European Parliament
2024-2029

TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2025)0028

Assessment of the implementation of Horizon Europe in view of its interim evaluation and recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme

European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2025 on the assessment of the implementation of Horizon Europe in view of its interim evaluation and recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme (2024/2109(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Articles 179 to 188 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),

– having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union[1],

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013[2],

– having regard to Council Decision (EU) 2021/764 of 10 May 2021 establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and repealing Decision 2013/743/EU[3],

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/819 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology[4],

– having regard to Decision (EU) 2021/820 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 on the Strategic Innovation Agenda of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) 2021-2027: Boosting the Innovation Talent and Capacity of Europe and repealing Decision No 1312/2013/EU[5],

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1 OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj.
2 OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj.
3 OJ L 167 I, 12.05.2021, p. 1, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2021/764/oj.
4 OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 61, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/819/oj.
5 OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 91, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2021/820/oj.

– having regard to Council Regulation (EU) 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021 establishing the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe and repealing Regulations (EC) No 219/2007, (EU) No 557/2014, (EU) No 558/2014, (EU) No 559/2014, (EU) No 560/2014, (EU) No 561/2014 and (EU) No 642/2014[1],

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/697 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the European Defence Fund and repealing Regulation (EU) 2018/1092[2],

– having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled 'A new ERA for Research and Innovation' (COM(2020)0628),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 22 October 2024 entitled 'Implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) – Strengthening Europe's Research and Innovation: The ERA's Journey and Future Directions' (COM(2024)0490),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 18 May 2021 on the Global Approach to Research and Innovation Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world (COM(2021)0252),

– having regard to its resolution of 6 April 2022 on a global approach to research and innovation: Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world[3],

– having regard to its resolution of 22 November 2022 on the implementation of the European Innovation Council[4],

– having regard to the Commission communication of 19 July 2023 entitled 'EU Missions two years on: assessment of progress and way forward' (COM(2023)0457),

– having regard to its resolution of 14 December 2023 on young researchers[5],

– having regard to its resolution of 17 January 2024 with recommendations to the Commission on promotion of the freedom of scientific research in the EU[6],

– having regard to the European Research and Innovation Area Committee Opinion of 26 June 2024 on Guidance for the next Framework Programme for Research & Innovation,

– having regard to the partnership evaluation reports published in 2024 on eight of the nine Knowledge and Innovation Communities, namely EIT Urban Mobility, EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Food, EIT InnoEnergy, EIT Health, EIT Manufacturing, EIT Raw Materials, and EIT Digital,

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1 OJ L 427, 30.11.2021, p. 17, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/2085/oj.
2 OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 149, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/697/oj.
3 OJ C 434, 15.11.2022, p. 23.
4 OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 8.
5 OJ C, C/2024/4183, 2.8.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4183/oj.
6 OJ C, C/2024/5713, 17.10.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/5713/oj.

– having regard to the Report of the CERIS Expert Group of November 2024 entitled ‘Building resilience in the civil security domain based on research and technology’,

– having regard to European Court of Auditors Special Report 09/2022 of September 2022 entitled ‘Climate spending in the 2014-2020 EU budget– Not as high as reported’,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 19 January 2016 entitled ‘On the Response to the Report of the High Level Expert Group on the Ex Post Evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme’(COM(2016)0005),

– having regard to Enrico Letta’s report of 17 April 2024 entitled ‘Much more than a market’,

– having regard to Mario Draghi’s report of 9 September 2024 entitled ‘The future of European competitiveness’,

– having regard to the report by the Commission Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe of 16 October 2024 entitled ‘Align, Act, Accelerate: Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European Competitiveness,

– having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (A10-0021/2025),

A. whereas Horizon Europe (HEU) is the EU’s largest centrally managed funding programme and the largest publicly funded research and development (R&D) programme in the world; whereas Parliament initially proposed a budget of EUR 120 billion rather than the EUR 93.4 billion left after the revision of the multiannual financial framework;

B. whereas investments in R&D are essential for EU competitiveness, societal progress and innovation; whereas the report on the Future of European Competitiveness (the Draghi report) and the report by the Commission Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe (the Heitor report) recommended a budget for the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) of EUR 200 billion and EUR 220 billion respectively;

C. whereas the FP must be founded on European values, scientific independence, freedom and excellence, as well as on high European ethical standards and a drive to improve European competitiveness as well as to address societal challenges;

D. whereas the Draghi report showed that Europe is a world leader in science and innovation with the second highest share of high quality scientific publications and the third highest share of patent applications globally; whereas the Draghi report also concluded that the value chain that goes from research to innovative products that improve citizens’ lives in the EU is less effective compared to the US and China in translating good research into successful businesses providing quality jobs, new products and services to European citizens, as illustrated by the persistent gap between the US and EU in innovation performance, and the closing gap between the EU and China; whereas the Draghi report highlights that Europe lags particularly when it comes to the scaling up of start-ups;

E. whereas Commissioner Zaharieva, in her hearing with Parliament, committed to fighting for an independent and simplified FP and expressed her support for an increased budget and more expert-driven governance;

F. whereas the Heitor report outlines that in the first three years of Horizon Europe, 7 474 SMEs (34 % of all participants) were participating in the programme and that more than half of Horizon Europe SMEs are new to EU research, development and innovation programmes; whereas the success rates of SME applications has strongly improved (up to 19.9 % from 12 % in Horizon 2020);

G. whereas the Letta report proposes the establishment of a 'fifth freedom' to encompass research, innovation and education as a new dimension of the single market, as the four original freedoms are fundamentally based on 20th-century theoretical principals;

H. whereas the Letta report's 'freedom to stay' reiterates the importance of avoiding internal brain drain, and the Heitor report's 'Choose Europe' initiative sets out to foster research careers and turn the current European brain drain into a 'brain gain' by 2035;

