none



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German Members and Deputies in the ITRE-Committee

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Herbert Reul (CDU)

EPP, Chairman of the ITRE-Committee

Main topics: Industry and Research, Energy Policy

“We have to invest in research in the EU, in order to keep our leading positions in many areas and at the same time progress in other fields. We also need to think about how support structures can be further improved. An increased interlacing of research in the EU seems important to me.”

Members:

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Greens/EFA

Vice-Chairman of the Greens in the EP, Spokesman of the Parliamentary Group of German Greens

Main topics: Energy and Climate, Research Policy, Industrial Policy

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Main topics: Research/Innovation and Industrial Policy

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EPP

Main topics: Industry, Security, Energy, Relations with Korea

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S&D

Main topics: International Trade, European Energy Policy, EU Space Policy, Satellite Navigation System Galileo and EU Research Framework Programmes

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Dr. Angelika Niebler (CSU)

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Main topics: Research, Energy, Telecommunications and New Media, Industrial Policy, Rapporteur for the FP7: Specific Programme “Ideas”

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Main topics: European Regional Policy/European Industrial, Research and Energy Policy

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Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE);

Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)