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Subject:	Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the research and training programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for the period 2028-2032, complementing Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and providing for the Community's contribution to the ITER project, and repealing Regulation (Euratom) 2025/1304 - Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

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https://dmsearch.eesc.europa.eu/search/opinion

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

EURATOM – Research and Training Programme 2028-2032

Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing the research and training programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for the period 2028-2032, complementing Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and providing for the Community's contribution to the ITER project, and repealing Regulation (Euratom) 2025/1304
(COM(2025) 594 final – 2025/0594 (NLE))

TEN/864

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Advisor	Tellervo KYLÄ-HARAKKA-RUONALA (to the rapporteur, Group I)
Legislative procedure	EU Law Tracker
Referral	Council of the European Union, 25/9/2025
Legal basis	Article 40 of the Euratom Treaty
European Commission documents	COM (2025) 594 - final Summary of COM(2025) 594
Section responsible	Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society
Adopted in section	9/3/2026
Adopted at plenary session	18/3/2026
Plenary session No	604
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	209/1/5

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

1.1 **welcomes** the proposed Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community for 2028-2032 (the Programme) and highlights its manifold role in promoting competitiveness, security and sustainability; to this end, emphasises the need to ensure adequate funding of the Programme and to amplify the whole range of investment from basic research to full-scale deployment;

1.2 **considers** that, on top of the EU funding, it is necessary to increase Member States' funding and to leverage private financing; calls for proper funding for companies of all sizes and the involvement of a range of actors in collaborative and cross-border research and innovation partnerships, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of European industrial ecosystems and the EU's economic security;

1.3 **points out** the importance of international cooperation in the development of new technologies and solutions, while recognising the need for proper risk assessment and management to ensure that third parties not meeting the general values-based and security criteria of the Programme are excluded and that cooperation safeguards the EU's economic and security interests, including in terms of financial aspects and the use of results;

1.4 **perceives** the development of fusion energy to be a crucial funding item of the Programme and considers it important to support the EU's role in ITER, with the aim of strengthening the European fusion energy ecosystem in the global context and accelerating the market uptake and deployment of fusion energy in the EU;

1.5 **emphasises** the need for proper funding for the development of other nuclear technologies in the energy sector, including Small and Advanced Modular Reactors (SMRs and AMRs), advanced fuels and materials, and safe solutions for the management of radioactive waste and spent fuel, with specific emphasis on the nuclear fuel cycle;

1.6 **encourages** focusing resources on the development and uptake of nuclear technologies for non-power purposes, such as applications in the medical, space, agriculture and industrial sectors; considers risk prevention and preparedness and the protection of people and the environment against safety and security risks as cross-cutting objectives of the Programme and calls for awareness to be raised of nuclear issues through communication and interaction with civil society representatives;

1.7 **calls for** due investment in the development of skills and competences in the nuclear field, with the aim of ensuring the availability of both world-class talent and a qualified workforce; to this end, encourages nuclear issues to be integrated into education at all levels and the attractiveness of nuclear professions to be promoted, while also enhancing cross-border mobility and networking through high-level research and technology infrastructure;

1.8 **advocates** implementing the simplification approach from the point of view of beneficiaries, in all administrative elements of the Programme and at all stages of the application and awarding procedures, and calls for making the procedures and work programmes easily accessible to any potential beneficiaries, including SMEs;

1.9 **stresses** the need for a strong synergy to be created between the Programme, the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), Horizon Europe and other relevant EU funds and programmes, including by following an outcome-oriented approach, while taking account of the specificities of the ecosystem and respecting the technology neutrality principle.

2. EXPLANATORY NOTES

Horizontal arguments

2.1 This EESC opinion is the latest in the series of EESC opinions on the Euratom research and training programmes, most recently preceded by the opinions on the programme for 2021-2025[1] and for 2026-2027[2].

2.2 The EESC has also recently provided several other opinions in the nuclear field, as referred to in relevant points below. Moreover, the EESC is contributing to the preparation of the new MFF with several opinions, including on the ECF[3] and on Horizon Europe[4], which are the most relevant ones with respect to the Programme.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.1 (Programme)

2.3 The Programme is part of the package of the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) and contributes to several priorities of the EU, including competitiveness and comprehensive security ('comprehensive' covers the various dimensions of security). The Programme's specific objectives of advancing research into safe and innovative nuclear technologies and ensuring related skills and talents in the EU are well justified. To meet all the objectives of the Programme, it is necessary to ensure that its financial envelope will be adequate for its implementation.

2.4 At the same time, it is important to seek synergies with other related EU funds and programmes (see recommendation 1.9), to ensure proper investment throughout the various investment stages, from basic research to innovation and full-scale deployment.

