


# CZECH POSITION PAPER ON THE FUTURE EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (FP10)



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Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports,  
Prague, December 2024



# 1. GENERAL REMARKS

- **Stabilising and maintaining continuity of rules and funding schemes:**

On the basis of the success of the instruments introduced so far, it is necessary to assess their effectiveness or their potential to achieve the expected results in the future period, and to set and maintain stable conditions for these instruments (typically the European Partnerships, for which a lack of stability was identified as one of the shortcomings in the previous Framework Programme). Instruments that do not meet expectations should not be automatically transferred into the forthcoming Framework Programme just for the sake of maintaining continuity. In the light of existing good practice, the pillar structure of the Framework Programme should be maintained. In order to promote efficiency and flexibility of projects, we propose to abandon the current trend of large projects (in terms of budget size and complexity of the topic), which leads to a creation of oversized, inflexible consortia.
- **Ensuring a greater degree of coordination and co-creation by the Member States:**

There should be significantly more genuine consultation and coordination with Member States in the development of FP instruments (e.g. co-funded and institutionalised partnerships, missions and other strategic instruments) and their implementation. Discussion of these instruments should take place primarily in the Strategic Configuration of the Framework Programme Committee. Improving the coordination process will increase the trust of all stakeholders and ultimately increase the motivation of Member States to participate financially in schemes that allow, or directly require, such participation.
- **Lowering the administrative barriers:**

The current system for calculating eligible personnel costs in Horizon Europe is too complex, unclear, administratively burdensome and does not take into account national and institutional specificities. Significant simplification in this area is crucial for FP10. Alternative unit personnel costs do not provide a solution in their current form. A uniform approach across all directly managed EU programmes would also contribute to simplification. We support lump sum funding, which has been tested in the Horizon Europe programme and has successfully met its objectives.
- **European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA):**

The European Research Council is a unique instrument for promoting excellent science and it is therefore important to continue supporting and strengthening it. Tackling the current major challenges is often no longer a question of innovating or improving current knowledge, but rather a question of new discoveries. It can be expected that the most important breakthrough discoveries that will address these challenges, can be achieved thanks to the frontier interdisciplinary basic research. Increase of budget available for this type of calls, especially for interdisciplinary projects like ERC Synergy, is absolutely crucial. The current form of ERC governance by an independent Scientific Council and the bottom-up nature of the calls should be maintained. It is also crucial to maintain MSCA instruments for researcher mobility, including interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility between academia and business.
- **Balancing research, development and innovation:**

FP10 should be as balanced as possible and provide a wide range of opportunities for researchers, whether it is a balance between the bottom-up and top-down calls for proposals or a balance in supporting projects at different technology readiness levels (TRL). In addition to the balance between basic research, applied research and innovation, it is necessary to strive for achieving as many linkages between them as possible.
- **Integration of social sciences and humanities (SSH):**

Research policy and research results cannot be seen in isolation, but instead research should be used to influence policymaking, as well as to better understand and address the challenges that the contemporary society is facing, such as education, citizenship, polarisation, destabilisation of values,

social inequalities, exclusion or changing social structures. These topics are as important for the prosperity of European societies as is the technological innovation. Emphasis should also be placed on research in the area of education, especially in conjunction with democratic and resilient societies. Due to this reason, there should be more dedicated project calls in the area of social sciences and humanities.

- **Knowledge valorisation:**

To maximise the value of research, innovation and knowledge creation, it is essential to further support the current developments towards a consistent application of the principles of knowledge valorisation. Further development in this area can be achieved by strengthening methodological support for project beneficiaries and by investing in the development of cooperation between academia, businesses and the public sector.

- **Inclusion and gender equality:**

It is necessary to ensure the continuation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as an eligibility criterion for participation in the Framework Programme and to specify more precisely the existing four mandatory requirements. It is crucial that the GEP requirement is not a matter of one policy cycle, as a longer time period is needed to assess the impact of this instrument. It is also necessary to maintain the gender dimension criterion in the content of research and innovation as a cross-cutting requirement of FP10 to ensure that the knowledge generated with public support is responsive to the research needs of the whole society.

