

FOURTH MEETING OF THE SOUTH AFRICA – EUROPEAN UNION JOINT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

2 – 3 December 2003, Brussels

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

The fourth annual meeting of the South Africa – European Union (SA-EU) Joint Science & Technology Cooperation Committee (JSTCC) was held in Brussels on December 2 and 3, 2003. In terms of the SA-EU Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology, this meeting was intended to review South Africa's current participation in the EU's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6), share new developments in policy matters and devise strategies for strengthening and enhancing future collaboration.

The meeting proved to be a point of acceleration for the SA-EU relationship, there being a united resolve about the need to ensure a vibrant and deepened implementation of the Agreement. The Co-Chairs of the meeting, Mr Hugh Richardson and Mr Dhesigen Naidoo, Deputy Directors-General respectively of the Directorate-General: Research in the European Commission and of the South African Department of Science and Technology stated that the current agreement reflects a very special relationship between SA and EU in that it offers mutual benefits at all levels.

The European Union's commitment to invest 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in research and development (R&D) by 2010 was commended by the South Africans, who are similarly committed to ensuring increased R&D investment in their country. South Africa is one of the NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development) partners who have taken a bold initiative to commit a level of at least 1% GDP investment in research.

The review indicated that already the South African participation in FP6 had improved significantly in comparison to Fifth Framework Programme (FP5) participation. As a fully eligible international cooperation (INCO) target country participant, South African researchers now have the opportunity to participate in all seven thematic priority areas of the FP6 with the possibility of receiving EU funding. These include areas of key priority for South Africa, such as food quality and safety; information society technologies; sustainable development, global change and ecosystems. It was noted that South Africans had submitted a significant number of proposals in the first FP6 calls, and moreover, that a third of these proposals had been successful. The success rate was even higher in the specific activities related to development research.

For example, as a result of successes in the thematic area of nanotechnologies, knowledge-based multifunctional materials and new methods of production, South African have been invited by the European Commission to participate in a

dedicated partnership matching event organised as part of the EuroNanoForum in Trieste, Italy during December 2003.

Substantive and considered inputs from both delegations led to fruitful and highly informative discussions on several research collaboration initiatives. Both parties expressed the need to embark on a targeted marketing exercise about the opportunities for mutually beneficial research collaborations that the Cooperation Agreement provides (for example through the production of information leaflets, effective use of web portals, and joint promotional events.)

In addition, there would be specific actions taken to strengthen research collaboration in biotechnology, animal health and livestock production, in aeronautics and space science, in renewable energies, and in facilitating researcher mobility. In health and life sciences, there was a shared and deeply held concern about the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. South Africa has already resolved to be a strong partner in the European Developing Country Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), and the discussions explored ways of increasing South African participation in projects within the FP6's thematic priority on life sciences, biotechnology and health.

One of the meeting highlights was the impending connection by the future South African National Research and Education Network (SANREN) to the high speed state-of-the-art European research network, called GEANT. This initiative shall be the culmination of a strong partnership on information communication technologies, which has been led by Minister Ngubane with support from the European Commission.

Another point of discussion was South Africa's bid to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope, a major infrastructure project in the field of radio astronomy. South African participation in an FP6 design study proposal for the SKA was confirmed.

Both parties agreed that further consideration shall be given to increase the utilisation of European Programme for Reconstruction and Development and regional funds for the purpose of science and technology cooperation.

Finally, the co-chairs affirmed their mutual commitment to global multilateralism, and the need to promote regional strategies in the effort to harness science and technology for development. The European Commission expressed interest in becoming a strong partner in the implementation of the NEPAD initiatives in Science and Technology.

South Africa and the European Commission reaffirmed their strong support for initiatives to build research and development capacity in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries, recognising that crucial development-oriented research could not take place without this capacity. The parties agreed on the need to

strengthen the ACP-EU Science and Technology policy dialogue started at the Cape Town Forum in July 2002 by Minister Ngubane and Commissioner Busquin.

The parties expressed satisfaction at the good progress with the preparation of the OECD Ministerial Declaration on International Science and Technology Cooperation for Sustainable Development, which had been led by South Africa and supported by the European Commission. There was also a review of collaboration within the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), co-chaired by South Africa and the European Commission, with the United States and Japan.

The two-day meeting concluded with both sides expressing their satisfaction with progress to date. There was anticipation of increased vigour in the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement, and a commitment to exploring new ways of deepening the collaboration.

BRUSSELS, 3 December 2003