General observations on Horizon Europe and Research and Innovation (R&I)

1 Recalls that we are at a crucial moment for R&I, and that Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that Europe needs to put 'research and innovation at the heart of our economy' during the presentation to Parliament of her programme for her second term as president of the European Commission in July 2024;

2. Notes that the Draghi, Letta and Heitor reports consider R&I to be of central importance to achieving European competitiveness and stress the urgent need to act not to fall behind; stresses that a strong commitment is needed to achieve a future framework programme that constitutes a crucial contribution to the competitiveness of Europe and its overall welfare;

3. Recalls that the Draghi and the Heitor reports are a wake-up call for Europe to face global competition and the significant rise of Chinese science in recent years; welcomes the higher success rate of HEU compared to Horizon 2020 (H2020); appreciates HEU's responsiveness in crises, such as COVID-19 and geopolitical challenges, but regrets not only the lack of additional funding but also the continuous funding cuts, which compromise original priorities;

4. Regrets that there have been negative experiences with the implementation of HEU because the shift from H2020 to HEU has mostly been experienced as an increase in complexity and bureaucracy; underlines that the success rates in some parts of the programme are still so low as to discourage potentially excellent applications, especially from researchers from research institutions with smaller budgets and SMEs; considers that strategic planning should lead to more substantial benefits for the quality of the programming and a strengthened commitment of all R&I stakeholders, which so far do not seem to have materialised sufficiently; believes that FP10 should be built on instruments under Horizon Europe that have proven to be effective and efficient;

5. Highlights the importance of an agile FP; notes that the Heitor report outlines the importance of responding to the fast-changing field of science and innovation and recommends a radical reform in engaging practitioners in the governance of the

programme, notably through the two proposed new Councils as well as less prescriptive calls; recalls that the Draghi report notes that the current governance of the FP is slow and bureaucratic, that its organisation should be redesigned to be more outcome-based and evaluated by top experts and that the future FP should be governed by people with a proven track record at the frontier of research or innovation; notes that innovative ideas cannot always be predicted and programmed and underlines the need for sufficient funding that is not pre-programmed in order to tap the full potential of developing innovation;

6. Highlights the importance of having an FP based on excellence in order to ensure the participation of the best researchers in Europe through the whole programme; argues that one of the critical weakness of the EU R&I policy landscape is also linked to the lack of a meaningful, integrated and complementary approach between place-based and excellence-driven R&I activities, in particular between the FP and the R&I window of the cohesion policy, which are of the same order of magnitude in terms of the EU budget; notes that the scale-up and commercialisation of research results remains a big challenge in Europe;

7. Recalls the recommendation by the Heitor report to foster an attractive and inclusive European research, development and innovation ecosystem; recalls the recommendation by the Letta report to foster the development of a fifth freedom in the single market; recalls the observation of the Draghi report that the fragmentation of the EU innovation ecosystem is one of the root causes of Europe's weak innovation performance; recalls that the Treaties situate the FP in the development of the European Research Area; is convinced that to maximise the impact of the framework programme, it needs to be embedded in a broader European research policy that ensures that Europe is an attractive location for research activities which attracts global talent, which effectively translates science into economic growth and societal progress, and which effectively addresses the innovation gap within the EU; considers that the upcoming European Research Area Act (ERA Act) should aim at achieving this Europe; recognises that there are still significant obstacles to 'brain circulation' among Member States, including the recognition of qualifications;

8. Insists on the absolute need for that Member States to adopt concrete commitments to reach a target of 3 % of GDP spending on R&D by 2030; notes that the EU is investing significantly less than other global powers, and that it has failed to reach the 3 % target for more than two decades, investing 2.24 % of its GDP in R&D in 2022, for example, compared to 3.5 % in the US; underlines that each year the EU under invests in R&D worsens the situation and deepens the gap with third countries; specifies that major discrepancies exist between the R&D intensity of the 27 EU Member States, with five reaching the 3 % spending target, while some others are below 1 %; recalls that, at less than 7 % of the total[1], the EU budget's contribution to R&D spending is a very minor share of the overall public spending on R&D in the EU; notes that national spending for research should not be cut in response to the availability of EU research funding as alternative funding; highlights that a joint effort between European and national funding for research and innovation is needed; underlines as well the important role of private investment in research and innovation in order to complement public funding; regrets that European private investment in research, development and innovation is lagging behind that in China and the US, reaching 1.3 % of GDP in the EU, compared to 2.4 %

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1 Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness, p. 236.

in the US and 1.9 % in China; insists, therefore, on the vital role of EU intervention as a catalyst for R&D spending, and on the need for further coordination and alignment between national and EU R&D spending;

9. Insists on the vital role of long-term public funding to support excellent basic research, driven by scientific curiosity with the only aim of advancing scientific knowledge and without an obvious nor immediate benefit, sometimes characterised by serendipity;

10. Highlights recital 72 of the Horizon Europe Regulation, which states that in order to guarantee scientific excellence, and in line with Article 13 of the Charter, the programme should promote the respect of academic freedom in all countries benefiting from its funds; underlines that while several incidents regarding academic freedom took place in several countries benefiting from Horizon Europe funds, the Commission has not used this recital effectively to address specific problems; welcomes the commitment by the Commissioner responsible for start-ups, research and innovation, in her hearing with Parliament, to propose a legislative proposal on the freedom of scientific research; calls on the Commission to present such a legislative proposal in line with Parliament's resolution of 17 January 2024;

11. Supports the high levels of climate spending in the first years of Horizon Europe; urges the Commission to stay on course to achieve the overall climate spending target of 35 % over the full lifetime of the programme;