## 2. EUROPEAN INNOVATION COUNCIL (EIC) AND EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (EIT)

- **Support for innovative startups and SMEs:**

It is essential to ensure that fast-growing companies have access to more significant investments by strengthening links with investors and enhancing the EU's capacity to secure large-scale investments. The focus of FP10 should include a broader range of innovations based on industry needs and the dissemination of breakthrough technologies throughout the economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a key role as a bridge between research, innovation, and the application of these technologies. Continuing the Innovative SMEs partnership and other EUREKA tools that complement the Framework Programme's instruments is absolutely critical for fostering all types of innovation.

To attract SMEs, it is necessary to simplify the rules (e.g., by introducing lump sums or enabling mechanisms like the hop-on facility). FP10 should continue supporting successful tools such as EIC Pathfinder, EIC Transition, and EIC Accelerator. At the same time, it is crucial to analyse and address issues in schemes like Fast Track and Plug-In under the EIC Accelerator to ensure their effectiveness and maximize benefits for innovative startups and SMEs, while also reducing the administrative burden for providers.

- **Streamlining innovation activities:**

Innovation activities and tools require adjustments, particularly regarding the functioning of the EIT, which could operate independently from FP10 as a standalone body. If it continues to be funded through FP10, it will be necessary to better align its activities with the EIC, enable synergies, and prevent overlaps.

### 3. RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURES (RTIs)

- **Maintaining a holistic view of the whole ecosystem:**

It is important to maintain the scheme of research infrastructures as an integral part of the European Research Area (ERA) and to avoid fragmentation into different sub-forms (such as research infrastructures, technology infrastructures, data infrastructures, e-infrastructures, ERICs, EDICs, etc.). Different variations of research infrastructures should be included under a single overarching framework. For strategic oversight of the whole ecosystem, it is important to maintain a system where different types of infrastructures are coordinated under one scheme (e.g. a single work programme).

- **Anchoring RTIs in FP10:**

RTIs should be integrated into the different pillars of FP10 to ensure synergies across the programme, while maintaining a specific part of the programme dedicated to this area. RTIs form an indisputable basis for all supported FP activities by providing support to all parts of the FP, from breakthroughs in excellent science to disruptive technologies in innovation actions.

- **Strengthening the conditions for maximising impact:**

There is a need to strengthen the long-term financial sustainability of RTIs and to enhance synergies with national research infrastructure funding schemes and other programmes. New funding models, such as cascade funding, should be sought in a way that does not undermine the integrity of the development of individual infrastructures. Human resources and professional training for the management of research infrastructures also play an important role. It is essential to support the implementation of ESFRI projects, but also to network national research infrastructures and to foster the development of new technologies for research in general and research infrastructures in particular, including the development, consolidation and implementation of structures such as ERICs and EDICs.

- **International cooperation:**

FP10 should include means to support transnational access of third countries to RTIs and to promote openness to international cooperation in research and innovation, while also implementing it thoughtfully in light of the current geopolitical situation. RTIs support European integration, attract users from all over the world and serve as a practical example of science diplomacy.

### 4. SYNERGIES

- **Better coordination and information sharing:**

FP10 requires better coordination of calls and the use of synergies between different funding instruments. There is a need for better coordination between the EU level and the national level, as well as strengthening collaboration between the various DGs, particularly DG RTD and DG REGIO, and building capacities for synergies.

There is a clear need for specific guidelines and a unified interpretation of rules. The Guidance on Synergies, published in 2022, is a good starting point and should be expanded and regularly updated to be available at least at the beginning of each programming period.

In light of the Draghi Report, more effort is needed to ensure better alignment with tools at the Member States level, to avoid duplication, and to leverage all types of synergies. All resources – national, regional, or from jointly managed funds – must be mobilized.

