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Although 2002 is an election year in France, the Ministry of Research will consolidate the achievements of previous years to promote and support innovation. Numerous actions have been taken, and they have considerably facilitated the innovation process for public sector researchers. The principal initiatives are as follows:

Law on Innovation and Research

Since the enactment on July 12, 1999 of this law, whose champion was Claude Allègre, French Research Minister at the time, all employees of the public service and of public research organizations have benefited from new opportunities to work in companies, where they can contribute scientific support, become shareholders or sit on the company's boards. In 2 years, 167 researchers have benefited, compared with previous years when approximately 20 companies were created annually by public researchers.

Innovative firm incubators

To assist and support innovative business creation projects linked to public research, 31 public incubators have now been created, one in each region of France, in partnership with these regions. These incubators are welcoming, supportive places, created by research organizations or universities and usually supported by local and regional authorities to provide the necessary advice, financing, and initial accommodation to innovative business creation projects. They are grouped under an association (France Incubation; <http://france.incubation.free.fr/>).

As of the beginning of 2002, incubators had taken on some 440 projects, exceeding the original objective by nearly 25%. They have already fostered the creation of more than 160 businesses and approximately 650 jobs.

Seed-capital funds

Similarly, 10 seed-capital funds have been established in specific areas of activity (biotechnology, telecommunications, etc.) providing capital to innovative businesses. They have succeeded in raising more than \square 135M, seven times the French government's initial allocation of funds.

Innovative-technology firm assistance competition

This competition, endowed in 2001 and in 2002 with \square 30M, is one of the measures implemented over the past three years to encourage the transfer of public research results to the production sector. ANVAR is contributing to this measure by providing some financial support (\square 5M).

ANVAR also manages the competition and organizes the awarding of the prizes. Over the past three years, the competition has provided support to nearly 800 business creation projects, of which 300 have already resulted in the establishment of businesses with more than 2,200 jobs created.

For the third year (2001), 1,481 projects were registered in the competition. Regional juries of researchers and company executives selected 350 projects that went on to the national level. The national jury selected 238 winners who shared the \square 30M in prize money, and the 8 best were awarded special prizes. Among the winners, 99 were classified as "creation-development" projects, in which the creation of a company is possible in the short term. In this category the average award is \square 221K per project, and 11 of them are receiving the maximum grant of \square 450K.

The other projects (139), classified as "emerging," will each receive a grant worth an average of \square 39K to enable them to pursue their business creation effort.

Technological research and innovation networks (RRIT) and the technological research fund (FRT)