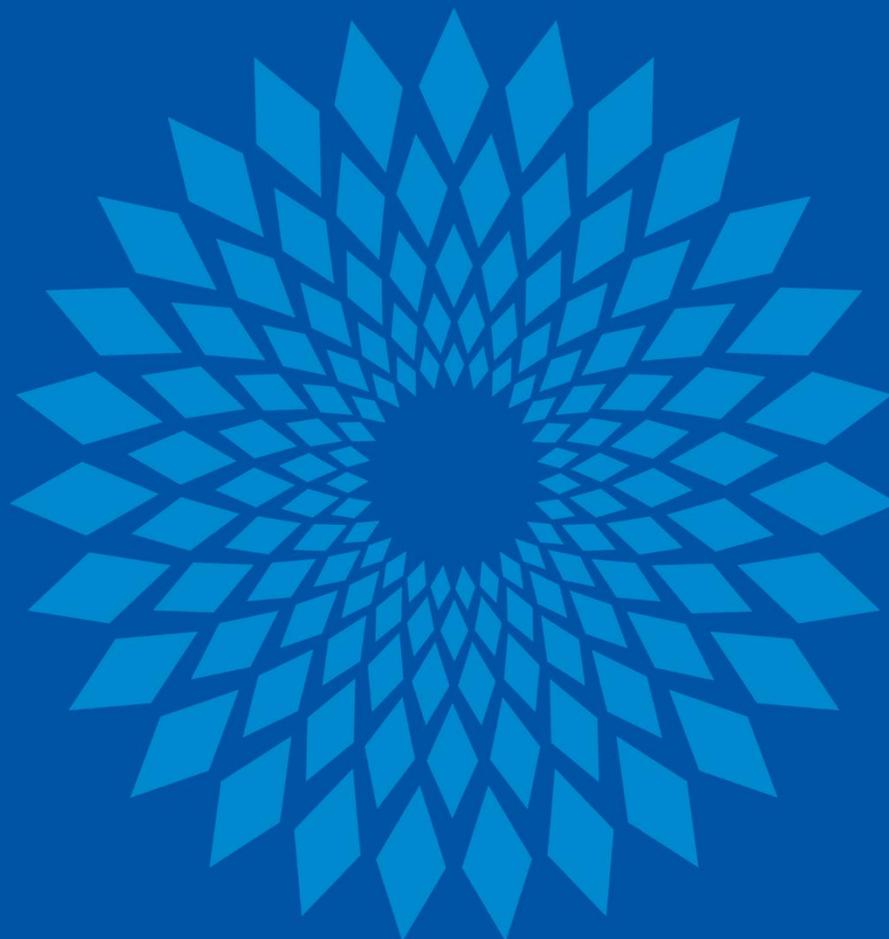


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Czech Presidency of the Council
of the European Union



Prague Declaration
on Synergies in the Research
and Innovation Funding
in Europe

Prague Declaration on Synergies in the Research and Innovation Funding in Europe

Synergies between EU programmes (including amongst them, e.g., Horizon Europe and Digital Europe), and national and regional programmes for research and innovation (R&I) are a cross-cutting need to capitalise on the full potential of investments in R&I. An efficient design, creation and implementation of the EU's, Member States' and Associated Countries' policies, promoting the right policy mix for the science and technology advancement, is the way to put synergies in practice. With the Pact on R&I in Europe (2021)¹, the EU and the Member States agreed on strengthening synergies to increase access to excellence and investments in R&I in order to foster the European Research Area (ERA).

A coherent investment planning and its implementation across Europe, aimed at strengthening the fundamental pillars of the knowledge society, and the shift towards sustainable and resilient economy, calls for complementarities, which spread way beyond the R&I fields and encompass all sectors of the economy. A well-planned approach to policy-making, aligning goals and implementation frameworks across policies, is an essential prerequisite for efficient public and private investments, capitalising on multiplier and leverage effects.

The directly managed EU programmes and those in the shared management, which are intended to strengthen the competitiveness of European economy and cooperation between European societies, reinforce the preparedness of Europe to address grand societal, ecological and economic challenges, and promote well-being in Europe, and are intrinsically all linked to investments at the national and regional levels, have been growing in number lately. New challenges in the policy-making and funding harmonisation, as well as for beneficiaries, which they have been bringing, require re-booting of the investment planning and synergies with an increased focus on far-reaching simplification.

