

## EUA's analysis of the Council of the EU's partial general approach on FP10

June 2026

On 26 June 2026, EU member states reached a partial general approach on the legislative proposals establishing the Horizon Europe programme for the period 2028-2034. The Council of the European Union's agreed text introduces a number of improvements compared with the European Commission's proposal published in July 2025 and reflects several concerns raised by universities during the discussions on the EU's tenth research and innovation framework programme (FP10). At the same time, important elements of the agreed approach continue to raise concerns regarding the future governance, implementation and openness of the programme.

### Horizon Europe's mission, relationship with the European Competitiveness Fund and governance

The most significant improvement concerns the **programme's overall objective**. The Council has reoriented FP10 towards its core purpose of strengthening the Union's scientific and technological bases through excellent research and innovation based on open competition. This represents a welcome return to the long-standing mission of the framework programme. Importantly, the Council has also moved away from language that effectively subordinated Horizon Europe to the European Competitiveness Fund, instead presenting the relationship between the two instruments in terms of **synergy and complementarity**.

However, the agreed complementarity approach still falls short of providing a sufficiently clear framework for how Horizon Europe and the ECF will work together in practice to support the full R&I continuum, from knowledge creation to deployment. A clear **interface between the two instruments** will be needed to guide how they interact in practice, preserving their distinct roles and intervention logics.

The Council has also introduced changes to the **governance arrangements** between Horizon Europe and the ECF by recognising the need for specific discussions on R&I priority setting alongside broader competitiveness discussions. This acknowledges the distinct nature of R&I policy while providing a mechanism for coordination with wider competitiveness objectives.

At the same time, the agreed approach does not introduce an **expert-led advisory mechanism** for programme implementation. Universities have advocated for an advisory board bringing together researchers and innovators to provide strategic guidance on implementation and emerging priorities, helping ensure that Horizon Europe remains informed by scientific and technological expertise. In EUA's view, further steps are needed to strengthen the role of scientific and innovation expertise in the programme's implementation.

## Dual-use, research security and international cooperation

While the Council has sought to address growing geopolitical and security challenges, several elements of the agreed approach raise concerns for universities.

The Council largely maintains the Commission's approach to **dual-use R&I**. It also elevates dual-use by design' to one of the programme's horizontal principles, signalling that dual-use considerations should increasingly cut across Horizon Europe rather than remain confined to specific instruments or calls. While dedicated calls specifically targeting dual-use technologies remain foreseen, the agreed text also allows dual-use activities in the remaining parts of the programme. This extends dual-use considerations beyond a limited and clearly defined part of the programme and risks affecting the civil character of Horizon Europe. A more targeted approach, based on clearly identified calls and accompanied by strong safeguards, would provide greater legal certainty and better protect the programme's core mission, particularly in Pillar I. Similarly, the Council maintains the possibility of supporting defence-only projects within the European Innovation Council, which universities have strongly opposed. Although the Council introduced a budgetary cap for such calls, the inclusion of defence-only projects in the EIC remains a significant departure from the programme's traditional focus on civilian research and innovation.

The agreed approach also places significant emphasis on **research security**. In an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, measures to strengthen research security are both necessary and justified. However, they must remain proportionate and carefully targeted. Europe's scientific excellence is built on openness, international collaboration and the free circulation of knowledge. Research security measures should therefore address genuine risks without creating unnecessary barriers to cooperation or imposing disproportionate burdens on researchers and institutions. Appropriate support measures for beneficiaries will be as important as protective measures themselves.

Maintaining openness to **international cooperation** will be equally important. The Council largely preserves the existing framework for participation by third countries and does not introduce more flexible arrangements for trusted international partners. As a result, the proposal misses an opportunity to better reflect the changing geopolitical context and facilitate cooperation with close partners that share the Union's values and research standards. As Europe seeks to strengthen cooperation with close research partners such as Switzerland and the United Kingdom, universities continue to advocate for an approach that facilitates association and international collaboration while ensuring appropriate safeguards where necessary.

## Other changes

The agreed approach also contains a number of other changes affecting the design and implementation of the programme. Some of these move the proposal closer to positions advocated by universities, while others continue to raise concerns.

Notably, it has reaffirmed the bottom-up nature of the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions** (MSCA), in contrast to the more directional approach proposed by the Commission. While EUA continues to advocate for MSCA as a fully bottom-up programme, the Council text includes some safeguards for its bottom-up nature and represents an improvement compared with the Commission proposal. However, it continues to allow for targeted thematic interventions in duly justified circumstances, meaning that the possibility of introducing greater directionality into the MSCA has not been removed.

For the **European Research Council** (ERC), the Council proposes a longer mandate for the ERC President than envisaged by the Commission, as well as changes that reduce the link between ERC work programmes and the Commission's corporate policy priorities. These changes are a welcome step towards strengthening the ERC's autonomy and preserving its distinct role within the framework programme.

The text also places greater emphasis on maintaining a **balance between bottom-up collaborative research and strategically defined priorities**. It emphasises that collaborative research and innovation activities should maintain an appropriate balance between the two approaches, helping to preserve space for researcher-driven ideas alongside activities addressing strategic objectives. It also promotes a less prescriptive approach to topic design by calling for simpler topic descriptions and avoiding excessive detail on specific methodologies. This gives applicants greater freedom to define the most appropriate pathways towards the programme's objectives while fostering openness and competition.

Concerning the R&I gap in Europe, the Council strengthens the **widening** component by placing greater emphasis on structural reforms, sustained upward convergence and a coherent portfolio of measures, while explicitly maintaining successful instruments such as Teaming and ERA Chairs, and introducing new measures to improve participation in ERC calls. These developments are broadly in line with EUA's support for a stronger widening pillar focused on long-term capacity building. At the same time, the most politically sensitive questions remain unresolved. The provisions on the classification of widening and transition countries and the proposed post-2030 conditionality are still bracketed. EUA continues to support a more robust methodology for determining eligibility, based on research performance and participation in previous framework programmes rather than relying primarily on the European Innovation Scoreboard, and considers that any conditionality linked to national R&I investment should be applied with sufficient flexibility to avoid unintended consequences for researchers and institutions.

The Council also proposes allowing FP10 to contribute to the construction and major upgrades of **research and technology infrastructures**. While the introduction of a budgetary cap for such activities is a welcome safeguard, universities remain concerned that funding for construction costs could reduce the resources available for R&I activities under the programme.

Finally, the agreed approach includes a number of additional changes of interest to universities. These include the reinstatement of the **Seal of Excellence**, which EUA advocated for, stronger recognition of the contribution of **social sciences and humanities** in

the programme, and provisions addressing the opportunities and challenges that **artificial intelligence** presents for programme implementation and evaluation processes.

## Conclusions

The Council's position marks an important step in the development of FP10 and will shape the next phase of discussions on the future programme. While it addresses a number of concerns raised by universities, significant questions remain regarding key new aspects of the proposal, such as links with ECF and dual-use. As the debate continues, EUA remains committed to bringing the perspectives and experience of universities and contributing to the development of a programme that effectively supports excellent research and innovation across Europe.

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