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### **European Programmes on Life Sciences \*\***

The European programmes on Life Sciences are normally placed at the junction of several policy objectives of the Union, and a dramatic renewal of scientific knowledge currently pursued by most research organisations. These two concomitant forces will dictate which research priorities eventually appear on the Community's agenda.

Policy objectives are based on the Treaty and the competences it defines for the Union. Among these objectives, the requirements spelled out by distinct policies such as the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies, the Environment Policy, the Policy of Consumer Protection, Trade, Development, all supplemented by superior objectives such as the one of Health Promotion. These co-existing policies find common ground in the achievement of the Internal Market and the articulation of a consistent regulatory framework which is in demand of simplification, science basis, safety assurance, and an ethical dimension every day more perceivable from the public debate. A typical feature of the new knowledge-driven society is the increasing scientific and technical expertise which gets incorporated into sectoral policy design. The European programmes on Life Sciences have manifested this trend by formulating priorities in a deliberate economic and social setting, exemplified by the «Key Actions» under Framework Programme 5 and now re-visited in the form of «Thematic Priorities» of the proposed Framework Programme 6.

Simultaneously, policy objectives are coming across a profoundly renewed science basis. The science-push of innovation is however becoming of a different nature in Europe. Although for more than a decade biotechnology seemed to be pushed forward through discoveries and applications arising from laboratories specialising in molecular biology (there is no reason why this should change pro-

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foundly), the European programmes received a limited yet essential mission to concentrate cross-the-border efforts on multidisciplinary links and the gradual integration of (sometimes) conflicting innovative forces stemming from the life sciences. In the field of agricultural biotechnology, consensus built up through successive consultations of the interested communities reaching their climax on the occasion of the Versailles conference of 5-6 December 2000. The deal is based on society feeling responsible for its treasures of agricultural sciences, and agricultural scientists feeling themselves responsible for the contribution they ought to make to society in a global sense.

This entails the refusal to neglect any technological leap, from data digitalisation to GMOs in the genome field for example, together with the commitment of researchers to reflect co-existing interests in promoting responsible technology choices, through an inclusive and communicative behaviour embracing scientists, engineers, producers, investors, processors, retailers and consumers. But the ultimate verdict shall remain with European consumers.