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**NOTE**

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Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020 and future outlook - Presidency text

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Delegations will find attached a Presidency text on the *draft Council conclusions on the ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020* with a view to the Research Working Party meeting on 23 February 2024.

**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EX-POST EVALUATION OF  
HORIZON 2020 AND FUTURE OUTLOOK**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

- its Conclusions of 27 May 2016<sup>1</sup> on “FP7 and the Future Outlook: Research and innovation investments for growth, jobs and solutions to societal challenges”, which support the ambitious simplification efforts initiated by the Commission, recognise the importance of ensuring attractiveness and accessibility of the Framework Programme (FP), acknowledge the need to better align policy agendas, and invite the relevant national and regional authorities and the Commission to increase the leverage effect of public research and development (R&D) spending on other public and private funding of research and innovation (R&I) as well as to foster public-private cooperation;
- its Conclusions of 1 December 2017<sup>2</sup> “From Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme”, which stress that EU added value must be the major driver for the design and implementation of the FP;
- its Recommendation of 19 November 2021<sup>3</sup> on “a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe”, in which it proposes a common set of values and principles inherent to the European Research Area (ERA) and its R&I systems, such as the pursuit of excellence and inclusiveness as a principle to reach the full potential of the ERA; pointing as well to the importance of coordination and coherence between the European dimension and national and regional R&I policies, the overall responsibility to increase impact of knowledge on society; reaffirming the target of investing 3% of Union GDP in research and development;

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<sup>1</sup> 9527/16  
<sup>2</sup> 15320/17  
<sup>3</sup> 13701/21

- its Conclusions of 13 October 2022<sup>4</sup> on the Special Report No 15/2022 on widening the participation in Horizon 2020 of the European Court of Auditors and its Conclusions of 9 March 2023<sup>5</sup> on the Special Report No 23/2022 on synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds of the European Court of Auditors, which stress the importance of synergies between Union programmes, on the one hand, and between European, national and regional levels, on the other hand, in order to ensure coherent programming and implementation and to address the R&I divide.
- 1. WELCOMES the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the “**Ex post evaluation of Horizon 2020, the EU framework programme for research and innovation**”<sup>6</sup> and its accompanying Staff Working Documents<sup>7</sup> published on 29 January 2024; NOTES that several of the recommendations of the ex post evaluation are being addressed in Horizon Europe, and therefore LOOKS FORWARD to the Commission’s reporting on the Horizon Europe Interim Evaluation.

## I. Core Principles

- 2. EMPHASISES that, driven by **the pursuit of excellence with the aim to deliver impact** for the benefit of the EU citizens, the overarching goals of the Framework Programme are to strengthen the EU’s scientific and technological bases and to contribute to the design and implementation of relevant Union policies; NOTES that the Framework Programme is thereby instrumental for the green transition, digital transformation and for other cross-sectoral policy goals, including the development of the **ERA** in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely, strongly contributing to the Union’s competitiveness and resilience.
- 3. UNDERLINES the pivotal role of the Framework Programme as the **central instrument to support R&I in the EU** and AFFIRMS the added value of the Framework Programme in enabling R&I activities, in particular collaborative research, that would not have been possible through other means or funding sources.

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<sup>4</sup> 13426/22

<sup>5</sup> 7258/23

<sup>6</sup> 5941/24

<sup>7</sup> 5941/24 ADD 2 - 4

4. NOTES that to achieve these goals and to safeguard the Union's competitiveness, its attractiveness for research talent, and for public and private investments, **not only an ambitious but also a stable budget** for the Framework Programme is necessary; in addition STRESSES that this **requires a strong European R&I system both at the EU and at the national and regional levels** and REMINDS that the EU remains far from achieving its headline target of investing 3% of GDP per year in R&D – with an investment of 2.22% of its GDP in 2022.

## II. Scientific impact

5. WELCOMES the **substantial scientific impact Horizon 2020 generated**, outperforming FP7, driving scientific breakthroughs and pioneering advancements in science and technology, thereby considerably contributing to the Union's position as a global scientific powerhouse. RECOGNISES the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) as flagship instruments and CALLS ON the Commission to explore ways to extend the leveraging effect of these instruments towards scientific excellence and improved researchers' skills and careers on all the Framework Programme's participating organisations.
6. TAKES NOTE that **Horizon 2020 covered the entire R&I value chain**, but CALLS on the Commission **to achieve a better balance** in offering funding opportunities between fundamental research and the final stages of economic or societal valorisation, including exploring more opportunities for collaborative research at lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs). STRESSES the importance of investing in a strong and broad knowledge base, ensuring a wide range of innovations on the longer term and reinforcing the Union's ability to respond fast and effectively to unforeseen crises.

