The EU FP7 from the aspect of an evaluator

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The author participates since four years at the EU projects evaluation process as an individual evaluator. He deals with the evaluation of security proposals on the base of invitation of the EU Commission. In the article he shows what will happen after sending the proposals to the Commission, what does it mean the evaluation process and what are the most important need to know for those who decide to prepare an EU proposal. The article resumes the aims and areas of the actual EU FP7 program, emphasizing the security topics. By showing the evaluation process, the author's intention is to give suggestion to the applicants from the aspect of the evaluator, with the aim of helping their work.

Introduction

FP7 is the short name for the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. This is the EU's main instrument for funding research in Europe and it runs from 2007 to 2013. The program has a total budget of over 50 billion. This represents a substantial increase compared with the previous Framework Program FP6 63% at current prices, showing a high priority of research in Europe. FP7 is the natural successor to the previous programme, FP6 taking into consideration the result of years of consultation with the research community from both the public and private sectors, with economic actors and with political decision makers in Europe.

Aims of the FP 7

The Framework Programmes for research have two main strategic objectives:
- to strengthen the scientific and technological base of European industry;
- to encourage its international and technological base of European industry.

FP7 is also designed to respond to Europe's employment needs and competitiveness. It is made up of 4 main blocks of activities forming 4 specific programmes plus a fifth specific programme on nuclear research:

Topics of cooperation- collaborative research and budget:
- Health 6 billion

- Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology   1.9 billion
- Information and Communication Technologies   9.1 billion
- Nanosciences, Nanotechnologies, Materials and new Production Technologies   3.5 billion
- Energy   2.3 billion
- Environment (including climate change)   1.8 billion
- Transport (including Aeronautics')   4.1 billion
- Socio-economic sciences and Humanities   610 million
- Security   1.3 billion
- Space   1.4 billion

Ideas-European Research Council   7.4 billion
- Frontier research actions

People- Human Potential, Marie Curie actions   4.7 billion
- Initial training of researchers – Marie Curie Networks
- Life-long training and career development – Individual fellowships
- Industry-academia pathways and partnerships
- International dimension – outgoing and incoming fellowships, international cooperation scheme, reintegration grants
- Excellence Awards

Capacities-Research capacities
- Research infrastructures   1.8 billion
- Research for the benefit of SME[1]s   1.3 billion
- Region of Knowledge   126 million
- Research potential   370 million
- Science in Society   280 million
- Support to the coherent development of research policies   70 million
- Specific activities of international cooperation   185 million

Nuclear research and training   2.7 billion
- Fusion energy
- Nuclear fusion and radiation protection

From the above mentioned whole project I will deal only with the security proposals which encompass both civil and defence security measures. The purpose of investment in knowledge and development further technologies is to protect the citizens from threats such as terrorism, natural disasters and crime while respecting privacy and safeguarding fundamental rights.

[1] Small Medium Enterprises

During FP7, EU funded research will tackle themes linked to civil security (anti-terrorism and crisis management) and will contribute to a whole range of Community policies such as transport, mobility, civil protection, energy, environment and health.

Security research in the timeframe of the FP7 will addresses the following areas:

- Security of citizens (technology solutions for civil protection, bio-security, protection against crime and terrorism)
- Security of infrastructures and utilities (examining and securing infrastructures in areas such as ICT, transport, energy and services in the financial and administrative domain)
- Intelligent surveillance and border security (technologies, equipment, tools, and methods for protecting Europe's border controls such as land and coastal borders)
- Restoring security and safety in case of crisis (technologies, and communication, co-ordination in support for civil, humanitarian and rescue tasks)
- Security systems integration interconnectivity, and interoperability (information gathering for civil security, protection of confidentiality and traceability of transactions)
- Security and society (acceptance of security solutions, socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of security, ethics and values, social environment and perceptions of security)
- Security research co-ordination and structuring (co-ordination and structuring co-ordination between European and international security research efforts in the areas of civil security and defence research).

It is highly important for the applicants to reinforce the competitiveness of the European security industry by stimulating the co-operation of providers and users for civil security solutions. The active involvement of end-users (SMEs) is indispensable.[2] All these things are very important during the evaluation process. It is always a dilemma from the side of the applicants how big should be the consortium. During the briefing for the evaluators held by the experts of the Commission the remark is as follows: "Consortium should be as small as possible and as big as necessary". Consortium depends always on the aim of the proposal. The Commission (evaluators) like the involvement of many countries, academics, research institutes and of course industries. Evaluators do not like if a proposal can be used only by one country. It is important the European aspect of the proposal. It is not determined to involve in the consortium big European nations, but it is useful! Evaluators do not like if the

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[2] Informations, documents in connection to the PF7 are available at the following web-site address:
http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/cooperation/security_en.html
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/security/index_en.htm

consortium is homogenous, e.g. only academics take part in the consortium. Evaluators and the experts of the Commission know well the universities, even some professors who give only their names to the proposal. It is important to prove the contact among members of the consortium as well.

