

Investing more in RD&I as a strategic move for Europe's future prosperity

Open letter to Iliana Ivanova, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Dear Commissioner Ivanova,

Our organisations, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO), and Science Europe, represent key research and innovation actors in Europe. With the design of the next EU R&I Framework Programme (FP10) on the horizon, we stress the crucial role that EU research and innovation investments play in addressing global challenges, boosting the EU's global competitiveness, and reinforcing its strategic autonomy. In this context, ensuring a strong and sustainable budget for FP10 is a necessary step towards realising these ambitious goals.

Europe is confronted with multifaceted and interdependent challenges such as climate change, health crises, and rising geopolitical tensions. At the same time, the global research, development and innovation (RD&I) landscape is becoming increasingly competitive. While the EU's RD&I investments have intensified over the past two decades, a noticeable gap persists when compared to its main global counterparts, particularly the United States and China.

In order to address these challenges effectively, ensuring strong and sustainable research and innovation investments in Europe is of paramount importance. As called for by the Members of the European Parliament Christian Ehler and Maria da Graça Carvalho, increasing the budget for FP10 to €200 billion is especially critical to enable Europe to find solutions to pressing societal challenges. An increased budget will not only bolster collaborative RD&I efforts across member states and leverage private investments. It will also enhance the use of shared resources, expertise, and infrastructures to address challenges that are increasingly transnational in nature and exceed the capabilities of individual countries.

Beyond increasing the budget for FP10, it is important to address a number of pressing issues. This notably includes the instability of the Framework Programme budget and budget shifts to non-RD&I purposes, which continue to threaten the role of the programme in strengthening societal and economic impact and put at risk the long-term planning of ambitious RD&I policies and other sectorial policies it supports.

Consequently, we highlight the need to ring-fence the programme's budget to safeguard it from yearly discussions in the context of the MFF negotiations and shifts between the different programme components and EU priorities. In addition, introducing any new priority to the programme should be accompanied by additional financial resources. These measures will ensure greater stability of the programme budget and keep the programme attractive to its participants. In parallel, a degree of budget flexibility should be maintained to address unforeseen crises. However, achieving this flexibility will require creating a larger budgetary envelope for RD&I within the MFF and collecting unused pockets of EU financing, rather than re-distributing the existing budget.

Additionally, it is important to rebalance the support provided to various stages of the RD&I continuum, including bottom-up basic research, applied research, development, and innovation. These are not isolated activities, but rather parts of a continuous, interconnected process. Only with a well-balanced mix can Europe effectively address global societal and industrial challenges and respond to emerging crises.

Furthermore, we stress the need to ensure greater synergies with other EU programmes – as well as with national and regional RD&I investments – to leverage the impact of the Framework Programme. While vast, untapped potential lies in strengthening synergies, their implementation is yet to be achieved due to several challenges, notably including the growing complexity of the EU funding landscape.

Finally, we emphasise that while increasing the budget of the Framework Programme remains a priority, ensuring sufficient national investments in RD&I, by meeting the agreed target of 3% of GDP, is key to generating solutions to address global challenges and fostering Europe's competitiveness, including by leveraging private investments. It is therefore crucial to counter the increasing lack of commitment to RD&I spending from some EU member states and the trend to substitute national RD&I investments with EU RD&I funds.

In this context, we believe that a well-funded and strategically designed Framework Programme is pivotal for boosting Europe's competitiveness, fostering excellent pan-European RD&I collaboration, and achieving overarching EU policy objectives.

We are eager to continue our previously successful collaboration with the European Commission in shaping the next Framework Programme through the expertise of our sectors. It is only through collaborative efforts that we can achieve the ambitious goals set for the programme for the benefit of our shared future.

Sincerely yours,

Josep M. Garrell
EUA President

Antti Vasara
EARTO President

Mari Sundli Tveit
Science Europe President