12. Highlights that Horizon Europe is on track to meet its climate spending targets without, according to the Horizon Europe Programme Guide, considering the Do No Significant Harm principle in the evaluation of proposals, unless it was relevant for the content of the call; underlines that there is no legal obligation or legal basis for the horizontal application of either the Do No Significant Harm principle or the Do No Harm principle; welcomes the commitment by the Commissioner responsible for start-ups, research and innovation, in her hearing with Parliament, to assess the current approach and the new approach to the application of the Do No Significant Harm principle, including the legal basis for its application, and to share the assessment with Parliament; urges the Commission to report to Parliament, before the start of FP10, on the impact of the use of Do No (Significant) Harm under Horizon Europe, including an estimate of the associated costs of its implementation for the Commission and beneficiaries, and its impact on the simplification of project applications;

13. Considers that during the implementation of Horizon Europe, several major global events put thousands of researchers at risk, including in the EU's neighbourhood, leading to significant spikes in applications by researchers at risk for an emergency placement in Europe; concludes, however, that under the current programme, the EU does not have sufficient funding available to support researchers at risk and that efforts by some Member States and NGOs are fragmented;

14. Affirms the importance of international cooperation for the advancement of science; is concerned in this regard that international cooperation has declined under Horizon Europe compared to Horizon 2020; encourages the Commission to seek and conclude

other association agreements with third countries, restates[1] and emphasises that Parliament's ability to give meaningful consent to international agreements specifically concerning the participation of countries referred to in Article 16(1)d of the Horizon Europe Regulation in EU programmes is impeded where such agreements do not provide for a structure that guarantees parliamentary scrutiny under a consent procedure for association to a specific EU programme;

15. Welcomes in particular the association of the UK and Switzerland to Horizon Europe as it recognises the fact that UK and Swiss science and innovation are an integral part of the European science and innovation ecosystem; restates its concern about the amended Protocol in 2023 and its provisions regarding the automatic rebate for the UK; emphasises that any international agreement on the association of Switzerland to EU programmes should fully respect the prerogative of Parliament to provide meaningful consent in line with its resolution on association agreements for the participation of third countries in Union programmes;

16. Takes note of the Commission white paper on options for enhancing support for research and development involving technologies with dual-use potential; considers that nearly all respondents to the public consultation on the white paper rejected option 3; emphasises that many respondents considered that the implications of options 1 and 2 were not clear enough to allow them to determine which option would be preferable; highlights that it is widely recognised that the current constellation requires improvement to ensure the efficient use of public funds and to boost Europe's technological sovereignty; notes that Commissioner Zaharieva committed, in her hearing with Parliament, to continuing this evaluation, potentially through a new study to ensure the views expressed are representative of all stakeholders;

17. Notes that significant advances have been made in the framework of Horizon Europe with gender equality plans (GEPs) as an eligibility criterion and the gender dimension in the content of R&I as an award criterion by default across the programme; recognises that recent analyses confirm that the GEP eligibility criterion has had a catalytic effect;

Observations on competitiveness

18. Is deeply convinced that EU spending on science, research and innovation is the best investment in our common European future and for increasing competitiveness and societal progress, and successfully closing the innovation gap; agrees with Mr Draghi that all public R&D spending in the EU should be better coordinated at EU level, meaning properly aligning investments with the EU's strategic priorities, focusing on funding initiatives that achieve relevant impact and create added value, and that a reformed and strengthened FP is crucial to achieving this; underlines that, in order to ensure real added value, R&D spending should also be better coordinated at national level between Member States; reiterates that the reformed fiscal rules exclude national funds used to co-finance EU programmes, and calls for this possibility to be put to full use in order to boost EU research funding;

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[1] European Parliament resolution of 8 February 2024 on association agreements for the participation of third countries in Union programmes, OJ C, C/2024/6341, 7.11.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6341/oj.

19. Underlines the importance of standardisation activities to ensure that European companies can effectively capitalise on the competitive advantage from research and innovation;

20. Underlines the significant role of research and innovation across different industrial sectors that contributes to creating jobs and increasing European competitiveness compared to third countries;

21. Emphasises the importance of the European Innovation Council (EIC) for Europe's competitiveness; highlights in this regard that investments under the EIC are bridging the 'valley of death' and lead to innovations of a disruptive nature that have breakthrough and scale-up potential; highlights also the unique proposition of the EIC Accelerator to provide tailor-made support for high-potential, non-bankable start-ups;

22. Welcomes the fact that 44 % of the Horizon Europe budget to date has contributed to the digital and industrial transitions, most notably by stimulating cooperation for technology development, which are fundamental for European competitiveness;

23. Strongly believes that, beyond their key role for long-term and sustainable competitiveness, applied research, development and innovation policies are instrumental to avoid, anticipate and cope with the main global and societal challenges;

Observations on technical implementation

24. Considers that administrative simplification stagnated under Horizon Europe given that 32 % of participants consider applying to Horizon Europe to be more burdensome than Horizon 2020, while nearly half of participants report no difference[1], is concerned about the 'exploded cumulative transaction and administrative costs'[2]; notes that on average beneficiaries reported spending 6-10 % of their project budget on administrative costs, with 48 % reporting administrative costs of more than 10 %, including a 10 % share of beneficiaries reporting administrative costs of more than 20 %; deplores the fact that the time-to-grant under Horizon Europe is longer than it was under Horizon 2020, and that it exceeds the target of eight months set by the Commission[3]; insists on further administrative simplification, streamlining of the relevant procedures, cost cutting and a greater focus on applicants, and underlines that simplification must be for the benefit of the applicants, while ensuring that applications contain all the information needed for the evaluation of their excellence;

25. Recalls that the first full version of the Annotated Model Grant Agreement for Horizon Europe was published only in May 2024, more than three years after the start of the programme; notes that without a full version of this document, beneficiaries are not fully informed of the legal and financial conditions associated with signing a Grant

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1 European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Evaluation study on excellent science in the European framework programmes for research and innovation – Final report phase 2 – Supporting the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, pp. 47-48.

