

Speech at the European Parliament by Dr. Guido BRUNNER 12.1.1976  
on 13th January, 1976 in Luxembourg

Mr President,

I would first of all like to thank you for acceding to the Energy Committee's request by putting the proposal for a decision on the Community research policy by emergency procedure on the agenda of this plenary session.

The common research policy is experiencing serious difficulties. I do not want to paint a gloomy picture but if the Council does not soon take the necessary decisions, the common research policy may be faced with a similar crisis to that of 1968, when the research programme for the Joint Research Centre collapsed; this was a blow from which the common research policy has still not fully recovered. In contrast to that crisis, the source of the trouble this time does not lie at the Joint Research Centre but in the "indirect-action" research which is carried out in research establishments in the Member States.

What has happened?

Most of the indirect-action research projects in the Community expired at the end of last year. Further programmes have not yet been adopted by the Council. In particular, the following research programmes remain undecided:

- controlled nuclear fusion and plasma physics;
- protection of the environment;
- biology and health protection;
- application of nuclear technology to agriculture;
- reference materials and substances.

The Council did endeavour, at its session on 15 December 1975, to adopt a further programme in the field of nuclear fusion and plasma physics. But, despite lengthy discussions, it did not succeed in doing so. The eventual result of the fruitless debate on nuclear fusion was that the other programme proposals could no longer be discussed because the requisite quorum was lacking.

It is hard to understand why the Council could not once reach unanimity on the principle of the multiannual research programme on controlled nuclear fusion and plasma physics, because all the delegations were agreed that this programme was of overriding importance not only for Community research but also for the Community energy policy.

I will not go into details here, but if this programme were to produce the hoped-for results then the Community would have accomplished a major step on the way to affording future generations cheap and secure energy supply.

But one delegation was unfortunately of the opinion that it would have to make even an agreement on the principle of the programme dependent on a technicality, namely the question where, at some time in the future, the proposed major fusion experimental device - the Joint European Torus, abbreviated to JET - should be located.

There are a number of research establishments in the Member States which are all anxious to accommodate the JET, and I understand the interest shown by these establishments and their Member States in this question.

But the preoccupation with this problem should not make us forget our responsibility for the Community fusion programme as a whole. First and foremost comes the question whether the JET will be built at all. The question where it will be built is of secondary importance.

The other four programmes, namely, protection of the environment, biology and health protection, application of nuclear technology to agriculture and reference materials, have not - as already stated - been discussed at all. However, the debate in the Permanent Representatives Committee has shown that similar difficulties are to be feared with these programmes. And here too there is the danger that the decisions will be made conditional on other decisions, which would inevitably paralyse the common research policy instead of helping it all along.

I therefore earnestly hope that at its next session, which is planned for 24 February, the Council will face up to its responsibility for the common research policy and take the requisite decisions so that we can press forward with the on-going programmes.

It this were not done - which I hope will not be the case - then much of the common research policy would be in danger. Contracts with the research establishments in the Member States could not be extended or renewed, the research teams would break up, jobs would be in danger and the Community would be deprived of the fruits of its investments and efforts to date.

This could not but have repercussions on other areas of Community policy: the Community's policy on protection of the environment, for instance, would suffer if the Community's research results were not available promptly.

Thanks to the European Parliament's decision, the requisite funds for the indirect action with which we are concerned here are available in the Communities' budget for 1976. I would like to thank you again for getting the appropriation of these funds through, despite the absence of programme decisions. If we had not the funds, everything would be even more - and far more - difficult.

I therefore hope that the Council will not lag behind the Parliament and will take the necessary programme decisions at its next meeting. If it does, then it is in no small measure to the credit of the European Parliament, which, with its budget decision, reminded the Council of Ministers firmly of its responsibilities. The Commission therefore warmly welcomes the proposal for a resolution which is before you today.