

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
GENERAL SECRETARIAT

PRESS RELEASE

446th meeting of the Council

- Research -

Brussels, 29 March 1977

President: Mr Gerald KAUFMAN,
Minister of State,
Department of Industry,
of the United Kingdom

410/77 (Presse 46)

29.III.77

The Netherlands:

Mr R.F.M. LUBBERS Minister for Economic Affairs

The United Kingdom:

Mr Gerald DAUFMAN Minister of State,
Department of Industry

Mr Anthony Wedgwood BENN Secretary of State,
Department of Energy

Mr Alexander EADIE Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State,
Department of Energy

Mr Leslie HUCKFIELD Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State,
Department of Industry

For the Commission:

Mr Guido BRUNNER Member

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MULTIANNUAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Council recorded its final agreement on the Multiannual Research Programme of the Joint Research Centre 1977-1980 ⁽¹⁾. It had already agreed, at its meeting on 18 November 1976, on the technical content of the programme and on the staff complement and overall appropriation to be provided for it.

In addition, the Council adopted a common position on the role to be played by the Ispra establishment in the field of fusion technology.

It instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to study the manner in which this fusion project could be included in the research activities at Ispra.

⁽¹⁾ One delegation had however recorded its approval subject to confirmation by its Government.

JET PROJECT

The Council examined in detail the problems posed by the choice of the site of the JET and by the structures and management of the project.

It agreed to continue its discussions on the matter in the very near future -- at a date to be agreed by the Permanent Representatives Committee -- with a view to taking a final decision on the matter.

The Permanent Representatives Committee was instructed to examine, as a matter of urgency, the questions of structure and management on the basis of a document prepared by the Chair, with a view to submitting a report to the Council.

Meanwhile, the Council has authorized the Commission to extend employment contracts in order to retain the team working on the preparation of the project.

The Council adopted, as a joint position, the finalized text of the Sixth Directive on VAT and decided to forward this joint position to the European Parliament in accordance with the conciliation procedure.

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The Council adopted in the official languages of the Communities the Council Directive on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the driver-perceived noise level of wheeled agricultural or forestry tractors.

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The Council also adopted in the official languages of the Communities the Council Regulation amending Regulation (EEC) No 557/76 concerning the exchange rate to be applied in the agricultural sector for the French franc, the Irish pound and the Italian lira.

THE COMMUNITY'S "JET" PROJECT

The major decision facing the Council of Research Ministers meeting tomorrow 29 March is the future of the Community's JET project. The underlying question is where to place the Joint European Torus (JET), the giant machine, which could unlock the way towards a new and practically unlimited energy source similar to that of the sun. JET is a stage in the programme of research into nuclear fusion. The fusion process is safer and cleaner than the "conventional" nuclear fission process, which is based on uranium or plutonium. Since the "fuel" for the fusion process, the light atoms, deuterium and lithium, are available in water, supplies are practically limitless.

Community research into the process has been going on since 1958 giving member states a leading position in this branch of science. It is recognised that this is essentially a long term project with fusion energy production not to be expected until next century. It is, however, a promising project and it is from a Community view point the most "communautaire" of all research projects, with teams of scientists from all member countries pooling their efforts and sharing their knowledge. The Community programme of fusion research is an integrated one carried out throughout the Community. An international team headed by Dr. P.H. Rebut (France) has been working since 1973 at Culham near Oxford, England, on the design of JET. It is to be a large Tokamak, a doughnut shaped machine, weighing hundreds of tons (building time 7 or 8 years) in which the plasma containing the fusion atoms can be contained within a magnetic field and heated to the temperatures in excess of a hundred million degrees necessary to initiate the fusion process. (The United States and The Soviet Union have big programmes on nuclear fusion research. The Japanese are also preparing a similar machine to JET).

The Commission attaches special importance to the project for the following reasons: no state can dispose itself of the human and financial resources needed; all member states have energy needs which are increasing and there is everything to gain if this fusion research proves a success; the safety of the fusion system is particularly significant for Europe because of its high population density and high consumption of energy per head.

The proposal for the construction of JET was put forward by the Commission as early as July 1975 as part of its proposed multi-annual programme (1976 to 1990) on controlled thermo-nuclear fusion and plasma physics. In February 1976 the Council adopted the Community's five-year fusion programme and approved credits amounting to 124 million units of account to be paid from the Community budget to the programme. The Council, however, failed to reach a common position on the site of the JET project restricting the implementation of the fusion programme to 1976 with an appropriation of 20.8 MUA pending a final decision on JET. The following four sites are under discussion: Cadarache in France, Culham in England,arching in Germany, and the Joint Research Centre Ispra in Italy. Four Council meetings of Research Ministers were devoted to the JET problem. Several Council meetings of Foreign Ministers discussed this question during 1976. Yet a decision has not been taken. During the past weeks Dr. Brunner, the responsible Commissioner for Research and Energy, has had numerous discussions in the various capitals in an effort to clear the way for a positive decision now.