1 OJ C, C/2019/110, 22.3.2019.

2 OJ C, C/2025/2968, 16.6.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2968/oj.

3 OJ C, C/2026/873, 27.2.2026, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/873/oj.

4 EESC opinion on "Horizon Europe" (not yet published in the Official Journal): https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/horizon-europe-0.

2.5 Cooperation with other funds is also necessary from the point of view of resources, considering that the indicative financial envelope of the Programme is EUR 6.7 billion for five years, which corresponds to less than 6% of the envelope for Horizon Europe and less than 4% of the ECF for seven years.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.2 (internal collaboration)

2.6 Given the significant investment needs in the area of the Programme, it is also necessary to increase efforts at Member State level, on top of the EU funding. The need to respond to the geopolitical, geoeconomic and environmental challenges calls on Member States to strengthen investment in research and innovation in general and in nuclear science and technologies, too.

2.7 It is also important to leverage private funding for this purpose and to involve both public and private actors in collaborative and cross-border research and innovation partnerships, comprising businesses, research institutions, universities and other stakeholders. Besides the large companies that predominate in this market environment, innovative start-ups can provide a valuable contribution to the development and uptake of nuclear technology in several parts of value chains. Versatile and cross-border partnerships are vital for enhancing European industrial ecosystems and hence the overall competitiveness and economic security of the EU.

2.8 Strong technological capacity is an increasingly crucial aspect in determining global influence and power. The nuclear research community is largely made up of big companies and public entities. It is therefore crucial to ensure sufficient resources for big actors and boost their RDI efforts. At the same time, it is important to enhance the role of smaller enterprises such as innovative start-ups. To this end, the maximum funding rate should be set at up to 100% for companies of all sizes at RIA stage and up to 100% for SMEs and up to 70% for big companies for IAs.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.3 (international cooperation)

2.9 The development of new technologies and solutions requires remarkable resources, which is not possible without international cooperation. Cooperation with third parties is thus necessary for the EU to develop its capacity and global role in the nuclear field.

2.10 On the other hand, the risks related to cooperation with third parties must be adequately assessed and managed. It must be ensured that the EU's economic interests are met in the cooperation, in terms of contributions and benefits. It is also crucial to safeguard the EU's economic security, ranging from raw material supply to the protection of intellectual property rights.

2.11 On top of conditions to safeguard the EU's direct economic and security interests, the proposed criteria for the participation of third countries in the Programme also include general values-based criteria. These should be implemented strictly and exclude countries not fulfilling these criteria or violating international peace and security principles.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.4 (fusion energy)

2.12 Given the significant opportunities provided by fusion energy, it is vital to allocate enough funding to its advancement. To overcome scientific, technological and market obstacles hindering its development and uptake, all investment stages should be considered as an entirety, from research through piloting to full-scale operation and deployment, including the necessary infrastructure. The upcoming Commission Communication on the EU's fusion strategy should provide a comprehensive framework to this end.

2.13 A major share of the Programme's budget (EUR 4 billion) is proposed to be allocated to the EU's contribution to the ITER project. This is justified, given the need to accelerate the market uptake of fusion energy and to strengthen the European ecosystem. This also complements the Horizon Europe initiative on 'Moonshot Fusion', which aims to tackle the challenges to the deployment of fusion energy on the EU grid.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.5 (other nuclear energy investment)

2.14 The increased need for the security of supply and decarbonisation of energy systems has made nuclear energy a more attractive option in energy production, while it is up to the Member States to choose their own energy mix. Replacing fossil fuels with zero- and low-carbon energy sources is not only a matter of energy production but is also important for the decarbonisation efforts of various industries and other energy consumers. This calls for strengthened investment in the development and uptake of innovative, safe and secure nuclear technologies and systems, as indicated in the EESC opinion[5] on the Commission Communication[6] on the 2025 Nuclear Illustrative Programme.

2.15 SMRs and AMRs are examples of technologies with increasing potential. SMRs have been recognised as a clean and flexible solution to generate electricity and heat for residential and industrial applications, including hydrogen production. The strategic action plan by the European Alliance on Small Modular Reactors[7] aims to roll out SMRs and help EU industry to grow and compete on a global scale. The action plan is to be backed by EU funding, including through the Euratom Programme. It also provides a basis for the upcoming SMR strategy by the European Commission.

2.16 As fission technologies are already able to support the EU's climate objectives in the short, medium and long term, they deserve greater recognition by increasing the funding allocated to fission and by providing it with a climate change mitigation co-efficient of 100% under the Regulation establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities. Innovative actions related to fission technologies (SMRs, AMRs, fuel cycle etc.) should also be eligible for Moonshot projects under Horizon Europe.