2 Heitor report, p. 90.

3 European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Evaluation study on excellent science in the European framework programmes for research and innovation – Final report phase 2 – Supporting the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 49.

Agreement; recalls that the first version of the Annotated Model Grant Agreement for Horizon 2020 was published before the official start of the programme; notes that the apparent cause of the delayed publication is the corporate approach to Model Grant Agreements which the Commission took for EU programmes under the current multiannual financial framework;

26. Notes that there are various opinions and experiences among different beneficiaries regarding the functionality of lump sums; recognises that some beneficiaries do not consider the introduction of lump-sum funding to be a simplification for them; underlines that the 2024 assessment of lump sum funding presents unclear data, which leaves important worries and questions unanswered, such as the uncertainty of the impact of an ex-post audit, while confirming other objections, such as the artificial increase of the number of work packages[1]; considers that this assessment confirms that lump-sum funding can be a simplification for some beneficiaries, but not for all[2];

27. Considers that the simplification offered by lump-sum funding consists of removing all obligations on actual cost reporting by beneficiaries to the Commission and removing

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1 European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Assessment of Lump Sum Funding in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe – Analysis of implementation data and feedback from surveys, 25 July 2024.
A key point of contention has been that the full impact of lump-sum funding on projects is unknown considering that there was no substantial data on fully closed projects. Furthermore, it has been recognised early on that lump sums would probably work for smaller projects (and single beneficiary projects), but the main point of doubt is their impact on larger, more complex projects. See the 2021 joint statement from EARTO, EUA and CESAER (https://www.eua.eu/news/eua-news/eua-cesaer-and-earto-call-for-caution-in-the-use-of-lump-sum-funding-in-horizon-europe.html) for an example. The opposition to the widespread use of lump sums comes from the fact that without substantial data on experiences with lump sums and without results from large, multi-beneficiary projects, the effects of lump sums on those projects is unknown. Therefore, this is the issue that the 2024 assessment should have addressed. A large part of the pilot under H2020 involved ERC proof of concept (PoC) projects, which are small, single beneficiary grants. Due to their specific nature, the PoC projects are left out of most lump-sum funding analyses, but not from all. For example, they seem to be included in the number of project closed (PoCs represent 44 % of the projects – see page 8 of the Commission's 2024 assessment – so they must be included in the 96 % of closed H2020 projects – see figure 6). This selective and un-transparent use of data makes the assessment unconvincing.

2 Slide 2 of European Commission presentation for webinar entitled 'Lump Sum Funding in Horizon Europe: How does it work? How to write a proposal?', 16 May 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/other/event240516.htm.
European Commission: EU Science & Innovation, promotional video on lump sums entitled 'How to evaluate lump sum proposals: Get started', 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsSO_s1Ec84.
European Commission: EU Science & Innovation, webinar entitled 'Lump Sum Funding in Horizon Europe: How does it work and what are the next steps?', 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUFYkhxE70I. At Minute 3.05, Director Will refers to error rate reduction as a reason for the use of lump sums. At minute 10.35, the first slide of the first presentation lists error rate reduction as the first objective of the use of lump sums.

financial ex-post audits for projects; welcomes the fact that this results in a lower error rate; underlines, however, that the error rate is a tool to ensure proper spending of public funds and not a goal in itself; warns, in that context, against putting at risk the quality of the spending of a highly successful programme by ramping up the use of lump sums too quickly;

28. Observes that the average size of consortia in Horizon Europe is significantly larger than in Horizon 2020[1]; considers that consortia foster collaboration and that bigger consortia contribute to broader, and potentially more diverse, collaboration; underlines, however, that managing bigger consortia also requires more time and effort both in the proposal preparation phase and in the project implementation phase, which takes away resources from performing research; considers, furthermore, that more complex consortia are less attractive to join for newcomers, given the complexity and the resources as well as the experience needed to manage them;

29. Underlines the importance of an open and accessible programme with low thresholds for applying in order to ensure participation of newcomers as well as SMEs; underlines that more than half of SME participants in Horizon Europe are newcomers[2]; considers that administrative burdens, the time investments needed and the complexity of applications risk discouraging SMEs from participating in the programme[3]; notes that the simple, small and fast grants of the SME Instrument under H2020 were a magnet for newcomer SMEs[4];

30. Considers that the Commission has not succeeded in creating agile but strong management of HEU, which has led to complex implementation; expects that the interim evaluation report should address shortages and possible solutions;

Observations on Pillar 1

31. Recognises the importance of Pillar 1 in promoting scientific excellence and attracting highly-skilled research, through the European Research Council (ERC), and programmes such as the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA);

32. Welcomes the continued success of the ERC; underlines that its success is dependent on the independence of the Scientific Council; stresses that the last few years have shown that the presence of a capable and committed president of the Scientific Council with respected scientific credentials is essential for the functioning and independence of the

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1 The average number of participants in a grant went up from 5.0 under H2020 to 7.1 under Horizon Europe (see: Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025–2027 Analysis). At the same time, the share of collaborative grants went down from 78 % under H2020 to 56 % under Horizon Europe (see Heitor report box 9.1).

2 European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, SME participation in Horizon Europe – Key figures (and key issues) in the first three years, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 11.

3 European Parliament, Panel for the Future of Science and Technology, The Horizon Europe Programme: A strategic assessment of selected items, 2024, p. 48.

4 Ninety percent of participants in the SME Instrument phase 1 were newcomers, while only 70 % of the EIC Accelerator participants have been newcomers so far. European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, SME participation in Horizon Europe – Key figures (and key issues) in the first three years, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 11.

