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INTRODUCTION

Slovenia is committed to the co-creation of the European Research Area (ERA) and has internationalization of research among its three strategic goals.

Considering the high importance of the EU Framework Programme for Slovenia, Ministry decided to contribute proactively to the preparation of the next Framework Programme (FP) by appointing an Expert Group tasked with recommending Slovenian position towards next FP. The recommendations set out in this report are applicable also in the context of the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020.

The Expert Group structured the nine guiding principles and recommendations in three blocks. The first block constitutes recommendations on the Framework Programme, ERA governance and the process of priority-making, the second touches upon instruments of the Programme and the third provides guidance on synergies.

With its work and report, the Expert Group hopes to deliver a modest but meaningful contribution to discussions about the next Multiannual Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This chapter briefly summarizes a number of fundamental principles, which form the basis for the recommendations. They include:

- The Expert Group is convinced of the benefits of an EU-wide research and innovation programme and supports its **increase to at least 100 bn EUR** over the next 7-year period.
- The Expert Group is committed to **scientific excellence** and believes this should be one of the important guiding principles of the next Framework Programme (FP).
- The next FP should be based on **clear political and policy objectives. A comprehensive impact measurement framework needs to be developed together with the Member States (MS)**, taking into account i.a. scientific, innovation, cultural, societal, policy (ERA), organisational, structural, symbolic and other levels of impact of supported actions.
- The design of the next FP should take into account the **multi-level governance of the European innovation ecosystem**. The European innovation ecosystem, of which ERA is an integral part, is defined by complex multi-level governance, framework conditions and interactions between actors, with funding programmes at various levels, be it regional, national or European. In order for next FP to optimally contribute to this system, maximize impact and deliver a distinct European added value (EAV), the intervention logic should not focus on optimal delivery of a single programme but keep in mind the whole EU-wide system and implementation of the ERA. At the same time, cooperation between the European Commission (EC) and MS in governance should be significantly strengthened.
- Attention should be paid to **complementarities with related EU policies, regulations and implementing instruments**. Two fields of action of particular importance addressed in these recommendations are State aid Rules and the European Cohesion policy.
- **Radical changes should be introduced when clearly justified** as they may create disturbances in the system to be borne mainly by its users. Horizon 2020 is a good programme, but its effectiveness to support the European innovation ecosystem nevertheless needs to be improved. To this end, the Expert Group recommends to continue with the holistic approach of supporting excellent science, industrial leadership and societal challenges and focus on the optimisation of the existing system.
- **Grants should remain the default form of funding research**, while loans are suitable for funding activities at higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs).
- Next FP must contribute to **reducing bottlenecks for participation of excellent researchers** in collaborations across Europe. It should take into account specific framework conditions of MS and enable fair and transparent competition on a level playing field.

- **Research infrastructures should not be kept in isolation**, since they can significantly contribute to several of the objectives of the FP beyond excellent science. Access to them should be significantly strengthened and comprehensive.

1st BLOCK: Governance and priority-making

MS involvement in FP governance needs to not only strengthen but also go beyond consultations within the comitology process in order to achieve better synchronisation of its thematic priorities with those of MS, optimal functionality and effectiveness within the multi-level EU research and innovation ecosystem and the highest EAV.

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Recommendations:

- **The priority-setting process needs to be reformed.** In order to optimize impact and achieve alignment, the two current processes of priority setting in societal challenges, one led by the EC, the other by each of the Joint programming initiatives (JPIs), should be merged into a single one. Taking into account good practices of some JPIs, MS should develop thematic Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIA) in JPI-like platforms, which would be translated into next FP Work Programmes in a comitology process, together and on even grounds with the input from EU-level stakeholders (associations, platforms,...) brought into the process by the EC. Priorities of external agencies and initiatives (e.g. JTIs, FET Flagships and others) should be included into the Work Programme subject to comitology, following good practices of some contractual Public-Private Partnerships (cPPPs).
- **The comitology process should be enhanced.** Programme Committees should be fully involved in strategic discussions before orientation papers are presented by the EC. There should be enough time for negotiations before decisions are taken. To fulfil their role, the comitology bodies should have access to timely and comprehensive (quantitative and qualitative) reporting on the implementation of the programme.
- **The topics within the programme should be more interconnected** in order to address societal challenges with state of the art solutions and maximise the effectiveness of public spending. Greater internal coherence will prevent its pillars (excellence, competitiveness, societal challenges) to become standalone silos and will facilitate greater impact of investment.
- **Mission oriented research is supported**, however, care should be taken to deliver it in a way to avoid mayor short term perturbations, where national systems would be unable to compensate for.
- **The evaluator selection process should significantly improve.** The evaluators should possess state-of-the-art knowledge, skills and expertise to support an ambitious but feasible

approach to the problem. This could become essential particularly in a mission-oriented approach. When moving closer to the market, higher involvement of evaluators coming from potential end-user groups is necessary. Performance of evaluators should be monitored, feedback given to them and taken into account to improve the overall quality and management of the evaluation process. To recognize EAV, geographic diversity of evaluators is needed, while gender balance of experts should reflect the actual share of researchers in a specific field. To avoid potential conflict, evaluators should not be selected by those running the evaluation process.

