Assessment of the implementation of Horizon Europe in view of its interim evaluation and recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme

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The European Parliament adopted by 472 votes to 75, with 92 abstentions, a resolution on the assessment of the implementation of Horizon Europe in view of its interim evaluation and recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme.

Following the Draghi, Letta, and Heitor reports, Members stressed that a **strong commitment is needed** to achieve a future framework programme that constitutes a crucial contribution to the competitiveness of Europe and its overall welfare.

General observations on Horizon Europe and Research and Innovation

Parliament welcomed Horizon Europe's **success rate** and its responsiveness to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or geopolitical challenges. However, it deplores not only the lack of additional funding but also the recurring **budget cuts**, which undermine initial priorities. The shift from Horizon 2020 to Horizon Europe has led to increased complexity and bureaucracy. Success rates for some parts of the programme are still so low that they discourage potentially excellent applications, particularly from researchers at research institutions with modest budgets and SMEs.

The resolution highlighted the importance of having a **framework programme based on excellence** in order to ensure the participation of the best researchers in Europe through the whole programme. It argued that one of the critical weakness of the EU research and innovation policy landscape is also linked to the lack of a meaningful, integrated and complementary approach between place-based and excellence-driven research and innovation activities.

Moreover, it is necessary to foster an attractive and inclusive European research, development and innovation ecosystem. The fragmentation of the EU innovation ecosystem is one of the root causes of Europe’s weak innovation performance according to Parliament. Members are convinced that to maximise the impact of the framework programme, it needs to be embedded in a **broader European research policy** that ensures that Europe is an attractive location for research activities which attracts global talent, which effectively translates science into economic growth and societal progress, and which effectively addresses the innovation gap within the EU.

The resolution insisted on the absolute need for that Member States to adopt concrete commitments to reach a **target of 3 % of GDP** spending on R&D by 2030. However, the EU is investing significantly less than other global powers, and that it has failed to reach the 3 % target for more than two decades, investing 2.24 % of its GDP in R&D in 2022, for example, compared to 3.5 % in the US. It should be noted that there are major discrepancies exist between the R&D intensity of the 27 EU Member States.

Members insisted on the vital role of long-term public funding to support **excellent basic research**, driven by scientific curiosity with the only aim of advancing scientific knowledge and without an obvious nor immediate benefit.

Recommendations for the 10th Research Framework Programme

Parliament called forFP10 to be a **stand-alone** EU programme with a substantially higher budget appropriate for achieving the 3 % GDP spending target and sufficient to fund at least 75 % of the excellent proposals submitted. It recommended that FP10 focus on three core objectives:

(1) creating a European competition of ideas, and a funnel to **accelerate the development from fundamental science to innovation scale-up**, providing support for blue-sky and basic research as well as strengthening the deployment and exploitation of innovative solutions;

(2) supporting **strategic research initiatives** which require large-scale and European collaboration to address the competitiveness gap with our global competitors, focusing on the development of priority innovative advanced technologies and their translation into concrete applications of innovative products, processes and services;

(3) advancing the **European Research Area s**hould lead to the development of an excellent, unified and well-functioning European Research Area that attracts talent, integrates newcomers in existing networks and provides access to world leading research and technology infrastructures.

Parliament recommended that the Commission ensure user-oriented, science-led, effective and efficient implementation of the programme, including by:

(a) implementing an **improved governance**, addressing the need to improve the programme's agility, which should: (i) be oriented towards facilitating the best science, technology development and innovation, (ii) contribute to EU priorities on the terms of science and innovation, (iii) be based on the principle of **self-governance**, through which recognised, independent specialists from the relevant field that act in the public interest can advise on how research and innovation can best contribute to the achievement of the policy priorities set by policymakers;

(b) including positions for **programme managers** for the EIC, appointed for a predefined period, as special advisers to the Commissioner responsible for research and innovation to ensure their seniority in the Commission, to manage strategic visionary portfolios of projects, fostering collaboration between projects where relevant across the whole programme for their mutual benefit and set out challenges based on strategic intelligence and with a view to fostering global leadership for Europe in specific areas of their field;

(c) implementing a **radical simplification** in the administrative work related to the application for and management of FP10 projects;

(d) promote **synergies** and coordinated programming and implementation with other sectoral programmes and policies.

Members believe that, within the framework of FP10, an **expanded and interconnected European Research Council (ERC) and EIC** should be the engine for a European competition of ideas and that their budgets should be increased as a priority. The EIC can only succeed if it can (i) offer blended finance as a single project and (ii) act with the same predictability and agility as private actors on the venture capital market through a tailor-made legal entity for its implementation. Furthermore, the **expansion of the EIC and ERC should include increased funding for blue-sky, collaborative and early research projects**.

The Commission is urged to design FP10 such that it can effectively support strategic research, technology development and deployment initiatives, focusing on a limited number of priorities to support research-based competitiveness and the resilience of key sectors in the European economy as well as to address societal challenges with 2040 as the time horizon and which require cross-border collaboration.