ERC; notes that the bottom-up calls and independent governance of the ERC Scientific Council have proven highly effective;

33. Highlights the ability of both the ERC and the MSCA to attract scientific talent to Europe; notes the valuable contribution of the MSCA to European scientific leadership; notes with worry the low success rates in the MSCA;

34. Underlines that research projects funded under Pillar 1 should adhere to the principle of 'high risk/high gain'; suggests clarifying evaluation criteria to strictly ensure the realisation of 'high risk/high gain' when evaluating research proposals; observes that 'high risk' also means employing new research methods;

35. Emphasises that research infrastructures, in particular digital research infrastructures, provide a vital platform for researchers and innovators across disciplines and sectors to share data, methods and expertise, fostering the development and application of new technologies to strengthen Europe's technological sovereignty; welcomes, particularly in this regard, the progress made on the European Open Science Cloud and the European Museums Cloud;

Observations on Pillar 2

36. Emphasises that collaborative research is at the heart of the European framework programmes; recognises the importance of Pillar 2, which serves as a vital strategic tool, fostering pan-European collaboration by pooling resources and knowledge, and aligning public and private R&I agendas; notes that collaboration would not occur without EU funding at a similar rate, highlighting the unique added value of EU collaboration programmes, in particular for enabling Europe to address complex societal challenges and integrate businesses into critical, continent-wide value chains; considers that Pillar 2 has fostered research collaboration and has in particular been able to support joint research and innovation agendas for technology maturation through the joint undertakings, which contributes to the competitiveness of the EU;

37. Considers Pillar 2 a strategic tool for enabling pan-European collaboration and pooling of knowledge and resources, attracting private investments, and for bringing together public and private stakeholders across Europe to tackle complex societal challenges; believes it is important to continue support for these collaborations; acknowledges, however, the complexity of Pillar 2; believes that the implementation of this pillar remains too complex and should be improved, simplified and streamlined with a view to targeting results rather than solely addressing expenditure; notes that the number of instruments involved such as a multitude of partnerships, the complex, top-down administrative implementation of missions, and the many budgetary shifts have resulted in unnecessary complexity which discourages applicants, and especially newcomers, from participating; emphasises the importance of the accessibility of these instruments, particularly for SMEs from across all European regions, in order to enable participation for all excellent researchers and innovators as well as to foster the absorption capacities of companies; welcomes the announcement of the rebalancing in Pillar 2 towards a better equilibrium between the different types of R&I activities, from fundamental research to market-oriented innovation, as announced in the second strategic plan for Horizon Europe; notes in that context the conclusion in the European Research and Innovation Area Committee opinion on FP10 that the Cluster structure of Horizon Europe creates an unnecessary obstacle for participants looking for funding, in

particular newcomers, as well as the conclusion of the Draghi report that '[t]he programme should consolidate the overall fragmented and heterogeneous activities';

Observations on Pillar 3

38. Notes that scaling up and commercialising research outcomes remains Europe's greatest challenge; recalls the decisive role of entrepreneurship, for instance in the commercial and economic exploitation of excellent applied research into breakthrough innovation;

39. Highlights that the European Innovation Council is filling a widely recognised investment gap for scale-up finance for break-through innovations[1]; takes note of the very low success rate under the EIC and considers this a confirmation of the relevance of EIC funding as well as a worrying signal of underfunding of the programme; welcomes that fact that the EIC was completed as an instrument by the introduction of transition activities because these complete the innovator's journey from early idea to scale-up by facilitating technology maturation and validation; underlines the quality and relevance of the advice provided by the EIC Board and recalls in this regard the importance of expert advice to guide the implementation of the framework programme;

40. Considers that the EIC is a needed and excellent instrument in principle; agrees that streamlining and boosting the EIC, attracting private investments and supporting the commercialisation of research is at the core of Pillar 3, as confirmed by the Heitor report; regrets, however, that the Commission made some implementation decisions that led the EIC away from its intended purpose to help companies scale up; recognises that the EIC should have the flexibility to strategically maximise its potential to support breakthrough technology; firmly believes that the EIC can achieve its full potential if the legal and institutional setting of the programme is clarified and strengthened;

41. Regrets that not all of Parliament's recommendations set out in its resolution of 22 November 2022 on the implementation of the European Innovation Council have been implemented, most notably the recommendation that a thorough assessment be made of ways to improve the EIC's implementation, considering as an option the establishment of an independent EU body under Article 187 TFEU as the main entity responsible for implementing the EIC; regrets, moreover, that its recommendation to ensure the implementation of both the equity and grant components with direct coordination between the two components has been ignored;

42. Draws attention to the work of the programme managers in the EIC; strongly believes in the approach of strategic intelligence developed by experts with widely recognised expertise in the field to effective programming of strategic challenge-based calls; appreciates, in particular, the work done by programme managers to help projects find and realise added value by bringing together projects with a common interest;

43. Notes the generally positive assessments (in particular in terms of EU added value) made by independent experts of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities; notes that EIT KICs contribute to strengthening links between higher education and business as

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1 European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Evaluation study of the European framework programmes for research and innovation for an innovative Europe – Report phase 2 (support study for the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe), Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 98.

well as to closing the 'skills gap', and that synergies should be explored with the academies introduced in recent EU legislation (e.g. Net Zero Industry Act, Critical Raw Materials Act, Cybersecurity Package); highlights, moreover, that the EIT regional innovation scheme (RIS) activities contribute to reducing the European innovation capacity divide; recalls that more synergies to bridge the innovation divide should be created between the EIT and other actions such as the EU preparatory action entitled 'Innovation for place-based transformation' and believes that the EIT KICs could improve synergies within the framework programme (in pillar 3 activities and between pillars), and establish concrete synergies between excellence-driven and place-based innovation, for instance via the implementation of successors of R&I activities led by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, such as the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) instrument;

