



## Contribution from Spain to the public consultation on the European Research & Innovation Framework Programmes 2014-2027

The European Commission launched a public consultation in December 2022 to evaluate Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe and to define future priorities with the Strategic Plan 2025–2027 and in views of the preparation of the 10th Framework Programme.

### Excellence and supporting our best R&I with reliable and simplified schemes and strengthening the best global R&I programme.

- **The EU Framework Programmes (FPs) for Research and Innovation (R&I) are essential instruments** to jointly advance in the European Research Area's (ERA) scientific knowledge and innovation as well as the base of the European industrial development. Horizon Europe (HE) has proven to be a strong support to researchers and innovators across Europe. As the largest R&I Programme in the world, it successfully fosters excellence and supports its valorisation, taking into account the needs of very different stakeholders.
- **Scientific excellence and open calls** are the biggest assets and should remain the main driver of the EU R&I FPs. The budget allocated to Horizon Europe **must be devoted to support its Research and Innovation activities**, as defined in its Regulation and Specific Programme. The R&I dimension of new EU priorities such as semiconductors, raw materials, etc; should follow the same strategic procedure established in the HE Regulation and the Specific Program in order to avoid deviations of the current MFF. Moreover, these new initiatives cannot impact the desired simplification of the partnerships under HE.
- **ERC and EIC.** The **ERC is the beacon of excellent research** performed in Europe at global scale. Its success is unquestionable. Therefore, the ERC programme should be maintained and, furthermore, reinforced during the next FP. Expanding the eligibility periods for researchers with excellent ideas to start or consolidate their own teams, is a much-needed measure to make ERC programmes more inclusive across gender, disciplines and varieties of researchers' career paths across Europe. Moreover, **the forefront of the EU innovation requires adequate EIC programming.** Schemes should be implemented as soon as possible to circumvent delays in projects, as a result of a program design, not fully aligned with the HE Regulation.
- **An assessment of the evaluation of research careers**, following the ERA Actions 3 & 4 should accompany this extension, to ensure that the greatest programme on excellence science, is in the forefront of Science Policy and that there is a balanced circulation of researchers. Specific measures to better demonstrate transparency in the assessment



process are even more needed, in order to face more qualitative evaluation processes in this transition.

- The upcoming EU R&I FP requires a **stable structure and consistent initiatives and instruments**, as stability is a major pathway towards simplification. Sustainable resources with agreed and concerted percentage distribution among pillars, as suggested by the European Parliament<sup>1</sup>, is the right approach to facilitate budget negotiations and to mitigate sudden program changes. H2020 introduced a uniform cost model with 100% co-funding for Public Research bodies and a flat rate for indirect costs that have deeply contributed to simplification.
- Broadening the **internationalization** of EU R&I FPs seems more relevant now than ever and re-establishing our partnership with the United Kingdom and Switzerland should remain a priority, always subject to the conclusion of a political agreement. Collaborative research and innovation with African, Mediterranean, Latin American and Caribbean countries will open up new scenarios for strategic and not so-explored EU partnerships.

### **Making the best out of the European funds to reach our priorities.**

- **Horizon Europe missions and new missions.** Spain's results on missions have been outstanding, and we are keen to continue contributing to this instrument. Nevertheless, the future of missions relies on a positive evaluation and assessment by the European Commission. It is essential that the R&I dimension is complemented and developed together with the other sectoral dimensions, **which are critical to reach each of the missions' objectives, and mobilising funds** from European, National and Regional sources. New missions, if any, would again be related to the national interministerial governance. Therefore, any new initiative should be duly consulted with national authorities.
- **Priorities for EU collaborative research and innovation are presently aligned with EU political agenda** in a top-down approach aiming at socio-economic impact. Bottom-up strategies are mainly limited to Pillar I. This is presently a missing opportunity for collaborative projects that, through interdisciplinary EU collaboration, would contribute to break down knowledge frontiers identifying new scientific targets and challenges. **Thus, there should be an appropriate balance of low TRL cooperative research calls under Pillar II during HE negotiations, as requested by the co-legislators during the negotiation of Horizon Europe.** Collaborative EU research driven under science-based agenda and knowledge growth in a bottom-up approach including a wide range of TRLs in small and medium sized projects, should be supported, if long term EU capacity building, competitiveness, autonomy and societal wellbeing are to be achieved and preserved. This will also contribute to increased cooperation between Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> (article 9) - Amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 12 December 2018 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination (1<sup>st</sup> reading) - [Texts adopted - Establishing Horizon Europe – laying down its rules for participation and dissemination \\*\\*\\*I - Wednesday, 12 December 2018 \(europa.eu\)](#)