5 OJ C, C/2026/883, 27.2.2026, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/883/oj.

6 COM/2025/315 final.

7 The strategic action plan by the European Alliance on Small Modular Reactors.

2.17 Strong efforts must also be focused on the enhancement of safe management of radioactive waste and spent fuel[8]. Specific efforts are needed to develop the nuclear fuel cycle, thereby responding to the geopolitical challenges related to the security of fuel supply and improving environmental safety. Given the importance of ensuring safe and safeguarded management of radioactive waste, it is necessary to increase the capacity of EURAD 2 (European Joint Programme on Radioactive Waste Management) to respond more dynamically to evolving needs and policy changes in this field with civil society involved.

2.18 All in all, the Programme must consider the needs of the entire life span of nuclear materials, technologies and installations, covering raw material supply, production, logistics, decommissioning and waste management. Advanced solutions are also needed for maintaining and upgrading the safe operation of existing plants.

2.19 It is also important to recognise and address various actors operating in the value chains. For example, SMEs play a crucial role in many parts of value chains related to nuclear technologies. They also act in a wide variety of sectors.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.6 (non-power uses)

2.20 More attention should be paid to the opportunities nuclear science and technologies offer in many sectors other than power production, such as applications of ionising radiation in health, agriculture, space and industrial sectors. These are also relevant for those Member States not using nuclear power in their energy mix.

2.21 In the health sector, radiological and nuclear technologies are particularly important in the fight against cancer at all its stages, covering detection, diagnosis, treatment and care. To respond to the growing demand for radioisotopes in healthcare, several challenges must be overcome: high dependencies on third countries for certain key source materials, the aging of research reactors and delays in plans to build new ones, as well as the lack of harmonised implementation of applicable regulation, such as nuclear, pharmaceutical and transport regulation, across the EU.

2.22 In this regard, tangible progress is needed in the implementation of the Strategic Agenda for Medical Ionising Radiation Applications (SAMIRA) and the European Radioisotopes Valley Initiative (ERVI) in connection with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, including through the contribution of ERVI to tackle dependencies more effectively and build high-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU) and stable isotope capacities in Europe[9].

8 OJ C, C/2025/110, 10.1.2025, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/110/oj.

9 OJ C, C/2024/4661, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4661/oj.

2.23 The protection of people and the environment must be considered as a cross-cutting approach throughout the Programme, both in the power and non-power fields. While the prevention of safety risks must be the priority, proper funding must also be allocated to improving preparedness for exceptional situations, such as radiation accidents. It is also essential to prevent and prepare for security risks caused by illegal transport and use of radioactive materials.

2.24 Given the manifold role of nuclear technologies in the economy and society, there is a need to raise awareness of nuclear issues and of the objectives and results of the Programme through communication and interaction with various civil society actors, including representatives of enterprises, workers and citizens at large.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.7 (skills and talent)

2.25 The availability of world-class talent in the nuclear field is a prerequisite for the EU to reach and maintain a strong role in the global context. It can be achieved through high-level education, together with a research and innovation environment that promotes excellence and provides access to advanced research and technology infrastructure. The Joint Research Centre (JRC) plays a vital role in this respect.

2.26 Moreover, success in the nuclear field requires qualified professionals and a workforce for practical tasks, ranging from inspectors and process workers for power plants to medical and healthcare personnel. It is therefore crucial to devote adequate Programme funding to promoting the development of skills and competences, which must complement national investment in education and training.

2.27 Achieving and maintaining the necessary mindset, skills and competences requires that, on top of general awareness-raising, nuclear issues be integrated in education at all levels, from primary schools to vocational training and higher education, complemented by tailored work-related skilling. Education in STEM subjects is one basis for further skills development for all.

2.28 It is also necessary to promote the attractiveness of nuclear professions, particularly for young people, and encourage women to join the nuclear field. According to the IEA analysis[10], wages in the nuclear sector are the second highest in the energy sector, after the oil and gas sector. Women's share of leadership roles in the nuclear sector has shown promising trends and now stands above the economy-wide average of 25%.

2.29 Enhancing cooperation between Member States is necessary to complement national efforts and generate synergies and additional benefits in terms of talent and skills. The same applies to international cooperation, including research cooperation to enhance scientific and technological excellence and the exchange of expertise in practical operations. The availability of and access to high-level research and innovation infrastructure are vital in enhancing the mobility and networking of talent.

