



Receiver(s): European Commission

Position Paper - Aarhus University, Denmark

Aarhus University (AU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission public consultation on the past, present and future of European Research & Innovation Framework Programmes 2014-2027.

AU supports the three-pillar structure and finds that Horizon Europe (HEU) and future Framework Programmes for research and innovation (R&I) should be developed with **continuity** as the key principle. AU strongly emphasizes the principle of **excellence** in funding R&I across HEU.

HEU has launched ambitious new approaches such as the EU missions, the European Innovation Council and the European Partnerships. AU welcomes these ambitious new approaches, although we find that the implementation calls for further simplification and increased relevance for the R&I community.

AU regrets that HEU **funding** to some extent has been **redirected** without having been part of the HEU negotiations. This has been the case for instance for New European Bauhaus and HERA initiatives. Such redirection should only happen in exceptional circumstances and only for R&I activities, while other elements should be financed by programmes more suited.

AU has appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the process of developing the HEU Work Programmes but has concerns as the Work Programmes 2023-2024 have experienced significant reductions. Any reductions of fully developed topics or Work Programmes should be avoided as it demotivates stakeholders and questions the legitimacy of the Programme Committees.





The **Excellence pillar** should maintain or, preferably, increase its budget not least due to the current inflation rates in Europe. ERC should at all costs maintain its independent role. MSCA offers a consistent and systematic approach to researcher mobility with significant impact on research careers, hence MSCA should (like the ERC) remain a cornerstone of pillar I. With regard to research infrastructures, a stronger focus on access to and visibility for new and existing infrastructures as well as for smaller infrastructures is encouraged.

In the **Global Challenges pillar** there is a need to rebalance the TRL coverage. Despite a relatively high proportion of RIAs, there are less topics on low TRLs for collaborative research in the cluster Work Programmes. AU reiterates that collaborative research on low TRLs is among the prerequisites for a robust R&I landscape. Also AU would welcome the introduction of Societal Readiness Level (SRL) as complementary to TRL.

AU has experienced Work Programmes with a high concentration on one destination, e.g., pandemic preparedness, and a very uneven distribution of budget. AU advocates for a more balanced approach where disruptive developments do not dominate the Work Programmes at the expense of other important domains.

By putting a strong emphasis on deep tech in the **Innovative pillar**, including in EIC, there is a risk of missing out on the complexity of innovation and not harvesting the transformational power of a more holistic approach to innovation. In addition, it would be helpful for future applicants if the term 'deep tech' is clearly defined. Furthermore, in relation to innovation, AU would like to see the Commission develop its ideas on Knowledge Valorisation into topics across HEU. Open Innovation in Science at low TRLs is a proven method to bridge the valley of death and to integrate at very early stages collaboration and trust between industry and research. As a best practice, we refer to AU's projects run with the Novo Nordisk Foundation on "Open Innovation in Science Platforms (ODIN)".

AU welcomes the simplification of the **Partnership** landscape but encourages the Commission only to include new partnerships when they are strategically necessary in terms of EU's global competitiveness or the European Green Deal Agenda. Moreover, AU finds it disturbing that topics on future co-funded partnerships are included in the Work Programmes. They should be announced separately to avoid misunderstandings regarding the access to funding. Moreover, AU finds it problematic that while the Commission encourages Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) to be active consortia partners in the partnerships (among others to carry out important transversal activities) it has still not (3 months before deadline for several partnership applications in WP23) clarified a formal procedure/governance structure, which may ensure that such RPOs will not become ineligible for participation in the external calls of the



partnership due to risks of conflict of interests. Also, a clarification of the main synergies, not least between the partnerships and missions, would be highly appreciated.

At this stage it is unclear whether the EU **Missions** will be able to deliver the expected impact. AU recognizes the ability of the Missions to bring together a variety of stakeholders and see particular value in the formation of Living Labs. Though, in several of the first Mission calls there are very few applications, suggesting very narrow calls and a lack of interest from a substantial part of the research community. It appears that the interest in the Missions is concentrated within very specific research communities. In addition, questions arise whether the projects could have been financed through existing instruments, e.g. in the Cluster structure of Pillar II or through other EU programmes. It is still not clear how the portfolio management will be implemented. For AU the complementarity of Missions is essential as well as full transparency on the evaluation criteria – a prerequisite for a transparent and efficient system.

The efficient **integration of SSH** aspects in topics still needs substantial attention – a real integration in the development of topics is essential rather than adding standard texts in topics as has been done in several instances. It should be emphasized more clearly that all disciplines including SSH are needed to help solve complex global interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial challenges.

AU finds the introduction of Key **Impact** Pathways (KIP) useful. It would, however, be very helpful if the Commission at this stage could share concrete examples of best practices for KIPs. Furthermore, the expected impacts of the individual topics need to be better aligned to the specific type of instrument (RIA, IA or CSA).

AU recognizes the introduction of **Gender Equality Plans** and the connected activities introduced until now. AU encourages the Commission to consolidate the experiences with these activities before developing new initiatives. The same recommendation applies for **widening** participation. AU recommends consolidation of widening activities with excellence as a guiding principle and by ensuring a strong interaction with other EU programmes more suited.

Now and in the future it is important to safeguard EU's strategic autonomy and security, but at the same time respect national competence in matters of national security without closing off European Framework Programmes to international R&I cooperation with third countries.

AU agrees with the EU objective of creating synergy, avoiding overlap and increasing impact but urges the Commission to be mindful of the proportionality of the measures it takes towards established projects that enter the Grant Agreement Preparation (GAP) and to take any measures as early as possible.



In relation to the **proposal preparation and management of the project**, AU encourages the Commission to:

- give transparent and upfront guidance on what the project's administration must foresee in terms of man-power and budget in order to collaborate across projects in joint cluster activities. As an example, there seems to be discrepancy between the topic text and the final cluster responsibilities as laid out in the GAP,
- ensure that the project officer for the individual project and the project officer for the group of projects work together. As it is now, the PI often has to navigate with two contact points within the Commission.
- clarify the rules about expectations for inclusion of external ethics experts, not least because the consortium can include the expense in the budget already at the proposal stage.

AU awaits the Commission conclusions drawn from this consultation process and calls on the Commission to share the process leading up to the 10th Framework Programme as early as possible.