

Horizon 2020 interim evaluation and the next framework programme

Position paper from the rectors
of Norway's Universities



The rectors of Norway's Universities fully support Norway's participation in the European Framework programmes for research and innovation. The opportunity to participate in and contribute to the European Research Area, and to engage in exciting research with excellent scientists and practitioners worldwide, increases Norway's international competitiveness and exposes our country's research and innovation potential to the world. We are dedicated to contributing to the success of Horizon 2020; participation in the European framework programmes is indeed a key priority in our institutional strategies. Currently the Norwegian universities have a 30% share of the total income to Norway from Horizon 2020. We would like to see an increase in our participation in the second half of the programme as well as in future framework programmes.

In this regard, we wish to contribute to the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and in the preparation of the next framework programme for research and innovation by sharing some concerns as well as by pointing out opportunities for improvement.

The present position paper outlines five key points:

- 1** Europe will benefit if Excellent Science continues to be a cornerstone of Horizon 2020 and future framework programmes
- 2** Europe will benefit from a better balance between basic research and innovation
- 3** Europe will benefit from sufficient and sustainable funding levels of collaborative science
- 4** Europe will benefit from a better integration of the social sciences and humanities disciplines in Societal Challenges
- 5** Europe will benefit from more international collaboration with the best researchers in the world

1

Europe will benefit if Excellent Science continues to be a cornerstone of Horizon 2020 and future framework programmes

Curiosity-driven research (ERC), access to world-class infrastructure (RI), researcher mobility and training (MSCA) and frontier technological research (FET) are all keystones of the science base needed to tackle future societal challenges through innovative solutions, products and services. In particular, the ERC has become an internationally acknowledged mainstay of research quality and excellence. The FET schemes and the MSCA give Europe the opportunity to nurture its creative talent and to push the frontier of science, while European collaboration in research infrastructure provides a foundation for this. Since universities are drivers of innovation in the triple helix, we strongly support the continuation of **Excellent Science as a key pillar in the next framework programme.**

2

Europe will benefit from a better balance between basic research and innovation

Collaborative projects funded under the Societal Challenges pillar emphasize incremental innovation and projects with high technology readiness levels (TRLs). This disregards the fact that universities are motors of innovation in the triple helix and that many innovations cannot be planned, but need room for serendipity. *A lack of emphasis on low TRL research may, in the long-term, lead to insufficient fundamental science to support high TRL research for the industry.* Therefore, we suggest the introduction of **“low to medium TRL calls”** to encourage higher-risk, potentially paradigm-shifting science. It is of utmost importance to fill the potential gap between low and high TRL research in order to avoid the “valley of death”. This will **strengthen the connection between fundamental research and innovation**, i.e. between scientific discoveries from basic research and commercial products and services.

3

Europe will benefit from sufficient and sustainable funding levels of collaborative science

The collaborative research promoted by the pillar Societal Challenges plays a pivotal role in the integration of knowledge in a range of fields, technologies, adds value to EU funding and is an important contributor to the implementation of the European Research Area. *However, the funding level of collaborative research is not aligned with expectations.* A combination of budgetary cuts underway while retaining the original ambitious goals of Horizon 2020 in conjunction with a drop in success rates, is a matter of concern and a potential threat. Oversubscription is a fact, and statistics for

2015 show that only one in four high-quality proposals were granted, a clear indication that excellence and collaborative science are being underfunded. Such low success rates are discouraging to academia, research institutes and the industry alike, and wastes top research and resources. Thus, we urge the Commission to **increase the budget of the Societal Challenges pillar to secure funding for excellent collaborative science**. In this regard, we emphasize that European research must be **funded by grants – not loans**.

4

Europe will benefit from a better integration of the social sciences and humanities disciplines in Societal Challenges

The ambition to include SSH throughout the thematic programmes has not been altogether successful. Many SSH flagged topics are awarded without the participation of SSH researchers, and SSH disciplines are almost completely absent from many current programmes and calls. We strongly suggest that **SSH perspectives be included in the scoping and framing of call topics for the Societal Challenges pillar**. In addition, the concept of **impact should be adjusted** to make it easier to integrate SSH in collaborative projects under Societal Challenges. Lastly, the **innovation** concept should also be **broadened in order to include non-technological forms** of innovation under fundamental SSH research.

5

Europe will benefit from more international collaboration with the best researchers in the world

We are concerned that the current policy of international participation is not working towards the intention of increasing international collaboration and **being open to the world**, as stated by Carlos Moedas at the *'A new start for Europe: Opening up to an ERA of Innovation'* Conference in June 2015. In fact, two years after Horizon 2020's inception, the share of participation of entities from non-associated international partner countries has almost halved, from 5.0% in FP7 to 2.8% in Horizon 2020. Only 11.7% of Horizon 2020 grant agreements include one or more partner from outside the EU member states and the associated countries, compared to 20.5% under FP7. It is our firm conviction that **this trend should be reversed in the course of the next framework** programme. Only then will excellent scientists engage with the best in their field no matter where in the world they are located. **Dedicated funding by increasing the number of topics explicitly flagging "international collaboration"** both in general and with specific countries is a must.

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