I do not want to deal with the preparation of the proposals, because this is the task of the applicant. I would like to emphasize the respect of the call, the deadline and the soundness of the proposal. All relevant information can be found in the Guide for Applicants. After finishing the proposal, the coordinator of the consortium must check the following:

- Is the proposal fit with the call for proposal? If not or only partially there is no chance to get enough score.
- Is the consortium applying for the right funding scheme? If there is a choice, the consortium must find the best suits for their needs.
- Is the proposal eligible? The coordinator of the consortium must check the compliance with the budgetary limits that may have been fixed on the requested EU contribution. Any proposal not meeting the eligibility requirements will be considered ineligible and not be evaluated.
- Is the proposal complete? Proposals must comprise a Part A and a Part B containing the scientific and technical description of the topic. A proposal without containing both parts will be considered ineligible and will be not evaluated.
- Does the proposal raise ethical issues? An ethical check takes always place during the evaluation and an ethical review will take place for proposal dealing with sensitive issues.
- Does the proposal follow the required structure? Proposals should be precise and concise and must follow the proposal structure. Omitting requested information will lead to lower scores and possible rejection.
- The chances must be maximised, because the competition is strong. Therefore weak points must be eliminated (it is a good idea to put the coordinator in the place of an expert evaluator and to follow the evaluation criteria).

Evaluation of the proposals

The evaluation process as a whole can be summarized as follows:

1. Submission of the proposal (project coordinator to the Commission). Commission checks the eligibility.
2. Individual evaluation (evaluators on the base of criteria defined by the Commission)

3. Consensus (evaluators, based on criteria)
4. Panel meeting (evaluator, based on criteria, proposals are placed in suggested priority order)
5. Finalization of the evaluation, Commission prepares the final ranking and rejection list).

Before the evaluation, proposals are opened, registered and acknowledged as received, and their contents entered into a database supporting the evaluation process. The Commission verifies that proposal meets the eligibility criteria defined in the call. These criteria are rigorously applied and any proposal found to be ineligible is excluded from the evaluation. The decision to exclude a proposal for failing one or more eligibility criteria is taken by the Commission. Only proposal that fulfils all of the following criteria are retained for evaluation:

• Receipt of proposal by the Commission on or before the deadline date and time established in the call.
• Minimum number of participants, as referred to in the call for proposals.
• Completeness of the proposal, i.e. the presence of all requested administrative forms and the proposal description.

Depending upon the number of proposals received, the evaluation may be carried out by a single group of evaluators or in different sub-groups. In organising the evaluation, the Commission staff assigns the proposal to subjects, taking into account the number of proposal received. The assignment of evaluators to subjects will be made taking into consideration the fields of expertise of the evaluators.

Evaluators are briefed by commission staff before the evaluation begins, covering the evaluation procedure, technical issues involved in the particular subject or activity type.

Each proposal will first be assessed by a minimum of three evaluators chosen from the data base of the Commission. Proposals are evaluated in terms of pre-determined evaluation criteria, set out in an evaluation form. Threshold for each criterion and overall threshold are defined by the Commission. Proposals under threshold are not be considered for financing. Let us see an example for the evaluation criteria in security theme, cal FP7-CES-2009.

1. S/T Quality "Scientific and/or technological excellence (relevant to the topics addressed by the call")

• Soundness of concept, and quality of objectives
• Progress beyond the state-of-the-art
• Quality and effectiveness of the S/T methodology and associated work plan

2. Implementation

"Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management"
- Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures
- Quality and relevant experience of the individual participants
- Quality of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity, balance)
- Appropriateness of the allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (budget, staff, equipment).

3. Impact

"Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results"
- Contribution, at the European level, to the expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic/activity
- Appropriateness of measures for the dissemination and/or exploitation of project results, and management of intellectual property.

Evaluators must prepare for each evaluated proposal an Individual Assessment Report (IAR). When examining proposals, evaluators may only apply the evaluation criteria that are set out in the Commission Decision and shown in the IAR. At this stage the evaluators are acting individually and independently. They shall not discuss the proposal with each other, nor with any third party. Since 2008 the Commission ordered the remote evaluation, it means that the evaluators work at home and send the IAR via secure website. The evaluators record their individual opinions on the IAR Form, giving scores and comment on each evaluation criterion. The detailed issues to be covered in the evaluation criteria differ by type of activity. There are as many IAR form as there are evaluators of the proposal. Normally each evaluator signs his/her own form. In signing the IAR, the evaluator also declares that he/she has no conflict of interest in evaluating the proposal (usually the conflict of interest is taken into consideration by the staff before giving the proposal to the evaluator, or the evaluator must announce the conflict of interest before beginning the evaluation).

