

Preliminary Romanian position paper on FP10

Introduction

Although the levels of quality and effectiveness which the common Union research has attained now are widely recognized, the fact that Europe is still falling behind its main competitors, the scale of the problems to be faced and the limited available public resources impose on the Union to set an ambitious new effective strategy.

Its experience and past achievements give the Union the right and the possibility to design such a new stage in the progress of European RDI. It is proposed to set out the features of this new stage in the light of three guiding principles:

- exploiting to the full the benefits conferred by the European dimension by ensuring that the common activities related to RDI at Union level are integrated into an overall strategy;
- using a comprehensive approach to increase competitiveness in research and innovation, while maintaining the European Union's core values and priorities;
- exploiting all Union available financial and legal instruments in a coherent way to capitalise on the full potential of Europe for excellence.

1. Exploiting the European dimension

The Union is both a large-scale organizational framework and a common market in which European Research-Development and Innovation (RDI) activities can find the most effective possible uses.

Make the best of this European dimension requires:

- to have all Member States fully involved in the implementation of Union activities in order to take advantage of all the European RDI best capacities which exist;
- to promote, facilitate and support at Union level the mobility of researchers throughout their career and their action (i.e. training, carrier start, research work, access to large scale scientific and technological facilities);
- to promote, facilitate and support joint multinational RDI activities, such as twinning of laboratories, networking of research entities and so on;
- to enable Member States to choose the most suitable approach at the national, international or European level for implementing scientific and technical actions of joint concern, in particular actions which reduce the research and innovation divide between Member States of the Union (review and coordination of national activities, promotion and support of joint national initiatives, strengthening of the overall scientific and technological bases of the Union).

2. Making the best of all appropriate EU instruments

By setting out activities in the context of an overall strategy the Union can assure their continuity from the economic point of view (the market), the industrial point of view (innovation) or the regulatory point of view (financial incentives, standards, competition).

In order to achieve this, it is necessary, but not sufficient, to adopt an integrated approach by bringing together all Union activities related to research and innovation and their implementation instruments. Such an integration needs also coherent Union policies and real opportunities of synergies between these policies to be effective.

This demands in particular to reconsider the ways and means of the control of State aid to RDI as RDI activities differ from the production activities of an undertaking.

These differences have been considered in the field of Antitrust Law and in the implementation of the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures Agreement by the WTO but only partly as regards the designing of the EU State aid rules in RDI, mainly by allowing aid intensities which are higher than in other sectors. In fact, distortion of competition is only a remote risk when awarding funding to RDI, fact which justifies a different application of the «balancing test».

Fundamental research should be excluded from the scope of State aid rules since the risk of distorting competition is merely hypothetical.

There is the need to have the same definitions for RDI in the Framework Programme and in the State aid to RDI rules: when the «RDI State aid framework» is considering three types of activities (fundamental research, industrial research, experimental development) according to the Frascati manual, Horizon 2020 for instance is in fact more considering the nine Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) to define the various stages of the technology development phase (fundamental research, technological research, product development and competitive manufacturing).

These differences may give rise to some misinterpretations of the rules and cause difficulties to investors in RDI. Another difficulty appears when one would like to use different complementary Union funds, Framework Programme and Structural Funds, for a certain project. Such an approach is authorized, it is even recommended, but it is difficult to implement as the State aid rules differ depending on whether the Union funding is «centrally managed» or not.

It should be pointed out that there is a real need for simplification of the State aid schemes, especially in supporting innovation, mainly to the private environment, as well as the simplification of public procurement procedures exclusively for research equipment.

3. Capitalise on the full potential of Europe for excellence

Our main challenge is to develop FP10 so that to maximize its potential for excellence. Although success rates are improving, there are still significant disparities between Member States, in terms of participation and involvement across the components of the framework programme.

We agree on the importance of reforming national research and innovation systems, making adequate national investments and improving access to international networks.

FP10 should integrate pockets of excellence everywhere in Europe and capitalize on the progress that has been made so far, which should lead to a full optimization of Europe's research and innovation potential and to a more distributed participation in the future.

The sustained implementation of specific measures under the Widening component with an additional allocated budget is critical for achieving the scientific excellence, overall in the Union.

Taking advantage at Union level of all existing excellence, everywhere in Europe, would furthermore require two specific measures:

- anonymous peer review of proposals: To avoid the risk of having individual evaluations biased by the knowledge of the names and the standing of the applicants, the best would be to have a twofold evaluation: in a first step evaluators would assess the scientific and technical merits of the proposal based on the single «anonymous» technical annex. The administrative forms with the presentation of the participants and the financial details of the application will be considered in a second stage only for the proposals considered as excellent during the first step. Such an approach would facilitate the participation of «new comers», in particular from EU13.

- «equal pay for equal work»: this principle, reaffirmed by the International Labor Office (ILO) in 1986 and the United Nations in 1979, is unanimously accepted to fight unfair wage discrimination. This principle is even at the origin of binding rules that apply in all the Member States of the European Union and that the Commission and the Court of Justice enforce.

4. Reduce the brain drain

FP10 should serve to make Europe an attractive and stimulating working environment for young researchers and innovators across Europe and from around the globe, while preventing brain drain.

