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EU Competitiveness Council Fails to Fully Recognise the Societal Value of Research

Brussels, 1 December 2017 – Science Europe supports some of the conclusions adopted today by the EU Competitiveness Council, but is disappointed by the lack of ambition in others. The conclusions reflect the Council position on the preparation of the ninth Framework Programme (FP) for Research and Development.

Science Europe thoroughly supports the Council as it reaffirms the necessity to prioritise R&I across all relevant EU policies and programmes. Science Europe shares the Council’s view that “R&I collaboration at the EU level has been a very successful example of European cooperation and integration.”¹ That is why Science Europe regrets that the Council only calls for “significant funds for the next EU R&D&I Framework Programme.” It should call more ambitiously for a significant increase of investments in the ninth FP – as previous drafts did – and this should not occur at the expense of national research budgets.

More emphasis on value of research needed

The Council expresses its support to broadening the notion of impact and to better recognise research’s wide-ranging contributions to knowledge and society. “Breaking away from solely measuring economic returns towards appraising long-term societal impact is good”, said Stephan Kuster, Acting Director of Science Europe, “but we expected a stronger emphasis on the intrinsic value of knowledge creation through research and on the wider value of science to society, in line with the Tallinn Call for Action² recently released by the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.”

Science Europe’s Position Statement on ‘A New Vision for More Meaningful Research Impact Assessment’³ states that no single impact assessment practice can ever fully capture the impact and value of research. Approaches to impact assessment therefore ought to be flexible and methodologically diverse. Research evaluation must always consider the importance of knowledge creation and its ‘option value’ – the broad spectrum of values that research brings to society.

Science Europe raises concerns with regards to the current shift towards higher Technology Readiness Levels in Horizon 2020. It regrets that the Council has not made more balanced conclusions that recognise the importance of collaborative basic research in tackling societal challenges and developing new technologies.

¹ Council conclusions ‘From the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme’, to be published on 1 December 2017

² https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/tallinn_call_for_action_2017.pdf

³ <http://scieur.org/impact-pos>

Better organisation of regional, national, and European research efforts needed

The preparation of the ninth FP offers a timely opportunity to think on how to better organise regional, national, and European research efforts. The Council echoes Science Europe's call for a rationalisation of the EU R&I partnership landscape, made in its recent Policy Brief on Public to Public Partnerships (P2Ps).⁴ Science Europe, however, does not advocate the co-ordination of all national research spending. Some degree of duplication is necessary to preserve competition and reproducibility, which are essential to science.

Science Europe supports the conclusions on a “long-term strategic coordination process for R&I partnerships.” Its Member Organisations are involved in 60% of the active P2Ps and are ready to jointly work towards the definition of “criteria for selecting, implementing, monitoring and phasing out the R&I partnerships.”

Notes to editors

About Science Europe

Science Europe is an association of major European research funding and research performing organisations in 27 countries. It was established in 2011 to promote the collective interests of its members and to foster collaboration between them. For more information, see www.scienceeurope.org.

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⁴ <http://scieur.org/p2ps-brief>