The Joint Research Centre - Prospects and Problems

The Council is also being called upon to approve the new 4-year (1977/1980) programme of the Joint Research Centre (JRC), proposed last year by the Commission to the Council, and agreed upon in principal by the Council on November 18th, 1976.

This expanded programme provides the Joint Research Centre with important tasks in the field of energy, environment, public services and with adequate financial means (346 MUA as compared to 220 MUA in the 1973-1976 programme - in real value terms, however, the increase is only of some 36 MUA). It sets also up a new "rolling system" for programme revision and renewal during the third year. This will ensure, along with a better adaptability of the programme to research policy trends, a long-term prospect of uninterrupted work for the JRC.

The cuts in staff (80 posts spread over four years) were regrettable but will not jeopardize the proper functioning of the JRC, which has a total staff of 2.119. These cuts reflect a trend from which all national research establishments suffer due to **budgetary stringency**.

Important as it is, the new programme for the Joint Research Centre and the JET project are very important, are not the only elements of the overall R and D effort of the European Community. There exist a number of other research programmes covering such fields as alternative energy resources, radio-biology and health protection, environmental research, recycling of Plutonium, radio-active waste and measures and standards. All these research programmes represent a total investment - spread over 4 to 5 years - of more than 700 Million Units of Account.

Bruxelles, le 28 mars 1977

GROUPE DU PORTE-PAROLE

PRIORITE P - 1

Remis au telex à 16 h 30

Note B10(77) 118 aux bureaux nationaux
c.c. aux membres du GPP, au directeur général DG I et au service
"relations avec les délégués" DG VIII

CONSEIL "RECHERCHE" DU 29 MARS 1977

Projet communautaire "JET"

La décision majeure à laquelle le Conseil des ministres de la recherche sera confronté à la réunion prévue pour demain 29 mars concerne l'avenir du projet communautaire JET. Le problème essentiel a trait au futur site du Joint European Torus (JET), la machine géante qui peut ouvrir la voie à une nouvelle source d'énergie pratiquement illimitée, semblable à l'énergie solaire. Le projet JET constitue une étape du programme de recherches en matière de fusion nucléaire. Le procédé de fusion est moins dangereux et plus propre que le procédé "conventionnel" de fission nucléaire, qui repose sur l'utilisation de l'uranium ou du plutonium. Le "combustible" utilisé pour la fusion des atomes légers de deutérium et de lithium étant disponible dans l'eau, les ressources sont pratiquement illimitées.

Les recherches communautaires sur ce procédé ont commencé dès 1958 et assuré aux Etats membres une position clé dans ce domaine de la science. Certes, il s'agit essentiellement d'un projet à long terme et on ne doit pas escompter la production d'énergie par fusion avant le début du siècle prochain. Il s'agit cependant d'un projet prometteur, le plus "communautaire" de tous les projets de recherche, du point de vue de la Communauté, pour lequel des équipes scientifiques de tous les Etats membres unissent leurs efforts et partagent leurs connaissances. Le programme communautaire de recherches en matière de fusion est un programme intégré, réalisé dans l'ensemble de la Communauté. Une équipe internationale dirigée par M. P. H. Rebut (France) travaille depuis 1973 à Culham, près d'Oxford (Angleterre), à la conception du JET. Il s'agit d'un gros Tokamak, une machine de forme annulaire, pesant plusieurs centaines de tonnes (délai de construction de 7 ou 8 ans), dans lequel les plasmas contenant les atomes de fusion peuvent être confinés dans un champ magnétique et portés à une température de plus de cent million de degrés, nécessaire pour engager le processus de fusion. (Les Etats-Unis et l'Union soviétique ont de vastes programmes de recherche dans le domaine de la fusion nucléaire. Les Japonais travaillent également à la mise au point d'une machine semblable au JET).

La Commission attache une importance particulière au projet, et ce pour les raisons suivantes : aucun Etat ne peut disposer à lui seul des ressources humaines et financières nécessaires; tous les Etats membres ont des besoins croissants en énergie et ne peuvent qu'y gagner si les recherches dans le domaine de la fusion aboutissent; la sécurité que présente le système de fusion est particulièrement importante pour l'Europe en raison de sa forte densité démographique et de sa forte consommation d'énergie par habitant.

