

JANEZ POTOČNIK*Member of the European Commission*Brussels, **07. 03. 2006**
13 (2006) 207

Dear Dr Lucas,

Thank you for your letter dated 30 January, 2006 in which you request information and comments regarding the participation of research entities from Israel and from the Palestinian territories in the Sixth Framework programme (FP 6).

With regard to Israel's association to FP 6, the 3rd Agreement for Scientific and Technical Co-operation between the European Community and Israel associating Israel to "FP6" (2002 – 2006) has been applied since December 2002. It allows Israeli legal entities to fully participate in all calls for proposals since the start of the Framework Programme.

The latest data on Israel's participation in FP 6 is available up to mid-2005. Overall, 279 Israeli research entities participated in FP 6 projects. The financial EU contribution (i.e. commitments) to these entities was € 58 million. Universities and other higher education institutions had a participation share of 41% among participating Israeli entities and they received about 35% of the funding that went to Israeli participants.

From a research policy point of view, Israel's full participation is highly valued by the Commission and European research actors. The multicultural co-operation involved in this partnership brings added value, new ideas, and accelerated innovation for both sides. EU partners appreciate Israeli technological excellence in key scientific and technological domains

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The Palestinian territories are not an associated State in relation to FP6, and thus do not financially contribute to the budget of the programme. However, Palestinian research entities have participated in FP 6 projects. They have received FP 6 funding as a Mediterranean partner country within the international co-operation working programme (INCO). The objective of FP 6 support under INCO is to lend support in the scientific and technological fields to the implementation of the Community's foreign policy and development aid policy and to strengthen, develop and consolidate our Partner countries' research systems as a means of reinforcing synergies with these external policies. Until July 2005, three entities from the Palestinian territories have participated in FP 6, receiving a total funding of € 240.000. In line with the priorities identified in the recent action plan agreed between the EU and the Palestinian Authority, the Commission will seek to further promote improved Palestinian participation in the EU Sixth Framework Programme on Research and Development.

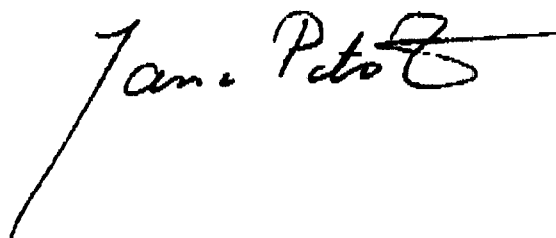
I cannot confirm the reports you have received according to which research entities from the Palestinian territories are required to have an Israeli partner to receive funding under FP 6. Palestinian entities, as entities from any other INCO country, are subject to Articles 5 and 6 (2) of the Rules for Participation (OJ L 355/23 of 30.12. 2002) which set out the minimum number of participants in indirect research actions. They stipulate that beyond the entity from an INCO country the minimum number of participants shall not be fewer than three independent legal entities established in three different Member States or Associated States, of which at least two shall be Member States or associated candidate countries. Consequently, a research entity from Israel as an associated state can but need not be a partner in an indirect research action in which an entity from the Palestinian territories participates.

Conversely, I welcome projects funded under the Framework Programme contributing to an improvement of Israeli-Palestinian relationships. I think that co-operating in research projects is a very potent instrument to foster better mutual understanding not only between the participating scientists but also between countries. There are encouraging examples of successful Israeli-Palestinian research co-operation under the framework programmes such as the HORTIMED project where joint research is undertaken to explore a sustainable and economic solution of water use in irrigated Horticulture using recycled water in Palestinian territories.

You are correct in stating that the violation of fundamental ethical principles is an exclusion criterion for the evaluation of proposals under the Framework Programmes. This exclusion criterion is, of course, taken into account in the evaluation of proposals the Commission receives from Israeli research entities. In assessing whether this criterion is respected, the Commission assisted by independent advisers, looks at the content of the concrete research projects. In the evaluation of proposals it does not, however, examine whether the State where the entity has its residence might have violated fundamental ethical principles or human rights. This approach is, in my view, appropriate since the FP funding does not help to finance the general budget of a state but is paid against proof of specific expenditure for a concrete research project.

As concerns the overall assessment of the Association Agreement, I fully endorse the European Parliament's report of 26 February 2004 on the conclusion of the agreement (PE 337.410) which ends with the following statement: "From the point of view of research policy, the Agreement is to be warmly welcomed. Researchers and research institutes in the European Union and undertakings stand to benefit from cooperation. With regard to the political situation, it may help ease the tensions, since it will also enable Palestinian researchers and institutions to work together with Israeli and European institutes."

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James P. O'Connell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.