2nd BLOCK: Instruments

Horizon 2020 employs different forms of funding and funding instruments. The system is well suited for strengthening research and innovation in Europe while targeting different stakeholders and combining funding mechanisms. This should in general remain the orientation for next FP but with grants being the default form of funding for research.

Recommendations:

- **The number of instruments should not increase. The instruments should however be reshaped** in a way to mitigate the oversubscription, increase its effectiveness and avoid fragmentation of the programme. The rules for implementing the programme (including those in the Financial Regulation) should enable tailor-made support and smooth transition between different forms of support.
- In view of the EAV and subsidiarity principle **monobeneficiary instruments should be limited** and should not significantly increase in comparison to Horizon 2020.
- **The ERA-NET Cofund scheme should retain a key role in establishing networking structures and co-funding transnational research projects.** A centralized procedure for the implementation of calls within the ERA-NET Cofund is needed, as is harmonization and simplification, preferably by one of the EC's implementing agencies. ERA-NETs should be grouped and managed through one platform per societal challenge. Consequently, MS could decide their participation per challenge. Allowing for a redistribution of funding between calls within the challenge when necessary, this might lead to better prioritisation of topics, ensure higher funding levels and increase success rates.
- Grand (societal) challenges can be adequately addressed through coordination of smaller (collaborative) projects, so a new **balance is needed between bigger and smaller projects.**
- **Widening objectives should be embedded into all relevant CSAs.** The underlying barriers for wider European collaboration in a specific field should be explored and recommendations on how to address them should be developed.

- **The instruments for widening participation should continue**, possibly be expanded and significantly enlarged in accordance with their ambitious objectives. The Expert Group considers measures taken by COST and the recent scheme of Fellowships to visit ERC grantees as interesting approaches to widening participation.
- In case of *ex aequo* proposals **introduction of a selection criterion of international diversity of the project consortium is recommended** to facilitate wider cooperation while safeguarding quality and excellence.
- **Full transition from a subscription system of scientific journals to an open access business model for all scientific journals should be promoted.** Eligibility of Article Processing Charges (APCs) should only be left for articles published in open access journals, which are included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and should be suspended for hybrid journals.

3rd BLOCK: Synergies

In order to create an efficient EU wide research and innovation system, various support measures available at EU, national and regional level should contribute to synergies and complementarities, while duplications should be avoided. In practice, this should be reflected in an optimal use of FP, national and ESIF funds in order to deliver on the objectives. Important steps were taken in Horizon 2020 with the activities such as Teaming and the Seal of excellence, yet some issues, such as different rules between Horizon 2020 and ESIF, work against the optimal use of various funds. Such is the case of COFUND actions, where the Horizon 2020 top up cannot be awarded if ESIF is used as national contribution, despite the fact that the topic is aligned with Smart specialisation and that cross-border cooperation is also promoted by ESIF. In general, the more specific rules are attached to various funds, the less optimal their use will be.

Recommendations:

- **The combination of ESIF and next FP funds should not only be allowed but strongly promoted in all cases when the objectives and targets of the funds are aligned.** Different and stringier rules are imposed on ESIF funds, preventing complementary use and synergies, and thus resulting in their less optimal use.
- **Same state aid rules should apply to projects positively evaluated in EU-wide competition, regardless if they are partly or fully covered by ESIF or national funds.** This would for example allow full implementation of the Seal of Excellence.
- **To achieve better complementarities and synergies with related policies and programmes especially ESIF, mechanisms and schemes should be developed on a systemic level, already in the programming phase of the new perspective.** An excellent example is the

Teaming scheme under Horizon 2020, where synergies between the various funds are a prerequisite for the implementation of the instrument. EIT with its regional partnerships delivering entrepreneurial education, innovation and business creation offers an excellent possibility for joint implementation by next FP and ESIF.

ANNEXES

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Abbreviations used in the report

CSA	Coordination and Support Actions
EC	European Commission
ERA	European Research Area
EAV	European Added Value
ERC	European Research Council
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Fund
EU	European Union
FP	Framework Programme for Research and Innovation
JPI	Joint programming Initiatives
JTI	Joint technology Initiatives
MS	Member States
Horizon 2020	8th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2014–2020
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
SME	Small and Medium sized Enterprise
SRIA	Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas
TRL	Technology Readiness Level