44. Regrets to conclude, however, that the relevance of the EIT as a programme is questioned by several stakeholders, including some of its biggest beneficiaries; underlines that in principle the concept of knowledge and innovation communities is appreciated by stakeholders as a useful instrument for effective innovation ecosystem development and integration; considers that the two main concerns raised are the financial self-sustainability requirement for KICs[1] and the central management by the EIT organisation which is too bureaucratic and burdensome, and which creates governance difficulties for the KICs[2]; concludes that for many stakeholders the financial and other costs, including the high burden of participating in a KIC, outweigh the benefits of the relatively little funding support relevant for them;

45. Regrets that, although some efforts have already been made, synergies between the EIC, the EIT and the ERC are not sufficiently developed;

Observations on Part 4

46. Welcomes that participation of entities from widening countries has increased in HEU; acknowledges that the innovation divide persists, notwithstanding a slight decrease in the disparities in innovation performance across Europe, in spite of two decades of widening efforts; underlines, however, that the existence of this innovation gap in Europe has negative consequences for the EU as a whole given that it means available talent is left unused and economic disparities within the EU can be expected to grow; notes that this low participation can be partially explained by structural factors, including inadequate national public investment in R&D, which undermines the effectiveness of the national R&I systems, as reflected by low scores on the European Innovation Scoreboard; notes, furthermore, that there is a link between high levels of FP participation and high levels of national public investment in R&D; is strongly convinced that without national reforms, the innovation gap cannot be closed, regardless of the efforts made at European level, and refers to the European Court of Auditors Special Report 09/2022 on this matter; recognises that new and more effective mechanisms to increase widening are needed, but that financing for these actions should

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1 See for example the European University Association's vision for FP10, page 14: https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/paving-the-way-for-impactful-european-r-i.html.

2 See for example the position of the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft: https://www.fraunhofer.de/content/dam/zv/en/institutes/international/brussels/finalpapers/Fraunhofer_PositionPaper_EIT.pdf.

primarily come from the national level and be complemented by cohesion policy funds; calls on the Commission to ensure that the upcoming ERA Act lays down strong obligations for Member States to improve the functioning of their R&I system in order to eliminate subpar performance due to structural challenges;

47. Underlines the importance of the Seal of Excellence under Horizon Europe; considers that the Seal in part mitigates the persistent issue of underfunding in Horizon Europe, which significantly hampers the ability to adequately support all high-quality proposals; acknowledges furthermore that the Seal can contribute to improving the relative participation of researchers from widening countries; emphasises, however, that the Seal cannot be considered as a substitute for direct financial support, particularly because the Seal is not a guarantee for funding;

48. Notes that a thriving European innovation ecosystem requires strong and well-connected place-based innovation ecosystems and that a better connected European innovation ecosystem will be essential for enhancing the competitiveness of Europe, its resilience and strategic autonomy; recognises that collaboration among territorial ecosystems enables European regions to leverage their combined strengths to develop innovative solutions more efficiently; underlines that this collaboration also accelerates the commercialisation and scaling of technologies, bolstering the EU's competitiveness also globally; recognises the vital role of public research organisations, including universities, as drivers of place-based innovation;

Observations on missions and partnerships

49. Highlights the science communication role of the missions and the need to strengthen this even further because this will bring research results closer to society and help address the challenge of distrust in R&I, while simultaneously helping gain societal approval for public investments in R&I; recalls that the Commission communication entitled 'EU Missions two years on: assessment of progress and way forward' did not constitute a positive assessment of the missions and concluded that missions had failed on core objectives such as crowding in external funding;

50. Recalls the fundamental role of partnerships in bringing together the Commission and private and/or public partners, and is of the opinion that they must receive continuous support with a defined target and scope; emphasises that public-private partnership governance structures should be streamlined and simplified to avoid unnecessary burdens and enhance focus on key priorities; considers the joint undertakings as very useful instruments to foster better coordination and alignment of research agendas across the EU, as well as to foster co-investment in R&D between the public and private sectors; notes with regret that the Joint Undertakings have not yet resulted in increased R&D spending by European industry overall;

Recommendations for the remaining part of Horizon Europe

51. Notes that no significant changes in the implementation of the missions have taken place since the publication of the communication; concludes that the current approach to missions is not sufficiently oriented towards fostering creative novel and R&I ideas to address challenges; believes mission-oriented programming should have objectives that can be reached through R&I, should be implemented through open calls for bottom-up ideas to achieve the mission, and should be managed through a portfolio approach

building on the experience of the EIC programme managers; considers that mission-oriented programming should first and foremost be a novel approach to research programming which puts more emphasis on bottom-up research ideas, which fosters interdisciplinarity and in particular creates space for synergies between Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts (SSHA)-driven and technology-driven activities, to address problems; therefore calls on the Commission to pilot this approach in the remaining years of Horizon Europe by spending the majority of the funds allocated to the missions through openly formulated calls that invite proposals for R&I activities that can contribute to achieving a specific objective; encourages the Commission to consider whether it is appropriate to continue funding each mission under Horizon Europe and to find additional funding and support for the continuation of the missions in other parts of the EU budget and at national as well as regional level, where appropriate;

52. Supports the proposal in the Heitor report to set up an experimental unit under Horizon Europe to experiment with new implementation methods and instruments in order to foster real simplification for participants and to develop a more agile implementation of the programme; urges the Commission to launch, from 2025, a task force to improve the efficacy of the European Semester, in line with the EU's share towards the 3 % target, as clearly described in the Draghi and Heitor reports and reiterated by European leaders in the Budapest Declaration on the New European Competitiveness Deal;

53. Insists that the Commission should continue the use of lump-sum funding under HEU, and apply it to beneficiaries for which the assessments show it to be clearly experienced as a simplification, such as SMEs and projects for which there is solid evidence that it is a genuine simplification; underlines in that regard that the intended ramping up of the use of lump sums for the 2026-2027 work programme remains questionable given the existing worries and unknowns regarding the impact of lump sums with regard to the simplification they offer to some beneficiaries and their impact on the quality of the projects funded; calls on the Commission to take all necessary steps to ensure sound and efficient use of EU funds before increasing the share of the Horizon Europe budget spend through lump sums in the last years of Horizon Europe and to explore the further improvement of the system to ensure lump-sum funding leads to genuine simplification for beneficiaries; supports the recommendation of the European Court of Auditors to define the scope of ex-post controls for lump-sum grants;