## III. Societal impact

7. TAKES NOTE of the significant contributions of Horizon 2020 to addressing key societal challenges in alignment with Union priorities and linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); WELCOMES the evolution to a more strategic, interdisciplinary and directional approach of the programme, aimed at promoting R&I activities that have the potential to transform social, economic, and environmental systems.

8. EMPHASISES that in order to be successful this approach requires the coordinated engagement and early inclusion of Member States, industry, academia and citizens in setting the thematic priorities. INVITES the Commission to combine relevant contributions from all programme parts to enable the pursuit of common objectives and increase impact in key areas, as was initiated by the Focus Areas approach. RECALLS the important role and impact of R&I outcomes in the policy-making process and ENCOURAGES the Commission to optimise feedback to policy from Framework Programme projects.
9. ACKNOWLEDGES that the integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH) increased over the lifetime of the programme and the quality of the integration of SSH in projects improved, although unevenly between programme parts and disciplines; UNDERLINES the importance of including a societal perspective on technology development and leading to better opportunities for industrial and societal value creation. NOTES however an uneven uptake of SSH across work programmes as well as in their qualitative integration in projects, and CALLS ON the Commission to improve the adequacy of societal considerations already at the drafting stage of all work programmes.

#### **IV. Economic impact**

10. ACKNOWLEDGES the wider economic impact of the programme, not only by stimulating employment and economic growth, but also by leveraging public and private investment and raising the productivity of companies involved; NOTES the estimate that every euro invested in Horizon 2020 will yield five euro of benefits for EU citizens by 2040. WELCOMES the **enhanced efforts and the new instruments to strengthen the innovation potential of the Union.**

11. **WELCOMES the introduction of the European Innovation Council (EIC)** pilot in Horizon 2020, initiating the creation of a one-stop shop for innovation measures; **RECOMMENDS** that the Member States and the Commission continue supporting breakthrough innovation potential within Europe and the efforts to create a European venture capital market that facilitates cross-border investments and increases the available risk capital. **CALLS ON** the Commission to further deepen synergies between relevant innovation instruments and programmes, such as to safeguard complementarity between the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EIC in support of innovation, or to explore the integration of activities.
12. **EMPHASISES** that despite the vast amount of exploitable results of Horizon 2020 projects more effort is needed to **enhance the effective uptake by end users, including policy makers**. **ACKNOWLEDGES** the efforts of the Commission to put Union-wide exploitation support services and tools in place to improve the visibility as well as the usability of results, but **URGES** the Commission to continue improving and extending these tools and services and to explore additional ways of supporting beneficiaries in improving their knowledge valorisation and communication capacities and skills.
13. **WELCOMES** the increased number of **newcomers attracted to Horizon 2020 from various sectors, scientific disciplines and countries**, and **CALLS ON** the Commission to continue facilitating participation of entities that can add value in reinforcing knowledge valorisation, in particular SMEs.

## **V. Synergies**

14. **WELCOMES** the progress made in facilitating **synergies between Horizon 2020 and other EU programmes**; **NOTES** that in Horizon 2020 upstream synergies and alternative funding are working well but that **downstream synergies** and complementary funding from EU, national, regional, and private sources showed a need for improvement. **ACKNOWLEDGES** that public-private partnerships can facilitate synergies that reinforce knowledge valorisation; **ENCOURAGES** the Member States to investigate ways to broaden the scope of the Seal of Excellence and to increase awareness of this opportunity.

15. INVITES the Commission and Member States to develop **an overarching vision on the European R&I funding landscape** that leads to a more coordinated overall design of the programmes and better connection between all parts, thereby enhancing coherence, reducing fragmentation and maximizing the further uptake of research results. ENCOURAGES the Member States to strengthen the cooperation between bodies involved in the management of R&I supporting national, regional and cohesion policy programmes and the Framework Programme; INVITES the Commission to continue investing in creating awareness for funding bodies and applicants of the opportunities across programmes and at different stages of the innovation pipeline.

