



Research carried out by Germany's Fraunhofer Society might be hampered by European funding rules.

parliament and EU member states, but it is expected to pave the way for Horizon 2020 to start on schedule.

“The parliament managed to safeguard many improvements and substantial simplification for participants,” said Christian Ehler, an MEP with the centre-right European People's Party and parliament's lead negotiator for Horizon 2020, in a statement to *Nature*. “But I dread the fact that the parliament had to consent to the council's funding model” because it will dramatically disadvantage some institutions.

Nonetheless, some of Europe's elite research universities are pleased with the promised reduction in red tape. “Having one rule for all is a major improvement,” says Kurt Deketelaere, secretary-general of the League of European Research Universities, a partnership of 21 top universities. “Imagine the insane complexity in collaborating with research organizations

and companies which all follow different rules. That system had to go.” By and large, says Deketelaere, universities will be better off financially than they were under previous EU research programmes.

But the commission has promised to address the concerns of those unhappy with the new rules. A recent commission working paper seen by *Nature* proposes that more of the costs incurred in operating research facilities could be reimbursed if the money were interpreted as being fully related to a Horizon 2020 project. “We will take the commission at its word,” says Neugebauer.

Scientists in the 13 states that have joined the EU since 2004 could benefit from the changes thrashed out last week. Universities and institutes there have less experience in dealing with EU bureaucracy — a prerequisite for claiming and verifying overhead costs. Moreover, their overheads tend to be smaller than those of facilities-rich Western European research centres. As a further sweetener, scientists in these countries who receive a Horizon 2020 grant will get an annual salary bonus of €8,000 (US\$10,400).

The flat-rate system could also help scientists in such countries to win a bigger slice of EU funding, says Krzysztof Frackowiak, director of the Polish Science Contact Agency in Brussels, which helps Polish institutions to negotiate EU red tape. The newer member states “haven't been able to get back from Brussels nearly as much as they paid into European research programmes”, he says. ■

TRANSATLANTIC CONCERNS

Flat rate overruled

The thorny issue of overhead payments is not restricted to Europe. In the United States, the average reimbursement rate is around 50% of direct project costs, but top institutes such as Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, receive up to 70% of extra money from federal grants. Critics say that the current practice unfairly favours a few research powerhouses over many other, smaller universities. However, an attempt last year by President Barack Obama's administration to introduce a single flat rate met with fierce opposition from large institutes such as Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. The plan was abandoned. **Q.S.**

CORRECTION

The y-axis in the graphic ‘The rise of open access in the News Feature ‘The true cost of science publishing’ (*Nature* **495**, 426–429; 2013) was mislabelled. The correct version is online at go.nature.com/e8rsrb.