

## STATEMENT

### ISE Calls Attention to the Ongoing Multiannual Financial Framework Mid-Term Revision

Last week (December 14 and 15, 2023), during the European Council meeting under Spanish Presidency, the mid-term revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 was on the agenda.

ISE and its members do not ignore the challenges that the EU and its Member States face today, along with the ensuing great levels of uncertainty. To address these challenges and position the EU as a key player on the world political scene, significant funds must be devoted to support Ukraine, fund strategic technologies and addressing other major issues. To fulfil these goals, the EU has proposed to withdraw funds from several European programmes. The scientific community understands that Horizon Europe can be affected by such cuts – we share the EU’s general concerns.

A reduction of 2.1 billion euros in the Horizon Europe budget (the so-called “Negotiating Box”) was, to our knowledge, discussed at last Thursday’s European Council meeting. Such a cut, representing 2.2% of the overall Framework programme budget, but 3.8% of the budget for 2024-2027, would inflict serious damage, since the HE budget is already generally underfunded, considering the substantial benefits that EU-funded research brings to all of today’s challenges.

ISE asks the EU Members States to revise their positions and increase their contributions to the overall EU budget.

If a reduction becomes inevitable, further justification and explanation for the 2.1 billion Euros figure should be provided. The decision on which specific actions should be impacted and at what level requires a careful analysis, in which the research stakeholders should be consulted. The destination of the funds taken from Horizon Europe should be communicated transparently, as well as how these funds would be used, and for the benefit of which other programmes. ISE would welcome a partial reallocation benefiting, for example, the reconstruction of the higher education and research landscape of Ukraine.

Overall, the budget cuts in Horizon Europe should be thought in such a way as to minimise, if not exclude, any impact on research activities. ISE stresses the following major points of attention to the upcoming Belgian EU Council Presidency:

- Pillar I, Excellent Science, must be integrally preserved. Already not all the best candidates can be funded, either by the European Research Council (ERC), or by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).
- Pillar II, Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, which improves solid intra-European relationships and sustainable partnerships, contribute to a sense of belonging to the EU, which is vital in these troubled times. However, as we have said elsewhere, the place given to basic and exploratory research in Pillar II is too small; collaborative basic research should be increased as an intrinsic part of Pillar II.
- The transversal “Widening the Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area” actions are crucial for a fair ERA and to alleviate the present tensions.

Finally, if there is a cut to Horizon Europe, the final Council document must contain a provision indicating that it will in no way harm the budget dedicated to RTD in the future MFF.

We reiterate that the R&I budget for the next Framework programme should radically increase. Our overarching message to the EU is: Don’t turn your back on the future!

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