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La proposition de construction du JET a été présentée par la Commission dès juillet 1975 dans le cadre de son projet de programme pluriannuel (1976 à 1980) sur la fusion thermo-nucléaire contrôlée et la physique des plasmas. En février 1976, le Conseil a adopté le programme quinquennal de fusion de la Communauté et approuvé l'affectation au programme d'un montant de 124 millions d'UC financé sur le budget communautaire. Le Conseil n'est cependant pas encore parvenu à arrêter une position commune sur le site du projet JET et a limité la réalisation du programme de fusion à 1976, avec une dotation de 20,8 MUC, en attendant une décision définitive. Les quatre sites suivants sont envisagés : Cadarache en France, Culham en Angleterre, Garching en Allemagne et le centre commun de recherche d'Ispra en Italie. Quatre réunions du Conseil des ministres de la recherche ont été consacrées au problème du JET. En 1976, cette question a été débattue à l'occasion de plusieurs réunions du Conseil des ministres des affaires étrangères. Aucune décision n'a encore été arrêtée à ce jour. Au cours des

dernières semaines, M. Brunner, membre de la Commission responsable de la recherche et de l'énergie, a eu de nombreux entretiens dans les différentes capitales européennes en vue de dégager les moyens permettant d'aboutir à une décision positive dès à présent.

Le Centre commun de recherche - Perspectives et problèmes.

Le Conseil est également appelé à adopter le nouveau programme quadriennal (1977/1980) du Centre Commun de Recherche (CCR), présenté l'année dernière au Conseil par la Commission et approuvé dans son principe par le Conseil le 18 novembre 1976.

Ce programme élargi confie au Centre Commun de Recherche des tâches importantes dans le domaine de l'énergie, de l'environnement, des services publics en le dotant des moyens financiers appropriés (346 MUC contre 220 MUC pour le programme 1973/76 - l'augmentation n'étant toutefois que de 36 MUC environ en valeur réelle). Il établit également un nouveau "système de rotation" pour la révision et la reconduction du programme durant la troisième année. Tout en garantissant une meilleure adaptabilité du programme aux orientations de la politique de recherche, ce système ouvrira au CCR la perspective d'un travail ininterrompu à long terme.

Si elles sont regrettables, les compressions de personnel (80 postes étalés sur quatre ans) ne compromettent pas le bon fonctionnement du CCR, dont les effectifs globaux sont de 2.118 personnes. Ces compressions de personnel sont le reflet d'une situation dont souffrent tous les établissements de recherche nationaux du fait de l'austérité budgétaire.

Pour important qu'il soit, le nouveau programme pour le Centre Commun de Recherche et le projet JET ne sont pas les seuls éléments de la politique globale de recherche et de développement de la Communauté européenne. Il existe toute une série d'autres programmes de recherche concernant des domaines tels que les sources en énergie de substitution, la radiobiologie et la protection sanitaire, la recherche écologique, le recyclage du plutonium, les déchets radio-actifs, ainsi que les mesures et les normes. Tous ces programmes de recherche représentent un investissement global de plus de 700 millions d'UC, échelonné sur 4 à 5 ans.

Amitiés,

R. RUGGIERO



COMMISSION
DES
COMMUNAUTÉS EUROPÉENNES

GRUPE DU PORTE-PAROLE

Bruxelles, le 30 mars 1977

RE/Lg

PRIORITE P-1

Remis aus telex à : 12640

Note BIO (77) 118 - suite 1 et fin aux Bureaux Nationaux
c.c. aux Membres du Groupe, au Directeur Général DG I et au service
"Relations de la Commission avec ses délégués" DG VIII

Council of Research Ministers

After beginning their meeting in the evening of the 29th, the Council of Research Ministers ended their meeting at 03.45 this morning with a decision to adopt the new four years programme of research for the joint research centre. The nine and a quarter hour meeting however failed to reach agreement on the site of the Community's JET project although the choice appeared to have narrowed to Garching in Germany or Culham in England.

The meeting under the presidency of Mr. Gerald Kaufmann (British Minister for Industry), spent much of its time in a procedural argument over the structure of the JET council which will provide guidance for the project.

COREPER has now been given the task of looking at the problems again with a view to enabling Ministers to take a decision in the near future. Mr. Kaufmann said he hoped to call another Council meeting at the end of April or the beginning of May. In the meantime the Commission has been authorised to extend the contracts of those researchers and scientists which would otherwise have run out tomorrow (March 31).

At a press conference afterwards, Mr. Kaufmann expressed satisfaction that the four year programme which gives added fusion work to Ispra had been adopted even with such difficulty, but also regret that the decision on JET had not been possible.

For the Commission, Dr. Guido Brunner said he was "very, very disappointed" and that he had not expected this result.

A very early convening of the Council was necessary, otherwise credibility would be lost.

He welcomed however the decision on the four year programme which would actually be costing some three times what it would cost to develop JET.


Amitiés,

R. Ruggiero