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Mr. Philippe Busquin
European Commission
Commissioner for Research
Directorate-General for Research
SDME 02/83
B - 1049 Brussels
Belgium

cc: Mr. Achilleas Mitsos, Director General of Research
Mr. Raffaele Liberali, Director of Directorate D -
human factor, mobility and Marie Curie Activities
Mr. Bruno Schmitz, Head of Unit 3: Research training networks, Directorate D
Prof. John Renner Hansen, representative of Denmark, human resources and mobility
Dr Eeva Ikonen, representative of Finland, human resources and mobility
Prof. Patrick Navatte, representative of France, human resources and mobility
Mr. Walter Denk, representative of Germany, human resources and mobility
Dr. Bernhard Rami, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung
Prof. Andrea Scozzafava, representative of Italy, human resources and mobility
Mrs. Alie Kwint, representative of the Netherlands, human resources and mobility
Dr Niclas Stenberg, representative Sweden, human resources and mobility
Ms Carole McKinlay, representative of UK, human resources and mobility

Dear Mr. Busquin,

We are the co-ordinators of eight RTN proposals presented at the 19th November 2003 deadline for the FP6-2002-Mobility-1 call. None of these proposals were retained for funding. This note is not an attempt to appeal to this outcome, but to give feedback in order to improve the situation for future network funding.

The eight RTN proposals represent almost one thousand colleagues in the field of particle physics phenomenology. This is a large and active community, which has demonstrated an excellent capacity to train young researchers (YRs). This is proven by the fact that many of the YRs nowadays active in particle physics grew up professionally in networks supported by previous FPs (please see Annex 1 for a list of YRs trained in previous networks).

Particle physics phenomenology, with its need to interpret and analyse real data in the context of

a formal, theoretical framework, provides an excellent training ground for YRs. The skills developed, and particularly the "problem solving" attitude, have proven crucial in securing careers in fields other than particle physics, such as information technology, industry and finance.

At the same time, Europe's world-leading experimental laboratories have been and are being exploited by our community as unique facilities for the development of the skills of YRs. The series of networks provided by previous FPs, complemented by the access to those infrastructures, has allowed our community in the past to contain the brain drain out of Europe of our best YRs.

We note that the fact that no proposal concerned with the interpretation of data from ongoing or near-future high energy particle experiments were funded may represent a bias against particle physics phenomenology (this bias was even stated explicitly in the verbal evaluation of one of our reports). We are therefore concerned that by cutting down on research training in particle physics phenomenology, we will miss an extraordinary opportunity to fulfill the very goals set forward by the mandate of the FPs.

As mentioned above, the field of particle physics phenomenology represents a very large community of researchers, which in FP6 was so far left totally unfunded. We suggest that for future calls a keyword be assigned to cover this large area of excellence in basic research, to facilitate the monitoring of the fairness and uniformity of allocations among the major sectors.

We are aware that in FP6 the success rate for RTN proposals has dropped to about 10%. We regret that the success rate is so low. We wonder if the RTN budget is adequate, since this is the only programme which supports networks based on free basic research. Such a low success rate means that an enormous amount of European researchers' time is being wasted with each FP call. We suggest for the future that there should be a pre-selection of proposals based on a much simpler application form, which would be used to produce a long-list of proposals to go forward with a full application.

With specific reference to the current recommendations for the forthcoming Marie Curie Actions, we fear that the focus on Inter/Multidisciplinary and on the Industry-academia collaboration will reduce even more the support for basic research.

We are also concerned that in the assessment of applications there are so many non-scientific objectives which carry a heavy weight, and that these objectives are formulated in a very soft way. This means that there is a lot of guesswork which goes into the applications. and a lot of subjectivity in their assessment. It is difficult to find solid, unambiguous and objective criteria for the "Added value to the community" and the "Relevance of the objectives of the activity". On the contrary, these criteria may be used as a screen to hide other reasons. There are proposals with very high marks for the scientific part which have been rejected due to those soft criteria. As a result, it means that scientific communities are completely excluded because, according to the evaluation panel, they do not serve the community purposes. If this were really the case, it would be fairer to restrict right from the beginning the fields for which proposals can be made, in order to

avoid wasting the time and effort which is necessary to prepare such a large proposal

In the evaluation reports, we regretfully note a certain lack of constructive criticism: in a given report, we often observe a discrepancy between the verbal evaluation of a given criterion and the grade assigned to it. As a consequence of the lack of constructive criticism, applicants are generally left completely in the dark as to how to improve next time.

A related concern is the lack of feed-back on the evaluation marking process. We wonder if a record of referees' performances is kept, and if measures are taken to avoid being affected by referees who grade systematically high or low, or who display a too wide or a too narrow range of marks (like, for example, re-scaling the mean and the standard deviation of the network grades of a given referee to the average mean and standard deviation).

We fully understand and accept the policy of confidentiality on the referees' identities. However, we do not understand why the identities of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the physics panel cannot be made public.

We would like to suggest that the Chair and vice-Chair be assigned roles and responsibilities similar to those of the Editors of scientific journals: maintaining their right to the final decisions, they could nevertheless provide a useful interface between the anonymous referee panel and the applicants.

Sincerely Yours

Vittorio Del Duca, on behalf of

Nora Brambilla	co-ordinator of	QWGNET
Christine Davies	co-ordinator of	FLAVOURLQCD
Vittorio Del Duca	co-ordinator of	HardQCD@LHC
Paula Eerola	co-ordinator of	LHCPhys
Barbara Erazmus	co-ordinator of	Europ-RTN
Frithjof Karsch	co-ordinator of	Hot-and-Dense-Matter
Piet Mulders	co-ordinator of	HAPNET
Christophe Royon	co-ordinator of	STRONGNET

Annex 1

Young Researchers trained in previous networks:

TMR network ``QCDNET', running in FP4, trained 20 Young Researchers, out of which:
14 work and do research in physics, 4 of them with permanent appointments;
3 work in IT;
one works in education;
one works in industry.

RTN network ``hadrons/lattice QCD", running in FP5, trained 10 Young Researchers, out of which:
8 work and do research in physics;
2 work in IT.

TMR network ' ' rife Temperature Phase Transitions in Particle Physics", running in FP4, trained 12 Young Researchers, out of which:
9 work and do research in physics, 3 of them with permanent appointments;
3 work in IT.

TMR network ``HaPHEEP' (FMRX-CT96-008), running in FP4, trained about 20 young researchers of which 8 are involved in research in physics in long-term, tenured or permanent positions. Most of the others work in industry, several of them IT-related.

RTN network ``ESOP" (HPRN-CT-2000-00130), running in FP5, trained 23 young researchers (16 theorists, 7 experimentalists) of which most are still involved in research in physics; 6 of them have a long-term, tenured or permanent position).