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CURRENT COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON THE ELDERLY AMONG  
MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

by  
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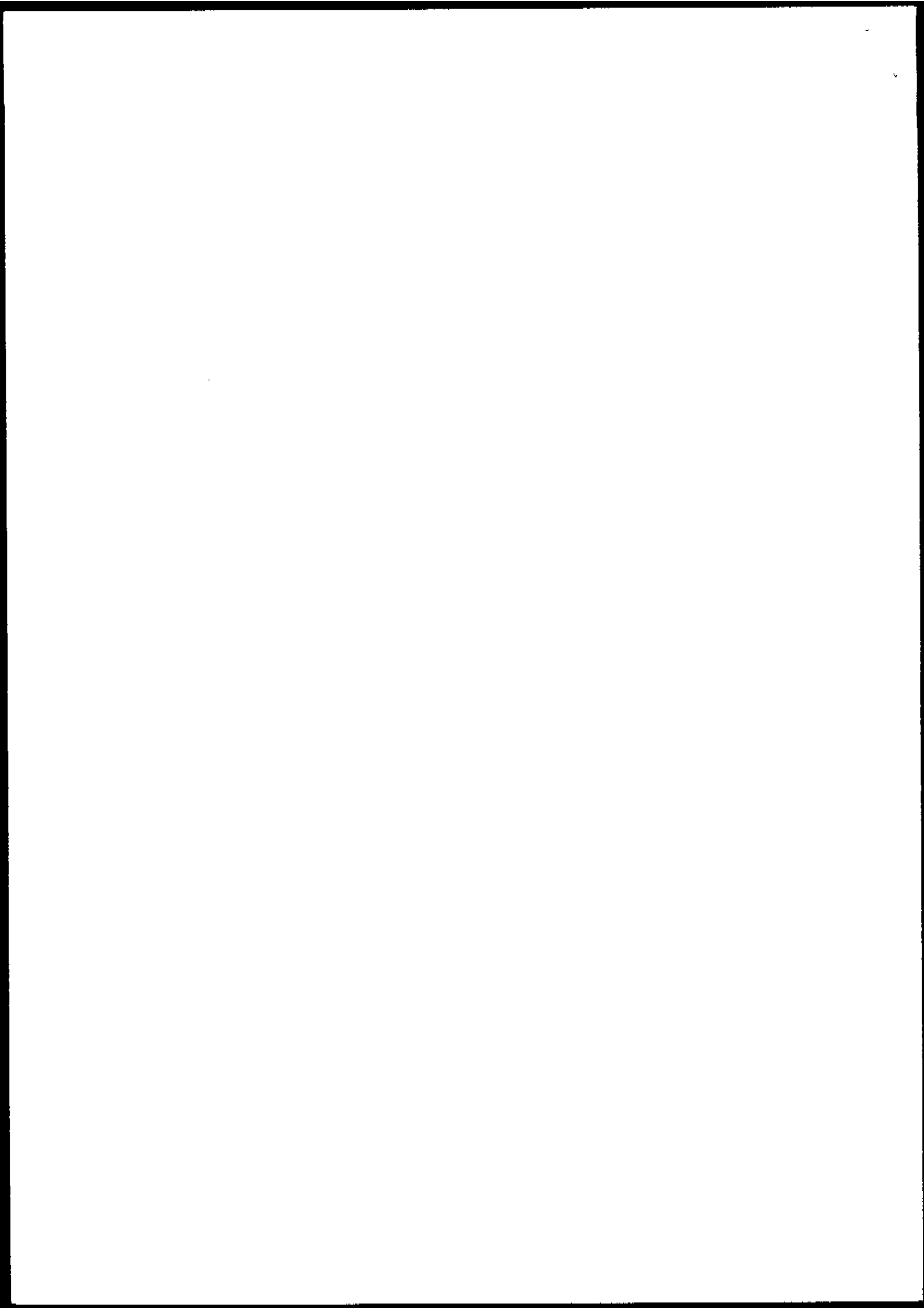
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### Introduction

In the Member States of the European Community, as in most other developed countries, the demographic structure of society has changed, which is reflected in an increase in the proportion of elderly persons in the population. Social and medical advances will continue to change the age-structure of the population in all Member States. Increasing numbers of people will reach older ages and this in turn will call for increasing medical care which can be based only on a better understanding of the biological ageing process.

