

## **Lithuanian contribution to the public consultation on the past, present and future of the European R&I framework programme 2014-2027**

### **Introduction**

Lithuania is committed to the renewal of the European Research Area (ERA), building on inclusive excellence, diversity and strengths of the European R&I ecosystems. Horizon Europe, as main ERA implementation instrument, shall be responsive to societal and geopolitical developments and challenges, also taking into account Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Therefore, we acknowledge the opportunity to participate in the public consultation on the past, present and future of the European R&I framework programme 2014-2027 (FP).

### **More stable budget**

To achieve the goals of Horizon Europe, it is necessary to ensure higher stability of its budget by ringfencing. This would also have positive effect on predictability of the FP, higher engagement and opportunity to achieve tangible results.

### **EU Missions**

At this stage, Lithuania is not inclined to support the initiation of any new R&I missions before there is evidence that the first 5 missions have been bringing the desired outcomes and impact. To enable current missions to deliver on their societal goals, we see the need to focus on restructuring the current missions' governance and on ensuring additional synergetic funding from other programmes and funds on EU, national, regional and local levels.

### **European partnerships**

Despite good intentions and efforts, the landscape of European partnerships remains complex. Even though European partnerships are an important instrument for ERA integration, their excessive number causes the opposite effect, as small Member States are unable to participate in all European partnerships due to limited human and financial resources and therefore are losing the opportunity to participate in European networks. For these reasons Lithuania advocates for limited number of new partnerships and supports their introduction only in cases where other instruments do not suffice, and/or current partnerships could not be reinforced to accommodate new arising needs.

To facilitate the right comprehension of this instrument and various requirements for co-funding, the European Commission (EC) should provide clear and continuous guidance, training and support to national funding agencies. At the same time further action is needed to unify the partnerships' landscape and to simplify the rules for participation and funding.

## More balanced approach

Elements of cooperation and competitiveness are the guarantor of the European added value of the Horizon Europe and must therefore be further nurtured. Equally important is the balance between the fundamental research, applied research, experimental development and innovation. To improve the current equilibrium pillar 2 should offer more funding opportunities for lower and middle TRL levels that would embrace also fundamental research. This is crucial if we aim to safeguard the foundations for EU's technological advancement in the future.

The next Strategic Plan should aim for better balance between large and small projects in anticipation of researchers and innovators needs. Lithuania believes that higher share of small and mid-scale projects may offer greater possibilities for wider range of participants and better exploitation of all European R&I potential. This would encourage smaller, but excellent players to fully contribute to the joint actions towards the best solutions.

## Synergies

Lithuania calls for further alignment of financial rules and programming and reporting periods. It is extremely important when implementing longer-term projects, for example, Teaming. Aiming for exploitation of all European R&I potential and achievement of EU's global leadership, it is important to support synergies during both phases - political design phase and implementation phase. We believe that timely and clear guidance by the EC is critical in both phases.

## Widening

The innovation gap in the EU remains a serious obstacle to realizing the R&I potential of the whole EU, therefore proper funding instruments to support widening countries are still needed. EC should focus on both: strengthening the participation of widening countries in the FP, as well as improving its support to widening countries' R&I capabilities. To ensure that current widening measures are fit for purpose in addressing the causes of the low participation of widening countries in the FP it is crucial to perform continuous monitoring activities and evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the whole portfolio of widening measures. Furthermore, Lithuania considers inclusive excellence as a horizontal and cross-cutting element via all pillars of the FP and would advocate for more targeted measures in this respect. For instance, COST plays an important role in the integration of the research communities, therefore the sustainability of its financing model should be ensured in the next financial period.

## Simplification

Further simplification of administrative procedures should be continued. Lithuania welcomes introduction of lump-sums and blind evaluation. In order to achieve the anticipated positive effects of these novelties, we call for a well-thought-out and coherently planned presentation and implementation, encompassing clear descriptions, examples and tailor-made trainings for NCPs and applicants.

Insufficiently informative Evaluation Summary Reports (ESR) are a long-standing problem of FPs. It is crucial that ESR include clear argumentation and evidence regarding the presented conclusions and scores awarded to the proposal, thus providing opportunity for applicants to improve their proposals in the future. Improved quality of ESR will help to keep the attractiveness of Horizon Europe for various participants, including the newcomers.

Lithuania is concerned about increasing number of horizontal requirements in proposals (such as, Gender Equality Plan, Data Management Plan, Ethics, Do Not Harm Principle, Open Science, multi-disciplinarity etc.) and associated administrative burden. We believe that all these requirements should be evaluated against their impact on project quality and reconsidered if necessary.

### **International cooperation**

The rapidly changing geopolitical situation leaves no doubt about the importance of international cooperation on the one hand, and European security, as well as the need to prevent foreign interference on the other hand. Furthermore, it requires reassessment of the concept of science diplomacy.

To play a leading role in delivering science based solutions to the greatest global challenges, the EU should be proactive and remain as open as possible. We must first and foremost develop close cooperation with EU partners that adhere to the EU's fundamental values and principles, including level playing field. Lithuania is in favour of signing the Horizon Europe association agreements with like-minded countries as soon as possible. We also call for a consistent plan of activities under the current and future FPs for rebuilding of Ukraine's R&I ecosystem and its integration into the ERA.

We believe that restrictions for participation foreseen in the Article 22.5 of the Horizon Europe regulation should only be implemented in exceptional cases and without risking close partnership with like-minded countries.

Lithuania also appreciates quick response by the EC to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The suspension of the participation of Russian and Belarussian entities in Horizon Europe should remain. It must be ensured that this decision is respected in all programmes and initiatives receiving funding from the Horizon Europe.

### **European Research Area**

Lithuania holds the view that there should be stronger link between the FP and the development of the ERA. The progress of the implementation of the first political agenda of the ERA shows that ERA actions should receive more support from the Horizon Europe and its successor. If we are committed to the renewal of ERA, funding of ERA actions should be considered as a horizontal and cross-cutting element via all pillars of the FP.

### **Future R&I priorities**

It is important that in the next three years, EU investments for R&I address (1) health technologies and biotechnologies; (2) new production processes, materials and technologies, contributing to green deal; (3) digitalisation. We believe that these priorities together with proper integration of Social Sciences and Humanities would contribute to increased public security, trust in science and societal preparedness for future crisis as well as EU global leadership.

Last but not least, the Baltic Sea region urgently requires more focused attention in terms of long-lasting environmental problems and new challenges, such as security of critical infrastructure and migration issues.