Taking the efforts made at the European, Member States' and Associated Countries' levels in the past EU programming period 2014–2020ⁱⁱ into account, particular attention is now paid to synergies in the regulations framing the EU programming period 2021–2027ⁱⁱⁱ. The Commission Communications^{iv} and the Council Conclusions/Recommendations^v underline the utmost importance of synergies across all the relevant EU programmes, including cross-sectorial outreach. The Commission manual^{vi} provides guidelines to put synergies between Horizon Europe and the EU Cohesion Policy Funds. The updated General Block Exemption Regulation^{vii} smooths practical implementation of synergies. Nevertheless, harvesting the full potential of synergies remains a pending challenge in the European R&I funding.

Against this background, the Presidency of the Czech Republic of the Council of the EU organised, in a close cooperation with the European Commission, a flagship Conference on Synergies in the Research and Innovation Funding in Europe, held in Prague on 7th–8th July 2022, to facilitate high-level political, as well as expert debates on enhancing synergies and exploiting their full potential.

Besides general policy perspectives on synergies, the event paid particular attention to synergies in the areas of research infrastructures and innovation (top priority areas of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU to be addressed by the Council Conclusions), and the EU Cohesion Policy, European Partnerships and EU Missions (initiating their new implementation cycle).

The conference conclusions resulted and fed into this Prague Declaration on Synergies in the Research and Innovation Funding in Europe, inviting relevant stakeholders to take action, as follows¹:

¹ The synergies between different policy areas, which are described in this Prague Declaration, must always take place within the framework of the competences and conditions laid down in the treaties, respective regulations and individual objectives of different instruments or programme parts.

The **European Commission** is invited to:

- Reinforce dialogue with the Member States and Associated Countries, their Managing Authorities and other bodies and support structures, such as the National Contact Points, and research funding organisations in general, and European associations of research performing organisations, and businesses and industries to address the topic of synergies and enhance the capacity building for synergies;
- Take up the working methods of the Seal of Excellence Community of Practice, establish analogous communities and guidelines for other actions and types of synergies, e.g., European Partnerships and EU Missions, and establish opportunities for sharing knowledge and exchanging experience on barriers and obstacles, on one hand, and exchanging good practices, on the other one, on a regular basis within and among these communities and Managing Authorities;
- Analyse the rules of the EU programmes funding R&I actions, and remove obstacles and possible gold-plating to synergic funding from the EU programmes, always subject to not exceeding an R&I action's actual costs;
- Acknowledge that synergies require increased flexibility, particularly in terms of the regulatory and audit approaches, and continue to explore the possibilities of mutual recognition of procedures and verifications performed in the EU programmes;
- Intensify the well-advanced internal coordination and cooperation within the Commission services to align policy-making, particularly the programming processes (e.g., well-aligned timing allowing for synergetic programming), and implementation of the directly managed EU programmes and those in the shared management in a close consultation and at early stage with the Member States' representatives and their Managing Authorities;
- Orchestrate better the timing of the calls to put forward project proposals within the frameworks of various interlinked EU programmes in order to ensure that synergies can happen;

- Continue to explore the basis of methodologies developed under Next Generation EU in order to allow for best practice sharing and establishing clear and straightforward guidelines to facilitate synergies between the EU and national programmes;
- Publish the guidelines for the application of synergies, which include information on practical use of synergies, thereby giving directions on how to best take advantage of complementarities among different R&I funding programmes and initiatives;
- Monitor and evaluate the efficiency of the EU R&I funding instruments aimed at strengthening the public-private and public-public partnerships and, where deemed necessary, review the schemes to reinforce the benefits and impacts of public investments in terms of leveraging R&I investments from private resources;
- Systematically assess the impacts of the implementation of directly managed EU programmes on promoting cohesion within the EU, and bridging the research gap and closing the innovation divide, and publish the findings on a regular basis, for example in the context of the cohesion reports and the Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU reports.