54. Supports the Heitor report's urgent call to introduce a 'Choose Europe' co-funding line and to turn the current 'European brain drain' into a 'brain gain' by 2035, noting that this should be considered a major and unique opportunity for Europe in the current uncertain geopolitical context, in particular following the recent US election, and should therefore be implemented urgently from 2025;

55. Calls on the Commission to restore EIC autonomy and agility without delay in order to get rid of existing complex processes that lead to lower implementation; believes the EIC transition activities should be open to proposals based on results from any FP project, regardless of which programme part funded that project;

56. Urges the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, to rely on recital 72 of the Horizon Europe Regulation to enforce more respect for academic freedom in the EU as well as in associated countries, in particular to use it as a basis to openly and directly address blatant violations of academic freedom by national governments;

57. Recommends that the use of the Do No (Significant) Harm principle should be accompanied by detailed guidance from the Commission on how compliance with the principle will be evaluated in the context of the specific call in which the principle is used;

Recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme (FP10)

58. Calls for FP10 to be a stand-alone EU programme, in the context of the upcoming discussion of the highly anticipated Competitiveness Fund, as announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her speech of 17 July 2024 in Strasbourg, dedicated to EU research and innovation excellence and strategic technology development, with a substantially higher budget appropriate for achieving the 3 % GDP spending target and sufficient to fund at least 75 % of the excellent[1] proposals submitted; recommends that FP10 focus on three core objectives:

    (a) creating a European competition of ideas, and a funnel to accelerate the development from fundamental science to innovation scale-up, providing support for blue-sky and basic research as well as strengthening the deployment and exploitation of innovative solutions,

    (b) supporting strategic research initiatives which require large-scale and European collaboration, as the programme's ability to prioritise these initiatives will be of utmost importance for Europe's ability to address the societal challenges it faces as well as for European industry and SMEs, including for technology maturation and fostering of European ecosystems, to address the competitiveness gap with our global competitors, focussing on the development of priority innovative advanced technologies and their translation into concrete applications of innovative products, processes and services,

    (c) advancing the ERA, including by addressing the innovation gap in Europe;

59. Recommends that the Commission ensure user-oriented, science-led, effective and efficient implementation of the programme, including by:

    (a) implementing an improved governance, inspired by the findings of the Heitor expert group and the Draghi report, addressing the need to improve the programme's agility, which should:

        i. be oriented towards facilitating the best science, technology development and innovation,

        ii. contribute to EU priorities on the terms of science and innovation,

        iii. be based on the principle of self-governance, through which recognised, independent specialists from the relevant field that act in the public interest can advise on how research and innovation can best contribute to the achievement of the policy priorities set by policymakers; recommends, as part of implementing this principle, setting up new Councils in line with the

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[1] Underlines that changing the threshold for 'excellent' in order to achieve the 75 % target without raising the budget would not be an acceptable approach.

Heitor report to deliver expert advice on the strategic priorities of the programme as well as on the formulation of call texts to ensure their quality,

(b) including positions for programme managers for the EIC, comparable to programme managers at the American ARPA-style agencies, who are experts appointed from outside the Commission with a proven track record in the relevant field, appointed for a predefined period, as special advisers to the Commissioner responsible for research and innovation to ensure their seniority in the Commission, to manage strategic visionary portfolios of projects, fostering collaboration between projects where relevant across the whole programme for their mutual benefit and set out challenges based on strategic intelligence and with a view to fostering global leadership for Europe in specific areas of their field,

(c) implementing a radical simplification in the administrative work related to the application for and management of FP10 projects, following the proposal of the Heitor report to trust first and check later for the application system as well as keeping the information requested in applications to an absolute minimum – no information which is not absolutely necessary for a good qualitative evaluation of the scientific or innovative quality of a proposal should be included in the proposal stage,

(d) promoting synergies and coordinated programming and implementation with other programmes and sectoral policies in particular with the future new industrial policy and the next important projects of common European interest dealing with research, development and innovation at national and EU level;

60. Recommends that the GEPs as eligibility criteria for funding should be maintained in FP10 in their current form as a permanent and integral element of EU research funding requirements;

61. Recommends that the general objective on advancing the ERA should lead to the development of an excellent, unified and well-functioning European Research Area that attracts talent, integrates newcomers in existing networks and provides access to world leading research and technology infrastructures while remaining open for excellent research proposals irrespective of the supporting research institution and supports joint early research programmes with national funders; underlines that the forthcoming ERA Act needs to ensure increased national investments, national reforms and the elimination of barriers to the free movement of knowledge, technology and researchers, to create the conditions for FP10 to support the achievement of a well-functioning ERA;

62. Considers that the Research Infrastructures, COST and Teaming programmes should contribute to the achievement of this general objective; is convinced that FP10 should provide for an instrument for strategic investments in technology infrastructures; believes that the MSCA is a crucial instrument for achieving this objective as it facilitates the mobility across the EU and between sectors of the best and the brightest who are selected based on the excellence of their proposal; believes that, to further the integration of the ERA, participation of entities from areas with low research performance should be encouraged in the programme;

63. Firmly believes that FP10 should include a newly established European fellowship programme for researchers at risk, incorporating the lessons learnt from the ongoing preparatory action, to achieve this general objective;

64. Continues to support the knowledge triangle approach of the EIT to foster innovation in Europe; believes that a reformed and refocussed EIT should contribute to the achievement of this general objective, given its particular role of integrating the European innovation ecosystem;