Compared with the problem of "greying of the nations", the current effort in all areas of gerontological research in Europe is small in comparison with the problems which confront the society at present and which will arise in the future. In the past years, this has been recognized in several scientific committees of the European Community. Also, there was a growing awareness of the need for coordination of the various small efforts underway in the

area of aging research in the Member States. This has led to a concerted project of the European Economic Community in the field of cellular ageing and decreased functional capacity of organs (Medical and Public Health Research)<sup>1</sup>.

#### Scope of the project

The concerted project, also known as EURAGE, runs for a 4 year period from 1978 - 1981. The project consists of coordination of the following topics at the Community level:

1. Cellular basis of liver ageing: biophysical and biochemical studies at organ, cellular and subcellular levels of the progressive, age-associated functional alterations, including comparative studies in other cell types;
2. The immune response during ageing: oriented studies in both animals and, to a limited extent, humans of the age-induced changes in the immune system with emphasis on immunodeficiencies and possibilities of therapy;
3. Ageing of the crystalline lens: physiological, morphological and biochemical studies in human and animal tissues of the age-related functional alterations leading to senile cataracts.

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<sup>1</sup>) Official Journal of the European Community,  
No. L52/24-27, 23.2.78.

### Organization

The research program is based on the activities of the participating local research groups in the various Member States. At the national level, there are at present only two biomedical institutes with long-established programmes in the area of ageing research, viz., the Unité de Recherches Gérontologiques INSERM in Paris, France, and the Institute for Experimental Gerontology TNO, Rijswijk, The Netherlands. Recently, the Institut für Gerontologie in Nürnberg, <sup>Federal Repub. of Germany</sup> ~~West Germany~~, was founded. All other research groups participating in the program belong to research institutions whose main task is in other areas of biomedical research, including clinical research. In most Member States, proposals for participation of research groups in the program are forwarded by the Medical Research Council or its equivalent, with exception of West Germany and The Netherlands. These two countries have designated specific institutions to participate in the program.

To coordinate and integrate the research of the different groups at the Community level, the local research groups are organized into Topic Oriented Research Groups, three of which have been established in conformity with the three topics of the concerted action program. The Topic Oriented Research Groups are responsible in their respective areas of research for the coordination of the research work at the executive level, the exchange of information, material and techniques, the organization of meetings of the Group, the use of "common" funds allocated to the Group and the submission to the Steering Committee (see below) of the proposals related to the execution of the research program.

Coordination of the research among the three Topic Oriented Research Groups is done by a Steering Committee, which consists of an independent chairman elected from the representatives of the local research groups, three delegates, one from each Topic Oriented Research Group, and the project leader. The project leader is appointed by the European Community. In addition to coordination of the research, the Steering Committee also evaluates proposals for exchange of scientists, technicians and interlaboratory visits. It is also involved in the organization of workshops.

To facilitate the execution of the project, a Concerted Action Committee on Cellular Ageing and Decreased Functional Capacity of Organs (COMAC) has been established by the European Community.

The tasks of COMAC are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. The Committee shall:
  - 1.1 contribute to the optimum execution of the programme by giving its opinion on all of its aspects;
  - 1.2 evaluate the results and draw conclusions as regards their application;
  - 1.3 be responsible for the exchange of information referred to in the first subparagraph of Article 5;<sup>3</sup>

