

The environmental and health aspects of mobile radio technology have not been included in the 6th framework programme of the EU

The topic “Mobile radio communications and the environment is an outsider”

Christoph Bächtle

In 1994 the Europe Union carried out the so-called framework programme, an extensive programme which focused on the promotion of research and technology in Europe. In the 5th framework programme electromagnetic compatibility was still planned as a topic for one of the seven specific programmes, however in the 6th framework programme which started in 2002, it was no longer considered a topic for the programme currently running. At present, the topic “mobile radio communications and the environment” has been pushed out of the picture by the EU.



It has been almost 20 years since the European Union managed to set up the first framework programme for the development of research and technology in Europe. Those responsible earmarked 3.2 billion euros to promote the first framework programme for research and technology. Since then more than 7000 projects have been realized. The first framework programme ran for only four years, since 1987, five years seems to be the rule for each programme. Subsidies have increased substantially. For the first time between 1994-1998 during the course of the 3rd framework programme the 10 billion euro mark was exceeded by 3.12 billion euros. In the

current 6th framework programme the project coordinators allocated 16.27 billion euros for the programme.

The subventions are steadily increasing in Europe for research and in spite of this, important topics have been side-stepped by other topics. In the 5th framework programme which was conducted between 1998 and 2002 the subject “potential environmental effects of electromagnetic fields” was still in the programme. When the key words “radiation protection” is entered into a search engine, it comes up with: “Community Research and Development Information Service of the EU” - (CORDIS) -23 projects, three of which deal

with the question concerning health risks posed by electromagnetic fields of mobile radio communication systems or mobile phones.

The 5th framework programme has a multi-theme structure consisting of seven specific programmes, each of these 7 programmes is sub-divided into many thematic programmes. Projects dealing with investigations on the potential effects to the environment posed by electromagnetic fields were established in the first thematic programme, with "Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources", and in the fourth programme with "The Environment and Health". 31.1 million euros were allocated for the programme "Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources", the investigations on the potential effects of electromagnetic fields on people and the environment was financially supported in the 5th framework programme.

Now it is certain that the European Union in the near future will give other topics priority. In the 6th framework programme, which establishes the scientific goals for 2002 - 2006 of the continental countries in the EU, mobile radio communications still plays an important role but only with regard to the development and use of technology pertaining to it. Only in the thematic programme "Information Society Technology" (IST) is mobile radio communication, as a component of communication and information technology, given any significance. Questions concerning possible environmental effects are not included and the topic in question is also not listed under any other thematic focal points.

Scientists within the EU and scientists from partner countries submitted over 12,000 proposals about which issues should be dealt with in the 6th framework programme. When looking in the data bank of the proposals that were submitted using the key words mobile phones or elec-

tromagnetic fields; there were less than 20 hits. If the results of the search query are more closely studied, the results show that not one single suggestion submitted had something to do with the environment or health relevant aspects posed by mobile radio technology. This is not surprising since the seven thematic focal points of the 6th framework programme are selected in such a way that the topic electromagnetic compatibility to the environment (EMCE) would not be a suitable subject for the 6th programme. The topic "Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources" of the 5th programme has been replaced by the topic "Life Sciences, Genomics and Biotechnology for Health".

In the Official Journal of the EU of 29.08.02 the European Council pointed out at a conference held in Stockholm in March 2001 that "special efforts would be made in the area of new technologies, especially in the field of bio-technology". Bio-technology, genetic research and health are, therefore, being placed in the foreground. On the other hand, a professed idea of the Eurocrats is to push forward in the field of information and communication technology. In the above-mentioned Official EU Journal the following resolution is quoted, "Within this framework, research measures for specific initiatives should be more coordinated, for instance concerning the development of the next generation of mobile communication systems".

There are reasons why the responsible EU committees choose certain subjects and why others were replaced. The bio-sciences are an important field of research for the 21st century and developments in communication and information technology will change our habits in the future more than ever before. It is also essential that the links connecting the main focal points are strengthened by investigations which are being conducted at the moment on the potential effects posed by new technolo-

gies to health and the environment and as a result answers can be worked out on the basis of conclusive scientific data.

In 2002 pertaining to the work programme for the theme "Life Quality and Management of Living Resources" in the 5th framework programme, the EU was still informing those interested that proposals were welcome on potential health effects posed by electromagnetic radiation, e.g. cognitive and other effects, combined irradiation and exposure quantification. In the 5th framework programme there was still a need for this type of research, nevertheless at present the topic EMCE has, at most, been placed in a holding pattern.

How a framework's thematic focal points are determined is an extensive process involving the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and many committees. Unfortunately, from official sources there is no sufficient explanation as to what criteria is finally used to determine the research focal points for the 6th framework programme. Written inquiries to the EU were not answered. The experts working at the 5th framework programme's national liaison offices are not involved in decisions concerning the 6th framework programme and the liaison officials for the 6th framework programme have not made any statements concerning EMCE.

So what has been established is that not all of the 5th framework programme projects are finished and their findings will still have to be analysed and evaluated. Only when these new findings are analysed and assessed, will the research strategists of the European Union decide whether or not "mobile radio communications, health and the environment" will be at the top of the list in the future for EU supported research or whether will be put on the back burner. In view of the next framework programme, perhaps this complex of topics should strive to be given top priority again in 2006. ■