FP10 should act as an EU lighthouse for excellent researchers and innovators, including early-career researchers. Member States should cooperate and compete on a fair playing field in the European Research Area (ERA), which is recognized for its quality and resilience.

In this respect, it should be avoided any ways to fuel the EU internal brain drain because going against the main objective set by the Treaty to strengthen its scientific and technological bases and because it contributes to the increase of the RDI divide within the Union.

In particular, it should be taken into account the possibility of allocating «return grants». These are grants that can be allocated to a researcher from a EU Member State, established in a third country and who wish to return and undertake RDI activities in a EU country, in particular in its country of origin. EU support should provide, for a period of three months to two years, a non-predetermined allowance for the researcher and a contribution to the research and administrative costs of the host institute.

The amount of the allowance for the researcher and the amount of the contribution to the research and to the administrative cost should be fixed on a case by case basis in order to take into account all possible scenarios: for instance, the researcher can be a «junior established researcher» or a Nobel Prize winner, the research could concern highly expensive natural science work or much less expensive socio-economic work. The allowance for the researcher must cover all the costs associated with mobility (such as travel, mobility daily allowance, insurance, eventually removal) and the salary of this researcher.

5. Put the applicants at center of FP10

FP10 can be as ambitious as possible, but it should stimulate researchers and innovators to apply to its calls and programmes, with an optimal balance between bottom-up and top-down calls. It should be improved the National Contact Points (NCPs) network to provide better support to all actors, providing clear and accessible guideline and support, as well as enabling their navigation within the components of the framework programme.

The reduction of the administrative burden for applicants should be one of the most important goal. FP10 should harmonise the regulations for all instruments to create more clarity and reduce misinterpretations.

Continuing simplification, including through the streamlining and rationalisation of instruments, must become a paramount priority in the design of the framework programme. For instance, in Horizon Europe, we have more than 20 «financial instruments » i.e. modes of intervention (doctoral networks, staff exchanges, grants, fellowships, CSA, subsidies, fast track, procurements, co-fund, prizes, ERANET, missions, partnerships, COST, chairs, twinning, teaming, Art.185, equity participation, bank guarantees, risk sharing funding), all of them in accordance with provisions of art.125 of Regulation 2018/1046.

There is no need of so many specific instruments as there are in Horizon Europe. The need is to have «instruments» that can respond to all potential needs of intervention in the frame of the EU RDI policy. This requires that each one remains flexible and open to all scientific and/or technical domains, to all forms of activities (from

Technology Readiness Level 1 -TRL1- up to TRL9) and to all types of «actors» (public or private, from SMEs to large industries).

We need in particular to promote and support non-programmed cooperation with twinning and networking of laboratories contracts. These contracts would be aiming at enabling researchers, engineers and technicians who are working in isolation in a certain scientific or technical field, in several Member States of the Union, to bring their efforts together, without coming into one laboratory, and thus encouraging in particular the formation of a global research team exceeding the critical size which is necessary to be effective at best. Furthermore, this contributes to break the isolation in which are a number of research teams in certain parts of the Union.

Funding should be granted to allow the people involved to meet, to carry out joint experiments, to exchange results, to add to their equipment in order to be more efficient, to strengthen their teams by temporarily taking on other people, preferably from another Member State of the Union and to train young scientists.

Research work as such would not be funded, Union support being in fact provided to all marginal costs (travel, new staff, computing, equipment, workshops, conferences) induced by the multinational cooperation. Union support would be provided to multinational European groups, either twinning or network, chosen on the basis of their scientific or technical quality, the quality of the proposed joint project, their innovative aspects and their value in terms of breaking down barriers between different Member States' RDI systems.

6. Raise the EU competitiveness by addressing jointly the big challenges of our times

FP10 should foster the creation of job opportunities and a stronger and more resilient EU economy, as Europe should become an innovative hotspot for companies to invest in development and early deployment of cutting-edge technologies.

FP10 should continue to contribute to transnational cooperation and excellence in research and innovation, thus expanding the knowledge base, strengthening competitiveness and strategic autonomy of the Union.

FP10 should address the whole value chain and put more emphasis on attractiveness for all stakeholders and to contribute to advancing the implementation of the European Research Area.

FP10 should take on a stronger leading role in offering research and innovation that supports solutions and responds to the challenges and emerging priorities, such as the adaptation to climate change, dual transition and so on, by finding a better balance between directionality and research and paying more attention to long-term challenges and opportunities.

FP10 should ensure stronger links between research infrastructures and its thematic priorities. Ultimately, FP10 should contribute to a better life for European citizens

through science-informed policies and by exploiting the full potential of research for society, in view of the development of key technologies for sustainable economies.

It should be put into practice science diplomacy to develop cooperation strategically with like-minded countries, especially with long-standing and trusted international partners and based on shared European values and principles, while ensuring EU added value and reciprocity whenever is needed.

Science diplomacy and the exploration of new ways to facilitate research partnerships with countries outside the EU is of high importance. Openness is the foundation of international research cooperation. Nevertheless, the issue of research security and foreign interference should be considered, based on the guiding principle of "*as open as possible, as closed as necessary*".