Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation on the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2019-2020) complementing the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation'

(COM(2017) 698 final — 2017/312 (NLE))

(2018/C 237/06)

Rapporteur: **Jacques LEMERCIER**

Consultation	European Commission, 18.1.2018
	Council of the European Union, 10.1.2018
Legal basis	Article 106a of the Euratom Treaty and Article 304 TFEU
Section responsible	Single Market, Production and Consumption
Adopted in section	9.3.2018
Adopted at plenary	14.3.2018
Plenary session No	533
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	178/0/7

1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1. The 2019-2000 Euratom programme carries over the research activities of the 2014-2018 Euratom programme, with which it is entirely consistent. The Commission's proposal contains very few changes, and the changes it does contain concern mainly the budget and are intended to ensure continuity of the programme.

1.2. The EESC takes note of the changes, taking its previous opinions on the subject into account ([1]).

1.3. The principal objective of nuclear fission research funded by Euratom is to enhance the safety of nuclear technologies. The EESC believes that the greatest attention should be paid to nuclear safety issues. The reduction and disposal of long-lived radioactive waste, control of fissile material and radiation protection must also be included in the priorities. These lines of research must be shared in the context of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) in which civil society — including the EESC — is represented.

1.4. The EESC reiterates and reaffirms its main point made in previous opinions, namely that: '*the level of knowledge about nuclear technologies, their use and their consequences must be maintained and developed. Given that it plays a coordinating role in pooling resources and integrating joint efforts, the Euratom R&D framework programme offers significant European added value in this connection*' ([2]).

1.5. The Committee also repeats its recommendation that the European Commission continue to promote the development of non-fossil, renewable energies and take steps to rebalance the share of nuclear energy in Member States' energy mix.

1.6. Following numerous incidents in European power stations, it has now been demonstrated that subcontracting is an element of insecurity in the maintenance of nuclear power stations. The EESC is of the view that limits should be placed on subcontracting and that it should be strictly regulated.

1.7. The EESC calls for special attention to be paid to these matters in the context of Brexit and the United Kingdom's de facto withdrawal from the Euratom Treaty.

([1]) OJ C 34, 2.2.2017, p. 66, OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 111 and OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 127
([2]) OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 111 and OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 127

2. **Gist of the Commission document**

2.1. The purpose of the Commission's proposal is the adoption of a new regulation carrying over all the research activities undertaken under Regulation (Euratom) No 1314/2013 of the Council on the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2014-2018) complementing the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

2.2. The Euratom programme proposal for 2019-2020 complements the Horizon 2020 programme. It determines the budget for direct and indirect actions, sets research and development (R&D) objectives and identifies R&D support instruments.

2.3. Under Article 7 of the Euratom Treaty, the current (2014-2018) programme is set for a period of no more than five years. The proposal is intended to ensure that the programme continues uninterrupted in 2019 and 2020. This approach will guarantee better coherence with the timeline of the Horizon 2020 programme. This is especially important given that the Horizon 2020 and Euratom programmes have mutually reinforcing objectives.

3. **General comments**

3.1. The EESC takes note of the Commission's conclusions on the interim evaluation of the 2014-2018 Euratom programme, including the fact that the analyses carried out by the Commission 'produced no conclusive finding bringing into question the strategy and format of the 2014-2018 programme or requiring it to propose a revision of the programme's scope, activities or mode of implementation in 2019-2020'.

3.2. The EESC also points out that the public consultation exercise carried out between October 2016 and January 2017 to feed into the interim evaluation of the 2014-2018 Euratom programme and the proposal for the 2019-2020 Euratom programme gave broadly positive feedback: 80 % of participants considered the programme relevant ('agreed or strongly agreed'). In addition, participants particularly appreciated the results achieved in relation to education and training, research on waste management, safety of existing reactors and nuclear fusion research. On the other hand, the programme does not appear to have leveraged private investment.

3.3. Finally, the Commission undertakes to ensure that the recommendations made by the various stakeholders are taken into account when preparing the Euratom 2019-2020 work programme or in relation to its routine activities of oversight and management of the Euratom programme, and that the recommendations on longer-term aspects are considered in the *exante* impact assessment for the next Euratom programme under the new (post-2020) multiannual financial framework.

3.4. The EESC takes note of the above, taking its previous opinions on the subject into account, and supports the Commission's proposal.

3.5. In line with its previous opinions, the EESC points out that the principal objective of nuclear fission research funded by Euratom is to enhance the safety of nuclear technologies. The EESC believes that the greatest attention should be paid to nuclear safety issues. The reduction and disposal of long-lived radioactive waste, control of fissile material and radiation protection must also be included in the priorities.

3.6. The EESC repeats its view that: '*the level of knowledge about nuclear technologies, their use and their consequences should be maintained and developed. Given that it plays a coordinating role in pooling resources and integrating joint efforts, the Euratom R&D framework programme offers significant European added value in this connection*' ([3]).

Brussels, 14 March 2018.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Georges DASSIS

([3]) OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 111 and OJ C 318, 29.10.2011, p. 127