

Science Europe Reaction

To the Legislators' Latest Decisions on Horizon Europe

Brussels, 17 December 2018

Following the vote on compromise texts¹ by the European Parliament (EP) on 12 December, and the adoption of a Partial General Approach on the Regulation² by the Council of the EU on 30 November, Science Europe would like to thank both institutions for their efforts to ensure a timely adoption of Horizon Europe. In view of the upcoming trilogues, Science Europe invites both institutions to consider the following elements in order to further improve this legislative package which is of utmost importance for European Research and Innovation (R&I).

Science Europe supports the EP's strong call for an increased budget of €120bn in 2018 prices, and invites the Council to take this proposed budget up in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Excellence and Fundamental Research

Horizon Europe must provide increased support to excellent fundamental research and include fundamental research activities in all parts of the programme. This is essential to keep or attract the best brains in Europe, develop knowledge and provide answers to current and future questions, and pave the way for tomorrow's innovation.

Science Europe fully supports the addition, by the EP and the Council, of scientific excellence as the first specific objective of the programme, and the modification of the name of Pillar I to reflect its primary goal in the title, i.e. excellent science.

The proposed increased focus on excellent R&I in the description of the missions objectives in Pillar II of Horizon Europe is also a welcome development.

Science Europe also supports the reassertion of the central role of external independent experts in project evaluation in order to ensure the quality, fairness, and integrity of the process.

The European Research Council (ERC) must be preserved as the globally recognised label it has become over the past decade and be protected from any changes that could endanger its future success story. The ERC Scientific Council must remain fully autonomous as it is in Horizon 2020 and as suggested in the European Commission's (EC) proposal. It must decide the focus of the ERC activities; no prescriptive provisions, such as a focus on a certain category of researchers, must be included in the Regulation. The

¹ Report on the Regulation:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&mode=XML&reference=A8-2018-0401&language=EN>

Report on the Decision:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&mode=XML&reference=A8-2018-0410&language=EN>

² <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15102-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) have also proved very successful in previous framework programmes, no new requirements should be imposed on them. The MSCA must remain fully open to all domains of R&I which must be chosen freely by the applicants whatever their profiles and career pathways are. Under no circumstances should the ERC or MSCA target specific missions or challenges as suggested by the EP.

Science Europe expresses its concern at the decrease of the budget share earmarked for research infrastructures. This poses a threat to the competitiveness of the European science system and its attractiveness in the eyes of top-level researchers. Research infrastructures also have an important role in the academia-industry collaboration.

Moreover Science Europe regrets that its call for a stronger place for fundamental research in the European Innovation Council (EIC) has not yet been heard. The objectives of the current Horizon 2020 FET Open instrument should be embedded in the EIC in order to support collaborative research, including technological fundamental research, towards radically new future technologies and innovation.

Science Europe also regrets that stakeholders representing the scientific community are not explicitly mentioned in the description of the consultation mechanism for the Strategic R&I Plans. Researchers push the frontier of knowledge and their views must be well reflected in this forward-looking exercise.

Structuring Pillar II

Collaborative research in international and multi-disciplinary consortia is instrumental in addressing global challenges and the new industrial revolution. It allows research to be carried out at a large enough scale, and enables European researchers to become leaders in the field.

Pillar II should focus on opportunities for collaborative research and innovation projects. The EP's suggestion to reintroduce a new SME specific instrument supporting mono-beneficiary grants for R&I activities in the clusters would undermine this. A budget earmarked for SMEs under Pillar II would also affect the coherence of the Pillar and its core objective, i.e. joining all relevant expertise to provide solutions to tackle the global challenges and increase European competitiveness.

Sufficient resources must be allocated to the projects within the clusters of Pillar II. The budgets which will be allocated to 'Partnerships and Missions' must not jeopardise this.

The EP proposes to earmark 15% of the programme's budget via calls using a 'Fast Track to Research and Innovation' approach. Science Europe would favour a piloting phase and a careful budget allocation for such a new instrument.

Science Europe calls for a discussion with the national funding organisations on the proposal to centralise the management of the financial contributions in the institutionalised partnerships. No final decision should be taken before these organisations, which will co-fund the initiatives, are involved and the national legislations are taken into consideration.

Bridging the RDI Gap

The divide in Research Development and Innovation (RDI) must be tackled via targeted measures, at EU and national level, to foster scientific excellence and strengthen RDI capacities across the EU. Excellence must therefore drive all parts of programme. The introduction of geographical considerations for the setting up of consortium or the evaluation of projects will not contribute to reducing the RDI divide in a structural manner.

Science Europe supports both parties' intention to maintain the criteria used in the evaluation system of Horizon 2020 (excellence, impact, and implementation). No priority system based on criteria that are not linked with the quality of the proposals should be implemented. Partners from underrepresented countries must be selected for their merit and not their geographical origin. Furthermore, excellence must continue to be **the sole evaluation criteria** for the ERC.

The EP's proposal to adapt the eligibility rules on personnel costs for Member States eligible for widening actions also deserves recognition. Allowing hourly costs of personnel to the level representing 1.25 times the usual national level may enable organisations from these eligible Member States to offer more competitive and attractive salaries.

Science Europe also supports the ongoing reflections on the new measures to support the participation of excellent researchers from underrepresented countries in the programme. Discussions involving all relevant stakeholders should be organised to assess these ideas, such as the proposal of the Council to grant legal entities who have participated successfully in the component 'Widening Participation and Sharing Excellence' with a record of this participation which may accompany proposals to Pillar II which they coordinate.

European Associated Countries

The European Research Area (ERA) benefits from the collaboration of the European Union with strong European research performers based in countries which are not EU members.

Science Europe regrets that neither the Council nor the EP reversed the proposal of the European Commission to exclude Switzerland from the first category of associated countries. All EFTA countries, whether they are member of the EEA or not, should be included in that category and be guaranteed full access to all parts of the programme under conditions that respect the appropriate rights and obligations.

Besides, the added value of the European non-EU countries contributing to the ERA should be acknowledged. The provisions on the preferred location for the first exploitation of the results should therefore include these countries, as proposed by the Council.

Going Forward

Science Europe is looking forward to collaborating with the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission during the trilogue phase to ensure that Horizon Europe meets the needs of the scientific community.

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