10 IEA, World Energy Employment 2025.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.8 (simplification)

2.30 Simplification must be an overarching approach that applies to all administrative elements of the Programme and all stages of the process, from work programmes to application and awarding procedures. Simplification measures should be implemented primarily from the point of view of beneficiaries, ensuring that the procedures and work programmes are easily accessible and understandable for all kinds of beneficiaries, including SMEs[11].

2.31 It is also important to ensure that the structure and governance of the Programme are clear and streamlined, which also helps beneficiaries in navigating the procedures. Moreover, clear and transparent granting rules and an encouraging overall funding landscape are crucial for potential beneficiaries, which requires finding a proper balance between predictability and flexibility.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.9 (synergy)

2.32 Article 7 of the draft regulation proposes to strengthen synergies between the Euratom programme and other EU programmes, stating that a single project may benefit from both Euratom funding and other European funding sources. The reinforced synergy among different tools of financing – such as the ECF, Horizon Europe and other relevant EU funds and programmes – is highly welcome. As the Programme is related to all four policy windows of the ECF, from clean and digital transitions to health and space issues, the synergies and benefits should be considered in all these topics.

2.33 For making the synergies viable, funding must be based on an outcome-oriented approach, and the principle of technology neutrality must be fully applied.

11 See also OJ C, C/2026/873, 27.2.2026, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2026/873/oj.

3. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Amendment 1
linked to recommendation 1.3
amending Article 8(3)(b)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Article 8(3)(b) commitment to a rules-based open market economy, including fair and equitable dealing with intellectual property rights, respect of human rights, backed by democratic institutions;	Article 8(3)(b) commitment to a rules-based open market economy, including fair and equitable dealing with intellectual property rights, respect of human rights, backed by democratic institutions***, as well as respect of international peace and security principles***;

Reason
See point 2.11.

Amendment 2
linked to recommendation 1.5
additional specific objective in Article 3(2), after 2(b)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	Article 3(2)(b) additional letter ***advance research and development on innovative and safe fission energy solutions, including reactor systems and the entire nuclear fuel cycle;***

Reason
See points 2.14 - 2.19

Amendment 3

linked to recommendation 1.5

additional specific objective in the Annex, after Specific objectives 2(a) and 2(b)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	Specific objective 2(b) additional letter ***In addition to activities relevant to fission energy mentioned under specific objectives 2(c) and 2(d) (safety and security, waste management, skills and competences)*** ***(i) support the development of fission-based energy production technologies, including Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs);*** ***(ii) support the development of advanced fuels and entire fuel cycles;*** ***(iii) enhance solutions to maintain and upgrade the safe operation of existing plants;*** (iv) ***enhance the creation of European ecosystems to develop and adopt innovative fission energy solutions.***

Reason
See points 2.14 - 2.19.

Amendment 4

linked to recommendation 1.7

amending paragraph 2(d) in Article 3

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Article 3(2)(d) develop, retain and utilise expertise and competencies in the nuclear field through education and training and support access to state-of-the-art research infrastructures, ensuring their long-term sustainability and operational excellence; and	Article 3(2)(d) develop, retain and utilise expertise and competencies in the nuclear field through ***awareness-raising,*** education ***at all levels*** and training**,** and support***ing*** access to state-of-the-art research infrastructures, ensuring their long-term sustainability and operational excellence; and

Reason
See points 2.25-2.29.

Amendment 5

linked to recommendations 1.6 and 1.7

adding a new point (vi) under Specific objective 2(d) in the Annex

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	(vi) ***raising awareness of nuclear issues and the Programme through communication and interaction with civil society, including representatives of enterprises, workers and citizens at large.***

Reason
See points 2.24 and 2.27.

Amendment 6

linked to recommendation 1.2

Adding a new paragraph to Article 12, after paragraph 2.

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	New paragraph after Article 12(2) ***By way of derogation from Article 27 of Regulation [establishing the Horizon Europe Framework Programme], up to 100% of the total eligible costs of an action under the Euratom Programme may be reimbursed for both SMEs and other for-profit legal entities in the RIA stage.***

Reason
See point 2.8.

Brussels, 18 March 2026.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee

Séamus BOLAND

N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX to the OPINION
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

LEGISLATIVE FOOTPRINT

LIST OF INTEREST REPRESENTATIVES FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

The following list is drawn up on a purely voluntary basis under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur. The rapporteur has received input from the following interest representatives (organisations and/or self-employed individuals) in the preparation of TEN/864 EURATOM – Research and Training Programme 2028-2032:

Organisations and/or self-employed individuals

Newcleo
nucleareurope
Orano
Urenco

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