The **Member States and Associated Countries** (where relevant) are encouraged to:

- Take action based on identified needs at both programming and implementation levels to further enhance synergies between the regional, national and EU R&I funding instruments, and foster effective ways of bringing together the relevant bodies dealing with Horizon Europe and the EU Cohesion Policy Funds;
- Carry out a systematic monitoring of synergies in order to allow identifying good practices, which could be shared with other Member States;
- Monitor and evaluate the efficiency of the national and regional R&I funding instruments aimed at strengthening the public-private and public-public partnerships and, where deemed necessary, review the schemes to reinforce the benefits and impacts of public investments in terms of leveraging R&I investments from private resources;

- Encourage Member States' Managing Authorities of the EU Cohesion Policy Funds to design and implement actions aiming at creating downstream synergies with Horizon Europe, particularly with the European Partnerships and EU Missions;
- Intensify the implementation of the "Seal of Excellence" scheme, where possible, to finance the project proposals, which were assessed under a directly managed EU programme, received the quality label by duly complying with the necessary quality requirements, but which could not be funded due to the budgetary constraints, without procedural gold-plating;
- Assess the impact of the "Seal of Excellence" scheme on the level of participation and success rate of the Cohesion Countries in Horizon Europe, and in other directly managed EU programmes and those in the shared management;
- Provide the European Commission and other Members States with the information on the specific measures implemented to ensure synergies at the national and regional levels, and experiences with such measures in order to provide feedback and reinforce mutual learning on the feasibility of implementation of synergies.

As regards the policy-making areas addressed by the parallel break-out sessions of the conference, stakeholders have been invited to take action, as follows:

Research Infrastructures

- In the area of research infrastructures (RI), policy-makers are invited to continue removing barriers that prevent harvesting the full potential of synergies. Actions should aim at enabling RIs to take advantage of various EU, national and regional funding instruments throughout all their life cycle periods, possibly even through involvement of new stakeholders, and at providing stable support in line with the long-term nature of RIs, at the same time bearing in mind that the EU Cohesion Policy Funds would engage in financing of RIs only if thoroughly justified and deriving from relevant Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3).
- RI operators are encouraged to participate even more intensely in Horizon Europe beyond the RI priority actions of the Excellent Science pillar. For example, their

engagement should spread over the European Partnerships and EU Missions, in synergy to other core Horizon Europe areas. On the top of that, RI operators are also invited to take part in other EU programmes (e.g., Digital Europe) in synergy to their participation in Horizon Europe.

- RI stakeholders are invited to engage in a close dialogue with RIs and policy-makers regarding the development of RI services, including contributions beyond their primary science and technology goals. Their services should be further developed and coordinated also taking into consideration wider policy objectives in setting strategic orientations in order to create excellent conditions for knowledge-based innovations.

European Partnerships and EU Missions

- The European Commission is encouraged to maintain the governance structures for the European Partnerships and EU Missions, which are as streamlined as possible, to avoid duplication, prevent fragmentation and secure a coherent approach to the implementation of Horizon Europe and the ERA Policy Agenda, including the Strategic Energy Technology Plan.
- The European Commission, in a close cooperation with executive agencies and the Member States, where relevant, are invited to jointly review, adapt and refine appropriately the management of European Partnerships in order to ensure their smooth, consistent and coherent set up, execution and monitoring with respect to their specific nature and characteristics as “partnerships” (as opposed to short-term projects), thereby avoiding unnecessary administrative complexity, red tape and a waste of resources, including human resources, and taking into account the synergic funding from other regional, national and EU programmes.
- The Member States and Associated Countries are invited to align their national and regional efforts with the incentives implemented in the framework of the European Partnerships and EU Missions in order to bring together a critical mass of resources that are necessary to address grand societal, ecological and economic challenges targeted through the European Partnerships and EU Missions.

- The Member States and Associated Countries are invited to reinforce contributions, and encourage reinforced contributions by R&I and other relevant stakeholders (provided the conditions upon which non-public stakeholders may contribute and the criteria for determining the eligibility of these contributions are established) to the European Partnerships and EU Missions implemented under Horizon Europe, and thus strengthen their engagement in tackling grand societal, ecological and economic challenges of the European and global relevance.
- The European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries are encouraged to reduce the administrative burden that is placed on beneficiaries engaging in the R&I projects implemented under institutionalised and co-funded European Partnerships, and to spread the use of simplified cost options.
- The Member States and Associated Countries are invited to report, in particular in the context of the Biennial Monitoring Report on European Partnerships, on the complementary and cumulative funding from other EU funds (e.g., EU Cohesion Policy, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Connecting Europe Facility, etc.) in order to improve the evidence-base for understanding the implementation barriers and drivers for synergies.

