

T&D Europe answer to the European Commission (DG RDT) survey on the “State of Play concerning ERA¹ priorities in research performing organisations”

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Introduction

T&D Europe² is the European Association of the Electricity Transmission & Distribution Equipment and Services Industry, representing the European manufacturers of technology and providers of service solutions for the transmission and distribution of electricity in Europe and globally. We are actively engaged with the development of the EU energy policy, the completion of its 20/20/20 objectives for 2020 and the preparation of a strategy for 2050. The companies represented by T&D Europe account for a production worth over € 25 billion EUR, and employ over 200,000 people in Europe.

Survey

We have received with great interest Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn’s invitation to answer a survey on the “State of Play concerning ERA priorities in research performing organisations”, following the adoption in July 2012 of a Commission Communication on “A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth”.

As a non-public organisation, nor a private organisation with a public mission, to whom the survey is more directly addressed, we shall not provide a detailed answer, but rather provide some general indications on our support for the reinforcement of the EU R&D&I policy.

EU R&D&I policy

In a position paper dated 27th April 2011, tabled before the European Commission’s proposal for “Horizon 2020”, T&D Europe stated that:

Research, technological development and innovation are essential for maintaining the worldwide technological leadership that our industry has acquired in many areas. The European research policy plays a significant role in underpinning and strengthening this position. Many companies can benefit from taking part in the European Research Framework Programmes. One of the programme’s key strengths for the business community comes from the possibility to improve a company’s own R&D by means of external resources, and by gaining a knowledge-based network across Europe.

T&D Europe supports the EU R&D&I policy and programmes via several means: we directly participate in two FP7 funded projects: Grid+ and e-Highway2050, both in the area of electricity grids. We are also

¹ ERA: European Research Area

² www.tdeurope.org

active, via our company representatives, in such research frameworks as the EEGI and the Smart Cities Stakeholders Platform (both in the framework of the SET Plan), the European Technology Platform for Smart Grids or the Grid4EU project.

The European Research Area

Whichever final amount of EU public funding will be made available in Horizon 2020 at the end of the negotiations between the Member States and the EU Institutions, the needs for R&D in the electricity sector will be much higher. This is why T&D Europe supports the overarching goal of the ERA, which is to ensure that the Member States research systems, while remaining distinct and continuing to build on their own strengths, become more open to each other, more interconnected and more inter-operable.

Moreover, we fully support the priorities for the completion of the European Research Area in 2014, notably:

- Optimal transnational co-operation and competition, particularly regarding “grand challenges”: one of them being climate change, research on the electricity grid development must be given priority at EU level;
- An open labour market for researchers and measures to improve gender equality: a major means to attract more students in electrical engineering is to ensure the attractiveness of the sector for female students
- Optimal circulation of and access to scientific knowledge, while respecting and promoting IPR.

T&D Europe would welcome some additional points to be added to the ERA completion:

- An effective harmonisation of the Masters degree, Engineer Diploma and PhD, which would ease the movement of researcher and technical staffs from one institution to another including private ones, across Europe. This could be achieved by better defining the reference for each degree in the European Credit Transfer System.
- A harmonisation of the employment grades in research institutions (including private ones) would also ease the mobility of experiences and senior staff from one institution to another by providing a common job grading over Europe.
- More emphasis is needed on innovation, which means that the ERA should be understood as a European Innovation & Research Area. That emphasis on Innovation would help stakeholders and national governments to support some joint initiatives by providing a framework of intervention in which the project would be easier to valorise.
- European research centres should also be directly involved in innovation projects to create direct links between industry and research staff from these centres, and to facilitate communication of the results of the JRC, leading to higher impact of EU funding on industry.

Improvement of Access to R&D&I Programmes

T&D Europe welcomes the adoption of a Revised Financial Regulation on 27th October 2012, completed by Commission Rules of Application (dated of 29th October), which entered into effect on 1st January 2013. We welcome in particular the fact that the period between calls for proposals and the conclusion of grant agreements and payment deadlines will be shortened, and the new emphasis of the grant system, which will be shifted from reimbursing cost claims to payments for the delivery of results through a greater use of lump sums, flat rates or unit costs.

Conclusion

The realisation of the ERA in 2014 is a very legitimate objective of the EU, which should be completed by a strong and ambitiously funded Horizon 2020, where the energy programme would be given a priority proportionate to its potential in terms of solving societal and policy issues (climate change, security of the EU energy supply) as well as economic and social (international role and further development potential of the European T&D industry, with the creation of qualified jobs).