- **Support for successful tools:**

Support for greater synergies must be established within the legislative framework of FP10, the cohesion policy funds legislation, and other relevant legislative proposals for additional programmes. When designing programmes implementing cohesion policy, an active approach to synergies should be pursued in these documents. To maximize the use of public funding, it is crucial to allow the use of the Seal of Excellence concept, combined financing, and downstream synergies, where relevant. The Seal of Excellence and the possibility of securing funding from other European or national resources should be a standard for all projects with a single beneficiary, such as MSCA PF, MSCA-COFUND, EIC, ERA Chair, and individual ERC schemes.

The complexity of the GBER (General Block Exemption Regulation) rules presents a significant challenge for synergies, and the European Commission and Member States should initiate a discussion on its simplification. The European Commission should be open to feedback from Member States when formulating an updated version of GBER.

- **Synergies with EHEA and EEA:**

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Education Area (EEA) are crucial areas for fostering synergies. Cooperation between DG RTD and DG EAC is essential for integrating research and education, which strengthens the role of higher education institutions in Europe. Additionally, it is important to engage with European university alliances, as they can further enhance the interaction between research and education at the international level. Better coordination between FP10 and relevant instruments, such as Erasmus+, is necessary to create stronger links between research and education activities and to support innovative projects at higher education institutions.

## 5. WIDENING

- **Maintaining the Widening component in FP10:**

To ensure a better balance within the ERA and participation in the FP, it is essential to effectively utilize excellent research across the EU. Widening (Widening participation and spreading excellence) should remain part of FP10, with successful tools from the current period (Twinning, Teaming, ERA Chairs, Excellence Hubs) preserved, while some tools require significant modification (e.g., Hop On). The added value of the European Excellence Initiative (EEI) is unclear, and its continuation should therefore be reconsidered. It is advisable that Widening in FP10 operates separately from tools aimed at reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system (ERA). Widening should continue to be a matter for the national level rather than the regional level. We support maintaining the emphasis on the development of research careers, management of research organizations, and support structures for researchers.

- **Strengthening leadership role:**

A key objective of Widening actions is to enhance the competencies of researchers and institutions so they can take on coordinating roles in projects across FP10. Therefore, it is desirable that a significant portion of Widening actions is not implemented solely through CSA projects but rather through new or innovated schemes such as RIA and IA projects. The formation of consortia within these schemes should also remain open to institutions from other Member States and associated countries.

## 6. EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIPS

- **The role of European Partnerships in FP10:**

The boundaries between the concept of European Partnerships and other instruments need to be more clearly defined so that their objectives and scope are clearly identified and there is no overlap with other instruments. European Partnerships need to build on existing cooperation (which does not necessarily take the form of European Partnerships) with a clear EU added value. Therefore, by their very nature, they will seek to respond to existing challenges. European Partnerships do not necessarily need to foresee future threats, this role should be left to the EU Missions and should be addressed through synergies between these two instruments.

- **Continuity and stability of partnerships:**

The continuation of the European Partnership instrument in FP10 must be maintained, given its added value beyond the results of individual projects. Partnerships also have the added value of building a community across the EU by involving a wider range of stakeholders from Member States and industry. The outputs of the partnerships should be clear and the instruments resulting from them should be sustainable, e.g. leveraging research and technology infrastructures.

- **Strategic planning:**

The Czech Republic considers it important that all partnerships in FP10 operate on a genuine partnership basis in close and equal cooperation between the European Commission, Member States and industry, where relevant. The European Commission should, as part of the process of co-designing the Strategic Plan, allow Member States not only to propose European Partnerships but also to have the opportunity to implement these proposals. Particularly in the case of co-funded and institutionalised partnerships, most of the financial contributions come from the Member States, and the decision-making power of the Member States should be adjusted accordingly. The timing of the preparation process for European Partnerships is key. If their preparation and launch is timely and allows for the transparent participation of all in the discussions, it will increase the chances of greater Member States' involvement in their implementation.