## **VI. Supporting the ERA**

16. WELCOMES the goals and achievements of the Science with and for Society (SwafS) part of Horizon 2020 and CALLS ON the Commission and the Member States to **better articulate the interlinkage between the Framework Programme and the political framework of the ERA** to improve their relevance in establishing a single, borderless market for R&I across Europe.
17. WELCOMES the improvements made towards **gender balance** in Horizon 2020, but NOTES that female participation in the programme should be reinforced, and INVITES the Commission to explore stronger additional measures to support women researchers, evaluators, entrepreneurs and innovators.
18. HIGHLIGHTS the **development, upgrading and improved accessibility of research and technology infrastructures** realised in Horizon 2020, enhancing research collaboration, state of the art scientific advances, and ensuring the testing of innovations; RECOMMENDS that the Member States and the Commission create greater synergies between EU, national and regional programmes for research infrastructures, to ensure their operations are sustainable.

19. WELCOMES the **progress made on the integration of the open access principles and requirements in Horizon 2020** and the establishment of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), contributing to enhanced knowledge circulation, and RECOMMENDS further incentivising findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR) data management across disciplines and programme parts.
20. RECALLS that Horizon 2020's openness to **international R&I cooperation is instrumental** to strengthen the EU's excellence and attractiveness, to tackle global challenges and to support the Union's external and development policy objectives; but NOTES that the level of international collaboration in Horizon 2020 remained similar to FP7 and therefore CALLS on the Commission to strengthen international collaboration in light of the key global challenges, taking into account the changing geopolitical context.

## VII. Widening Participation

21. APPRECIATES the moderate increase of the participation rate and of the EU contribution share of widening countries in Horizon 2020, but NOTES that there were fewer newcomers amongst the beneficiaries in Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation as compared to the other programme parts; HIGHLIGHTS at the same time considerable disparities among widening countries both in participation as well as in success rates and INVITES the Commission to **present and assess the impact of various options** towards a more differentiated approach.
22. RECALLS that the Commission should assess the need for more tailor-made actions and targeted networking activities, taking into account the different national systems and the reforms already undertaken by the Member States, and that genuine sustainable change requires continuous national investments and reforms in national R&I systems. HIGHLIGHTS in that respect the leveraging effect of Teaming actions in attracting new funding and their potential to stimulate reforms in the national R&I systems in widening countries and CALLS ON the Commission to explore a **wider use of co-funding approaches** for capacity building, as well as to extend support measures hereto. INVITES the Commission to strengthen coordination between instruments that **support opening up researchers' networks** and providing networking opportunities, especially for early career researchers, such as COST.



## VIII. Implementation

23. NOTES with regret that several parts of the programme suffered from significant **oversubscription** and hence resulted in a serious loss of effort and resources for applicants; CALLS ON the Commission to continue exploring new approaches to address the low success rates and to continue efforts to **reduce complexity and administrative costs for applicants and beneficiaries**; WELCOMES the piloting of measures aimed at enhancing the efficiency or reducing the complexity of the programme, such as lump sums; EMPHASISES that a transparent evaluation, including adequate feedback from stakeholders, is needed before changes are rolled out more broadly; STRESSES at the same time the importance of the rules for participation remaining as stable as possible.
24. NOTES that in general the large number of instruments in the programme, including the complex Partnerships landscape, hampers navigability and accessibility for applicants despite considerable improvements made, such as the Funding and Tenders Portal. CALLS ON the Commission to **investigate the added value of each separate instrument and to discontinue or reorient those that underperform or overlap**. INVITES the Member States and the Commission to streamline the roles and practices of National Contact Points and to invest in organisational research management and support capacity.

## IX. Monitoring

25. WELCOMES the enhanced attention to assessing the results and impacts of Horizon 2020, but NOTES with regret that **the monitoring arrangements in Horizon 2020 were too narrow in scope** mainly when considering economic and societal impacts, cross-cutting issues – notably SSH and gender –, policy priorities – such as the green and digital transition – and in assessing leveraging effects on organisational R&I change of its beneficiaries. Therefore, ENCOURAGES the Commission to keep on doing long term assessments of the programme in future evaluations and to further develop innovative methods, relevant indicators and realistic targets to optimise monitoring.