65. Believes that in FP10 an expanded and interlinked ERC and EIC should be the engine for a European competition of ideas and that an increase of their budgets should be prioritised in the FP10 budget; recommends that these programmes be designed so that they create a European, bottom-up funnel for innovation to develop quickly from fundamental science to innovation scale-up;

66. Considers that the EIC can only succeed if it can (i) offer blended finance as a single project and (ii) act with the same predictability and agility as private actors on the venture capital market through a tailor-made legal entity for its implementation; underlines that the strengthened autonomy and self-governance of both the ERC and the EIC are crucial to achieving this; considers in this regard that new options must be investigated to ensure their independence and long-term stability, such as creating dedicated legal entities;

67. Considers that the expansion of the EIC and ERC should include increased funding for blue-sky, collaborative and early research projects; recommends this expansion to fund smaller projects and consortia in order to lower the barrier to participation, to increase the success rate and to encourage experimentation with new ideas and collaborations; considers that both the EIC Pathfinder and the ERC Synergy Grants have a role to play in this expanded space for bottom-up collaborative research; underlines that the EIC Pathfinder should continue to fund Challenges, but they should be reformed from Challenge-based calls to ARPA-style Challenges which leave space for bottom-up proposals while securing strategic technology development;

68. Urges the Commission to design FP10 such that it can effectively support strategic research, technology development and deployment initiatives, focussing on a limited number of priorities to support research-based competitiveness and the resilience of key sectors in the European economy as well as to address societal challenges with 2040 as the time horizon and which require cross-border collaboration due to the scale and complexity of the issue at hand; believes that these initiatives could take the form of (i) societal mission-oriented programmes which address socio-economic and/or ecological challenges, (ii) technology mission-oriented programmes to accelerate the development of strategic technologies in Europe, and (iii) joint undertakings to secure joint investments by the private sector, Member States and the EU;

69. Is furthermore convinced that a share of the budget of FP10 should remain available for higher Technology Readiness Level collaborative calls to support strategic collaboration not covered in the strategic initiatives, in particular this budget could be used for strategic calls developed by the programme managers to further develop an emerging ecosystem;

70. Emphasises that mission-oriented programmes under FP10 should be fundamentally differently organised than the current missions in Horizon Europe; calls on the Commission to implement mission-oriented programmes under FP10 that set objectives that can be reached through R&I, implemented through open calls for bottom-up ideas, fostering interdisciplinarity, including between SSHA-driven and technology-driven activities, to achieve the mission, and managed through a portfolio approach building on the experience of the pilot under Horizon Europe; underlines that the successful management of these mission-oriented programmes requires outstanding expertise on the topic of the missions rather than generic expertise;

71. Underlines that procedures for obtaining support under FP10 must align with companies' realities; is of the opinion that, to this end, an industry-oriented application procedure, building on the experience of the Fast Track to Innovation from Horizon 2020, should be re-introduced under FP10, in particular where the programme aims to support strategic initiatives;

72. Is convinced that a strategic approach to international cooperation is more important than ever; believes that global collaboration in science is essential for the knowledge development of humanity, but cannot be pursued in a naive manner; recommends that the Commission develops a clear strategic policy framework for its decisions on international collaboration which includes (i) a clear policy on the association of third countries which recognises that association is a tool for political partnerships, (ii) a structured process for determining how open or closed FP10 projects need to be to foster the best possible research while also considering the strategic interests of the EU, and (iii) a plan to boost global collaboration through the programme;

73. Underlines the importance of FP10's compliance with the Council recommendation on research security; calls on the Commission to include in the strategic approach whether the right balance between security and openness can be best achieved at the level of programmes, calls or selected projects; believes as well that, beyond the agility of the framework programme itself, delivering resilience must be mainstreamed to become an integral part of all the applied research, development and innovation activities of the next framework programme, in a differentiated manner depending on the topic and the type of activity; believes in particular that innovation activities close to the market must take into account the risk of increased dependency on third countries stemming from them, and the necessary enhanced strategic autonomy of the EU;

74. Recommends in principle maintaining the civilian nature of the next framework programme and leaving calls specifically for defence applications to the successor of the European Defence Fund; urges the Commission further to develop options to strengthen the synergies between civilian and defence R&D spending; calls on the Commission in particular to explore how the exploitation of dual-use potential can be maximised, especially through interventions after project selection rather than in call or programme definition; underlines that academic freedom includes the right of researchers to decide to what research and development they wish to contribute;

75. Recommends that the programme should recognise the role of interdisciplinary research in addressing societal challenges, also including a better integration of SSHA; reiterates the need for sufficient funding for research projects that address societal challenges and that fall within the area of SSHA;

76. Recommends the introduction of research actions in order to foster and encourage more lower Technology Readiness Level research and basic research;

77. Notes that the allocation of at least 35 % of Horizon Europe expenditure to climate objectives served the general EU objective of mainstreaming climate actions into its sectoral policies and funds; considers this an ambitious target to ensure that FP10 adequately funds science, research and innovation that support the EU climate objectives;

78. Underlines that any potential application of the Do No (Significant) Harm principle under FP10 should, in line with Article 33(2)d of the Financial Regulation, be set out in the FP10 legislation;

79. Recommends that the central role of standardisation in driving innovation, enhancing competitiveness, and ensuring impactful, market-ready solutions be recognised in FP10 by ensuring that costs associated with standardisation activities, where relevant in projects, are clearly recognised as eligible for reimbursement under the programme as well as by offering support to researchers in their standardisation activities;

80. Insists that rules regarding the association of third countries to FP10 should require that these associations can only be concluded through international agreements, which requires the consent of the Parliament for each specific association to a specific EU programme, including for the scope of that association;

81. Notes that FP10 should take into account the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a way to foster European research and development while identifying specific risks that may arise form an abusive use of AI in the scientific environment and the corresponding mitigation measures;

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82. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments of the Member States.