- **Synergies.** There is a clear potential of EU funds synergies, which has not been exploited, not only in EU DGRTD but also in other EU policies, such as DGREGIO. The Court of Auditors and the recent Council Conclusions on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 23/2022 'Synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds' clearly identifies some of the main challenges still existing. The different timing and planning of the programmes, are also challenges to overcome for making synergies a fact. Working towards overcoming these challenges should be a priority for the next period. This would have a clear impact on Missions performance.
- **Convergence of regions.** The **Widening dedicated instruments** have not exploited their full potential. H2020 introduced specific actions targeting low R&I performing Member States (also called "widening countries"), in order to maximise and widely distribute the benefits of the Programme across the Union. Widening measures were further extended in Horizon Europe. However, many regions from medium or even high performing countries remain behind. Future FPs will have the challenge to explore dedicating specific measures, turning from the Member State level, to pointing at measures that foster regional convergence of low-medium with high research/innovation performing regions.

## Challenges of the HE Comitology: Improving 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Planning co-design and co-creation

- **Strategic Planning** could be considered a useful tool for steering political objectives. However, it must be implemented in a simple way to be understood and easily applied in projects by participants.
- **Co-creation** was a term used since the beginning of the HE programme that has come up recurrently while talking about Horizon Europe. In this sense, many new ways to discuss and participate in the management of the programme have been put in place. However, the level and quality of discussion between the EC and Member States (and Associated countries) has decreased during these first years of the programme. To improve it and maintain the needed interaction must be a common goal tackled from all sides.
- In addition, the pandemic also added some problems when organizing the **discussions within the different HE Programme Committee configurations**. Although physical meetings have started to take place again, more can be done in this sense, by recalling that the real added value of physical discussions relies on personal contact.
- **Managing PC configurations.** Horizon Europe's structure was one of the biggest changes compared to its predecessors, mainly focused on Pillar II and its Clusters. This new Pillar organisation is aimed at having interdisciplinarity, more interactions among themes and reinforce synergies between them. In practice, this rearrangement has created a **problem at the management level**. Big clusters are very difficult to manage from a single Programme Committee configuration, having to take decisions on very different and critical areas without having enough information and discussion.



- The big proliferation of **European Partnerships**, especially those requiring co-funding from Member States and associated countries must be avoided. In fact, many member states do not have enough resources to participate with full involvement in all partnerships, and therefore, in some cases, the innovation breach might increase. More efforts should be devoted towards rationalization, both in terms of number of initiatives and in the homogeneity among them.
- The **NCP support services** during the different Framework Programmes have been developed and fine-tuned. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep improving the interactions between the EC and its executive agencies with NCPs and the information shared between them, including by NCP Trainings and the R&I Information Days in Brussels.

### **Horizon Europe 2025 – 2027 Strategic Plan – looking into the R&I future priorities**

- The **alignment of HE strategic priorities with EU political agenda** is a necessary step to tackle global societal challenges, though this directionality for research and innovation is not free of side effects. Focusing too much the scope of the Programme to high TRLs or give it an “innovation-only” approach - funding only what can give economic outputs in the short-to medium term – has **the risk of a loss of disruptive and breakthrough knowledge**. This can, in the end, damage European competitiveness and societal wellbeing in the long term, as well as reduce the value that high quality research and innovation can create for future generations. Funding EU collaborative research with low and medium TRLs is to be rescued.
- In addition to this extensive consultation, **future R&I scientific priorities must be soundly identified with adequate instruments and means**. This is missing in HORIZON programmes. Bottom-up small-medium sized EU collaborative projects merging very different disciplines may contribute to break down knowledge frontiers identifying new scientific targets and challenges to keep Europe at the forefront of international scientific competition.
- **International cooperation** becomes more relevant than ever, and EU efforts should open scenarios that have not been traditionally explored and exploited as research and innovation is concerned. This is the case of African, Mediterranean, Latin American and Caribbean countries where significant opportunities for collaboration could be envisaged all along the six clusters.
- **EIT**. Synergies and complementarities with the EIC, and among clusters should be considered.