Innovation

- The European Commission is encouraged to learn lessons from the Plug-in / Fast-track pilot actions of the European Innovation Council (EIC) once there is sufficient experience and, when relevant, review respective procedures. Subject to this review, the objective is an efficient and collaborative administration that ensures smooth flow of high-quality proposals to the EIC Accelerator, further building on the mutual trust between EIC and the regional, national and EU bodies.
- The EIC stakeholders are encouraged to cooperate with third parties, who are motivated to provide additional resources or services to the EIC holders and EIC “Seal of Excellence” holders, including helping the “Seal of Excellence” holders cover their investment component. To that end, a closer dialogue with the regional, national and international investors shall be developed. The existing services (e.g., the EIC Business

Acceleration Service) should be used, where possible. In addition to the EIC Fund, the InvestEU supported instruments managed by the European Investment Bank, international promotional institutions and national promotional banks should also be explored as a financing option.

- The European Commission is invited to monitor and assess the efficiency of public investments in innovation made through Horizon Europe and, where deemed necessary, adjust the instruments, e.g., to leverage more private investments in R&I. The assessments should be done on a regular basis and in a timely manner, especially for new innovation funding/financing instruments.
- The European Commission is invited to strengthen the initiatives to boost the European innovation ecosystems between the EU, national and regional levels to promote research excellence and close the innovation gap in the ERA.

EU Cohesion Policy

- The Member States and Managing Authorities, in a cooperation with the European Commission, are encouraged, based on the implementation guidelines, to embrace synergies between the EU Cohesion Policy instruments and other EU, national and regional programmes, in particular the EU Missions and European Partnerships. This collaboration should ensure synergies in the programme design, creation and implementation phases, including the financial and administrative levels.
- Applicants and beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Policy and of Horizon Europe funding are invited to identify potential synergies with other EU, national and regional programmes to benefit from synergies in terms of excellence, interdisciplinarity, knowledge transfer and internationalisation of R&I in the ERA.
- The Member States, Managing Authorities and R&I stakeholders are invited to share experiences and exchange good practices, as well as to identify possible barriers and obstacles, when it comes to implementation of synergies between the EU Cohesion Policy funding and other EU, national and regional programmes, primarily through the relevant Communities of Practice, and respective national and regional platforms.

- The Member States, their regional authorities and the European Commission should ensure that S3 contribute to enhancing the R&I competitiveness of the Member States and regions with the aim of improving the innovation performance. S3 play a pivotal role in paving ground for synergies through pooling scattered resources and competences, and aligning strategies and actions in order to address grand societal, ecological and economic challenges. Synergies go beyond funding and S3 should be utilised as a common ground to set up initiatives and design adequate instruments to boost synergies among the EU, national and regional programmes, thereby promoting the impact-driven R&I in the ERA.

ⁱ The *Council Recommendation of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe* set out the fundamental values and principles for R&I in Europe, and the priority areas for joint action, inviting the Member States to prioritise investments and reforms addressing the ERA priorities, and stressing out the significance of synergies between the R&I policies with sectorial policies and the industrial policy to boost the EU's innovation ecosystem.

ⁱⁱ The *Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013* stressed out the importance of synergies between Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds, and invited the Managing Authorities to develop supportive structures to ensure sufficient coordination and avoid overlapping. The *Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013* called for the development of close synergies with other EU programmes, the EU Cohesion Policy Funds and the EU Rural Development Policy to achieve the maximum impact, and strengthen national and regional R&I capabilities in the context of S3.

ⁱⁱⁱ The *Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021* elaborated on synergies in detail and the Annex IV. underlined specific directly managed EU programmes, where synergies shall be sought and put in practice throughout the entire process of implementation, including design of programmes, planning, project selection, management, communication, dissemination, exploitation of results, monitoring, auditing and evaluation. The *Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021* emphasised synergies and complementarities as an instrument to optimise the added value from the EU and Member State investments.

^{iv} In particular the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 30 September 2020 on a New ERA for Research and Innovation*.

^v In particular the *Council Conclusions of 1 December 2020 on the New European Research Area* and the *Council Recommendation of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe*.

^{vi} In the past EU programming period 2014–2020, the *Commission Guidance for Policy-Makers and Implementing Bodies: Enabling Synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other Research, Innovation and Competitiveness-Related Union Programmes* introduced a number of possibilities of synergies, enabling combination of different funding resources in a complementary way. The guidelines for the current EU programming period 2021–2027 have been published in the *Commission Notice – Synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF programmes* of 5th July 2022.

^{vii} The *Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021*, amending the General Block Exemption Regulation and bringing simplification in funding of projects awarded the “Seal of Excellence” label and the projects under the Teaming and European Partnership instruments.