

Statement on the European Commission's Horizon Europe Proposal

Consistent with its mission to involve scientists in the design and implementation of European science policies, Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) welcomes the Commission's June 6 proposal for the 9th Framework Programme Horizon Europe, and will be actively involved in the forthcoming months to help improve it. This first statement will be followed by others, by ISE or its member organizations, addressing general and specific issues of the programme.

On the budget proposed for Horizon Europe

- ISE appreciates the Commission's budgetary proposal; we acknowledge that, given the consequences of Brexit, an increase over the budget of Horizon 2020 **must be viewed as a significantly positive result**.
- The proposed budget, however, is clearly not sufficient to address the socio-economic challenges of our time whilst sustaining and developing the European Research Area.
- Therefore, ISE calls on the European Parliament and the EU Member States **not only to ring-fence but to increase the proposed budget** during the negotiation of the Multi-annual Financial Framework.
- ISE calls on the European Commission **to revise the budget allocation** between the three pillars. Pillar 1 of Horizon Europe, Open Science, with its programmes of proven efficiency, should represent a higher share. Indeed, it is essential to reiterate that many technologies of today can be traced back to curiosity-driven scientific research of the past. Furthermore, the EU trans-border and inter-sectoral mobility schemes contribute in an essential way to the training of the future generation of researchers in both the public and private sectors.

On the content of the Horizon Europe proposal

Pillar 1. Open Science

Pillar 1. covers the European Research Council (ERC), the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the research infrastructures programme. The choice of 'Open Science' to name this pillar is somewhat unfortunate because it leads to confusion between pillar and policy. ISE assumes that the Horizon 2020 FET Flagships, which are no longer included in this pillar, will become one of the instruments, possibly under the new name of 'mission', to be implemented in Pillar 2.

The European Research Council (ERC)

- As stated by Commissioner Moedas, the ERC is the “jewel in the crown” of the Framework Programme. Since its inception in 2007, the ERC has been an uninterrupted success story largely thanks to its specific governance structure, the ERC Scientific Council. ISE was at the forefront of the scientific community’s efforts leading to the creation of the ERC, and **is delighted that the independence of the ERC Scientific Council has been confirmed by Commissioner Moedas. We caution against any attempt to overrule this independence.**
- The budget proposal for a now 27-EU Member States ERC will be significantly increased. This is a good decision; **however, will the increased budget be enough?** Presently, many excellent proposals to the ERC are turned down. Second, the ERC Scientific Council has decided, after the success of the pilot phase, to implement the Synergy Grant Scheme to foster some form of collaborative research. Finally, the Commission has ambitious goals for the ERC, including making the EU a more attractive environment for the world's best scientists.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

- The Horizon Europe budget proposal offers a slight increase for the MSCA. This increase, however, **falls short of expectations.** The number of active researchers in the European Union rose by over 30% between 2005 and 2015. Available research funding has not kept pace with this rapid growth, leading to a hypercompetitive environment that is discouraging many outstanding researchers from staying in research. All MSCA schemes display extremely low success rates (with numerous outstanding applications being turned down) and the recent trend being towards even lower success rates; this is a waste of talent and effort.
- Boosting the participation of poorly-performing countries in the EU framework programmes is a major priority to foster European integration and bridge the research & innovation divide in Europe. The MSCA ‘Widening Fellowships’ scheme was created under Horizon 2020 to provide opportunities to work in research and innovation areas in these countries, with a positive, long-term impact on those countries. **This scheme should be strengthened.**
- Under Horizon Europe, MSCA grants will include nuclear research, which was previously under EURATOM.

All of these facts plead for a larger budget increase for MSCA than proposed.

Pillar 2. Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness

Pillar 2 merges the H2020 pillars “Societal Challenges” & “Industrial Leadership” and is divided into a reduced number of clusters. This structure has the advantage of giving a broader perspective.

- However, the risk exists that the agenda of this pillar ends up mirroring industrial interests almost exclusively, whilst critical issues of the global challenges receive little attention from private companies and rely strictly on public funding in order to be tackled. Furthermore, under Horizon 2020, the Societal Challenges actions have been heavily criticized for focusing **overwhelmingly on short-term issues, with mostly closed-ended calls focusing on technology**

readiness, whilst long-term, “out of the box”, were not adequately considered. Horizon Europe needs to strengthen collaborative basic research in relation to applied research, demonstration and innovation actions to close the research and innovation cycle addressing global challenges and industrial competitiveness¹. Otherwise it misses out on the potential benefits from projects that include, or focus on, basic research, but also on linking basic research to applied solutions and asking questions from innovation back to research. It would thus hinder ground-breaking solutions for current and future challenges. Closing the R&I cycle will widen participation, including EU13, increase mobilisation of national (via ERA-Nets) and EU resources and meet the needs of private companies, who might have in-house capacity for applied research and innovation, but lack motivation, time and funding to do the explorative research which lays the ground for innovation activities².

- The use of large-scale instruments such as the proposed ‘missions’ to address global challenges raises concern³. [Great care ought to be given to the management and governance of these instruments](#). Furthermore, the ‘missions’ should maintain the spirit of the Horizon 2020 FET Flagships: “...visionary, science-driven, large-scale research initiatives...”
- In the spirit of striving for a Responsible Research & Innovation, ISE strongly advocates an [open, transparent and multi-stakeholder](#) consultation process for the selections of priorities as well as [the establishment of advisory boards whose recommendations are made public](#).

Strengthening the European Research Area

- The doubling of the budget fostering scientifically less competitive EU member states, “Sharing Excellence”, is welcome [as European integration in the area of R&I should become a major priority](#). However, it will not be sufficient in a context where Structural Funds are significantly reduced and competition for EU funding has become extremely intense.

The **Initiative for Science in Europe** (ISE) is an independent platform of European learned societies and scientific organizations whose aim is to promote mechanisms to support all fields of science at a European level, involve scientists in the design and implementation of European science policies, and to advocate strong independent scientific advice in European policy making.

Contact information:

Martin Andler, ISE President

Martin.andler@initiative-se.eu

+33 (0)6 62 35 31 48

Statement prepared by the ISE Executive Committee with the help of Dr. Luc van Dyck.

¹ ISE and Euroscience statement on the Horizon 2020 mid-term evaluation, 26.7.2016, www.initiative-science-europe.org/ISE-EuroScience-H2020-interim-evaluation.pdf

² ISE: Conclusions ISE workshop "Is there a funding gap on collaborative basic research in Europe?", 14.4.2016, www.initiative-science-europe.org/2016fundinggap/Conclusions_ISE_funding-gap.pdf

³ Policy Paper ESF/ScienceConnect, EuroScience, ISE on missions in FP9. <https://www.euroscience.org/news/policy-paper-on-missions-in-fp>