- **Ensuring sustainability:**

Partnerships should be regarded as long-term initiatives, with clear terms, strategy and legislative framework that ensure a budget is allocated for the entire duration of the partnership. This is particularly relevant for co-funded and co-programmed partnerships, as this is already provided for by legislation in institutionalised partnerships.

- **A common methodology and approach:**

There is a need for the European Commission and the different EU agencies to have a common methodology and approach for the implementation and evaluation of the partnerships, ensuring that the process is as easy and flexible as possible, without unnecessary administrative barriers. This stability will not only ensure a smooth implementation of activities, but also increase the credibility of European Partnerships for other partners, both from the private sector and outside the EU.

It is desirable to establish a single and transparent web interface, ideally within the Funding and Tenders Portal, bringing together all existing partnerships and key information about them, in particular their governance structure and members, strategy documents and their updates, calls for proposals and contact information for national representatives as well as coordinators of the relevant European Partnerships. This would significantly facilitate the coordination of national strategies and make it easier for potential applicants and beneficiaries to navigate calls for proposals and identify the appropriate points of contact. Additionally, this information could be consolidated into a comprehensive document, the European Partnerships Methodology.

## 7. EU MISSIONS

- **New forms of governance and collaboration for EU Missions implementation:**

The implementation of EU Missions (and, more broadly, Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy, MOIP) in FP10 requires new forms of governance and collaboration, innovative approaches to citizen engagement, and significant investments from both private and public actors through a synergistic mix of tools to support a portfolio of research and innovation-focused actions. Clear mechanisms for EU Missions governance need to be established, including the definition of responsibilities and competencies for their coordination. Ongoing capacity building, sharing of information, and best practices are essential in EU Missions implementation, societal impact assessment, regulatory frameworks, or interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly in countries that are currently lagging in EU Missions implementation. EU Missions will require strong political support to succeed and achieve their goals in the next period.

- **Strategic direction and maximizing EU Missions impacts:**

To effectively achieve Sustainable Development Goals, it is crucial to systematically align efforts and funding resources. Therefore, greater support for alignment measures, including the strategic use of EU funds from both direct management and shared management (ERDF, ESF), is essential. To enhance efficiency and coherence, a strategic approach to integrating EU Missions activities is necessary, including central coordination to ensure unified standards and improve communication, resource sharing, and the exchange of best practices among missions-implementing agencies. This will minimize duplication and maximize the impact of collective efforts in EU Missions implementation.

## 8. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- **Research Security:**

With the growing international tensions, increasing geopolitical significance of research, development, and innovation, as well as the illicit transfer of technologies, FP10 should implement specific measures to minimize the risks associated with illegitimate interference. Within FP10, the issue of research security should be approached as a cross-cutting theme across all its components to ensure the maximum elimination of risks related to illegitimate interference. Therefore, FP10 should include defined objectives, relevant conditions and rules, while at the same time emphasising the strengthening of research security across Member States.

- **Support for research and development of dual-use technologies:**

Given current geopolitical developments, it is essential to address the issue of supporting the research and development of technologies with dual-use potential in FP10, without strictly separating research activities for technologies that can have both civil and military applications. Support for research and development in dual-use technologies should be strategic, proportionate, and embedded in well-justified parts of FP10. It is important to define clear rules regarding recipients, scope, and budget.

- **Association of third countries:**

Within FP10, with regard to research security, active cooperation with like-minded third countries should be promoted, including their potential association with FP10. This should also include collaboration with key EU partners in research, development, and innovation, such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland. It is crucial to maintain a thoughtful and responsible policy in this regard.

- **International cooperation beyond association:**

It is essential to ensure the competitiveness of European research and innovation in many areas and to support cooperation with non-member or third countries. Overall, strengthening cooperation with the USA, the Republic of Korea or Japan, and other countries with advanced research, development and innovation should remain a priority.