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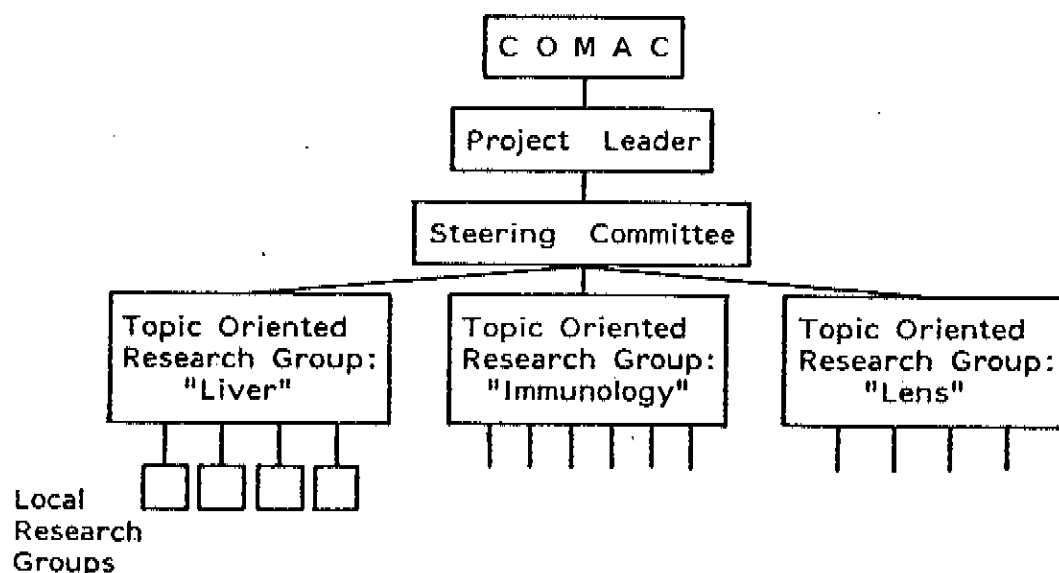
2) Annex II. Official Journal of the European Community, No. L52/27, 23.2.78.

3) See footnote 1.

- 1.4 keep abreast of national research being done in the fields covered by the concerted project, and more especially of scientific and technical developments likely to affect the execution of the project;
- 1.5 suggest guidelines to the project leader.
2. The Committee's reports and opinions shall be forwarded to the Commission and to the Member States participating in the project. The Commission shall forward these opinions to the CREST (Scientific and Technical Research Committee).
3. The Committee shall be composed of persons responsible for coordinating the national contributions to the programme, and the project leader. Each member may be accompanied by experts.

As mentioned under 3, the COMAC is composed of national delegates and the project leader. In addition to the tasks mentioned above, COMAC will annually evaluate the contributions of each participating research group in the program.

The following scheme summarises the overall organization of the concerted action.



### Finances

The Member States finance the basic activities of the ongoing research at the national level. Because the Member States have chosen to integrate part of the ongoing research of their national programs into the concerted action, the European Community is responsible for the coordination of this part and provides financial support for it. In concrete terms, the last implies financial support for execution of the concerted action programs, which includes support for interlaboratory cooperation, exchange of research workers for training in special techniques or the performance of collaborative research and exchange of materials. Also included is the organization of small work groups or meetings for interlaboratory consultation among the scientists involved in research in the three areas of the concerted action. The annual plenary meeting for all participants is also financed in this way. This plenary meeting is usually combined with one or more small workshops as mentioned above.

### Ongoing activities

At present, about 40 local research groups participate in the program. There are great differences in size among the research groups involved. Large groups consisting of several scientists and technicians as well as various small groups sometimes consisting of only one scientist participate in the concerted action.

During the first scientific meeting of EURAGE in February 1979, a detailed research program for the concerted action was prepared. This program entitled "Elaborated plans for cooperative research" was submitted to COMAC, which approved it.

The Topic Oriented Research Group on Ageing of the Crystalline Lens organized a "Meeting on Ageing of the Lens" in Jouy-en-Josas near Paris, France, following the official meeting of the Association for Eye Research in September 1979. Scientists from outside EURAGE also participated in this meeting.

In the framework of the concerted action, 35 scientists and technicians have already paid short visits to laboratories in other Member States and an exchange of old animals, tissues and cells has taken place among a number of laboratories.

In November 1979, the project leader visited the National Institute on Aging and the National Eye Institute in Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A. This visit was a consequence of an earlier visit of officials of the European Community who explored the possibilities of collaborative activities among Institutes of the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, and ongoing research coordinated by the European Community in Europe. As a result of the visit of the project leader as well as of already existing contacts of scientists in the Topic Oriented Research Group on Ageing of the Crystalline Lens, a collaborative research effort among the National Eye Institute, the American Collaborative Cataract Research Group and EURAGE is being formalized. The visit to the National Institute on Aging has not yet resulted in an approach for cooperation between this Institute and EURAGE.

### Summary

The scope, organization, financial aspects and ongoing activities of the Concerted Action on Cellular Ageing and Decreased Functional Capacities of Organs of the European Community are described.

Up to now, this concerted action has been very successful.

### Acknowledgement

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