

bringing together international scientific cooperation

“With our project we intend to pave the road to the international dimension of ERA by creating an EU network for international cooperation with third countries.”

© European Communities, 2004

Every EU Member State has its own international cooperation research programme. However, these national efforts are rarely coordinated, either with each other or with Union research activities. This lack of harmonisation results in various inefficiencies that can reduce the effectiveness and value of collaborations with third countries. INCONET will lay the groundwork for the networking of national and international research cooperation initiatives, paving the way for a fully-fledged ERA-NET Coordination Action.

Attempts to coordinate European research efforts to avoid duplication, share costs, get more rapid results, and then disseminate them are paying dividends. Spurred on by the European Commission, an integrated European Research Area (ERA) is swiftly taking shape. However, gaps remain in this harmonisation drive.

One such grey area is international scientific cooperation. Reflecting its centrality to the European enterprise, EU Member States cooperate in research both with one another and with third countries. In addition, the European Union has its own international cooperation programme which the Commission currently administers through the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6).

Despite this hive of activity, these efforts are rarely coordinated. In fact, there is currently no mechanism for such transnational coordination. INCONET seeks to address this disparity by gradually establishing a network between national governments and agencies in order to maximise the impact of their scientific collaboration efforts with non-EU countries.

Iberian roots

Spain and Portugal are the nucleus of this endeavour. Together, they are working to lay the foundations for the EU-wide network. The two governments already have experience managing a similar project. In the multilateral regional initiative CYTED, 19 Latin American national science and technology programmes are participating. With a budget of €6.3 million, it is financing 56 thematic networks and 47 research projects.

The two partners will employ this experience to study the characteristics of the international cooperation programmes of the Union's 25 Member States. Through this Specific Support Action (SSA), they will identify which EU countries are interested in coordinating their national activities on international research cooperation.

INCONET will then organise a workshop for national managers and other stakeholders to explore the possibilities for joint transnational research activities in selected groups of target countries.

Strength in partnership

The partners aim to use INCONET as a scouting exercise, or a preparatory project, that will pave the way towards a full ERA-NET Coordination Action bringing together national ministries and agencies from individual Member States and the European



Specific Support Action INCONET

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Coordinator:

Spain: Ministerio de Educación y
Ciencia

Partners:

Portugal: Gabinete de Relacoes
Internacionais de Ciencia e Encino
Superior (GRICES)

Further information:

Dr Luis Delgado, Ministerio de
Educación y Ciencia
C/ José Abascal, 4, 2ª
E-28003 Madrid
Fax: +34 91 5948643
e-mail: luis.delgado@min.es
website: <http://www.mec.es>

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“ *INCONET will elucidate synergies between international scientific cooperation programmes to get a more visible and effective role of the EU within the world wide scientific community;* ”

Commission's Research Directorate-General.

They will explore the possibilities of setting up such a consortium in 2005.

Such a future partnership will enable national managers and decision-makers to gain a better idea of what their colleagues across Europe are doing, and to engage in fruitful joint action with them, thereby boosting the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their national programmes.

At national level, international scientific cooperation activities are usually focused on particular areas and countries – for instance, France focuses on Francophone countries and Germany on central and eastern Europe. Networking of this nature will allow Member States to learn from one another's experiences and identify new opportunities for cooperation with third countries outside their traditional spheres of interest.

ERA and the world

The future ERA-NET Coordination Action will help to improve the coherence and coordination of international cooperation activities, thereby contributing to the international dimension of the European Research Area (ERA) and to good relations with third countries.