If during the review of a proposal, an individual evaluator suspects that a proposal is found to be partially, or even not at all, within the scope of the call, he must alert the supervising Commission official. In this case the Commission official will inform all the evaluators of that proposal and seeks their views before continuing with the evaluation. Based on the consensus of the evaluators, the Commission staff shall determine whether or not to proceed with the evaluation of the proposal.

Evaluators examine the individual issues of each evaluation criterion and give a mark for that evaluation criterion on a six-point scale from 0 to 5. The scores indicate the following with respect to the evaluation criterion under examination:

0 = the proposal fails to address the issue under examination or can not be judged against the criterion due to the missing or incomplete information.

1 = poor. The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses

2 = fair. While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.

3 = good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, although improvements would be necessary.

4 = very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.

5 = excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

Since 2009 half marks may be given by individual expert as well. Before 2009 this was permitted only in the Consensus Report and the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR).

For all criteria a threshold score is applied, as well a threshold on the overall score to be achieved. Proposal which fail to achieve one or more of the threshold scores will not be considered for support. An overall score is calculated for each proposal and all criteria will carry an equal weight, so the overall score is calculated by simple addition.

In addition to the evaluation criteria to be evaluated, the following issues also need to be addressed during the evaluation, and recommendations made if appropriate:

- Gender: are there any gender issues associated with the subject of the proposal and, if so, have they been adequately taken into account?
- Ethical and/or safety aspects: have they been identified and taken into account?
- EC-policy issues relevant to the proposal: have they been identified and taken into account?

The individual assessment forms include space for the evaluators' comment on these issues. If evaluators have noted that there are ethical issues, the topic will be further discussed at the consensus step, and if necessary, an Ethical Issue Report (EIR) form will be completed.

The individual evaluators assess and mark the proposals as it is described and presented. It is prohibited to make any assumptions or interpretation about the project in addition to what the proposers themselves have written in their proposal. Evaluators provide brief but explicit justification of their scores. The comments should be concise and understandable to third person. Evaluators are asked to give recommendations for modification if needed. These recommendations may help negotiation on successful proposals and provide useful feedback to improve less successful proposals for any

future application. It is forbidden for the evaluator to contact a proposer on his own account, either during the evaluation or afterwards.

Consensus

When the evaluators of a particular proposal have completed their individual forms, they may convene in Brussels under the moderation of a Commission official as a "consensus group" to discuss and agree scores and comment on the proposal. The discussion of the proposal will continue until a consensus is achieved. In the case of continuing disagreement, the Commission official supervising the evaluation of that proposal may bring in up two additional evaluators to examine the proposal.

The Consensus Report will reflect the agreed outcome of the consensus discussions. It provides scores and precise comments for each criterion as well as overall remarks highlighting strengths and weaknesses and providing recommendations for grant agreement negotiation. From the consensus scores for each criterion given on the CR form, an overall score for the proposal will be calculated by the Commission services. There is one CR form per proposal, it will be signed by all evaluators of the proposal in the consensus group.

Panel meeting

After consensus discussions have taken place for all of the proposals, the Commission may convene a panel meeting. The panel will comprise a representative subset of the evaluators from the individual evaluation step. The panel will first make an overall review of the scores and opinions on each proposal given by the consensus group. This serves both to bring the weight of the whole panel's experience and expertise to the review of each proposal, and also to ensure that the same standard of scoring is applied to each. The panel may propose to revise scores or comments given. Any proposed changes in scoring or additional or revised comments from those originally given in the CR forms by the consensus group shall be discussed. The panel gives a clear guidance for the contract negotiation.

Proposal which have fallen below one or more of the evaluation threshold will no longer considered. The proposals which have passed all evaluation thresholds will be further discussed and a ranked list of proposals per activity type will be produced and will represent the advice of the evaluators to the Commission. The panel will particularly address the question of the ordering of any proposals which have tied scores. The panel prepares the Evaluation Summary Report (ESR) for these above-threshold proposals, which the Commission services will send to each proposal co-ordinator, giving the outcome of the evaluators' assessment of the proposal. This

represents the advice of the evaluators to the Commission, to be taken into account in the final selection of projects for negotiation.

Co-ordinators of proposals which failed one or more eligibility criteria, and which were therefore not evaluated, receive a letter from the Commission informing them of the reasons for exclusion on eligibility grounds.

For proposals which passed the thresholds on the evaluation criteria, but failed the threshold on the overall score, the ESR will contain scores and comments for all of the criteria, as well as an overall score and overall comment.

Summary

In accordance with the Amsterdam Treaty the individual and collective well-being of European citizens depends on the quality and relevance of research and technological development. The security research is a small but important part of this task. The common thinking and realization of great ideas is the real stronghold of the EU.

References

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