

operational development phase should kick off around 2004

4. Future S&T Directions in France

"[TRANSLATION] I am convinced that in all advanced countries, research is today the principal engine of competitiveness, economic growth and employment.

In an increasingly open and competitive economy characterized by the rapid development of new technologies, innovation has become an essential factor in economic success.

We must make every effort to fertilize the economy rapidly with the results of research."

Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg, French Minister of Research

Paris, 14 February 2002

2nd Forum international sur la gestion de la recherche,
de l'innovation et des nouvelles technologies [international forum on management of research,
innovation and new technology]

1997 Assessment

The observation made by Henri Guillaume in his 1997 report on innovation in France was frank: France has great scientific and technological potential, but there were insufficient linkages between discoveries and knowledge, and industrial activities. Several drawbacks of the French system were then identified:

- Public research and economic actors were too compartmentalized;
- Technological transfer and partnership arrangements were too complex;
- Venture capital investment was inadequate and there was no support structure for business creation;
- Concentration of public financing in a limited number of industrial groups and sectors was excessive; and
- There was no real government strategy to support industrial research.

In May 1998, during the innovation forum chaired by the prime minister, the French Government introduced a comprehensive package to support innovation based on the proposals of this report.

This policy of supporting innovation is based on several initiatives:

- enactment of the law of July 12, 1999 on innovation and research;
- incubators;
- seed funds;
- a national competition for the creation of new technology firms;
- creation of networks for technological research and innovation
- (RRIT: Réseaux de Recherche et d'Innovation Technologique) ; and
- promotion of placement of young researchers in companies.

Assessment since 1999

"[TRANSLATION] ... In order to have innovation, there must also be the sociological and cultural conditions and a mindset to promote and encourage it.

And therein lies the rub: Europe is no longer creating this climate..."

(Innovation) can flourish in an environment built around ... three essential values: intellectual freedom, recognition of talent ... and a risk-taking culture ..."