



Contribution to the ‘expert group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe’. 10 June 2024.

The University Alliance Stockholm Trio¹ published a position already in February 2023. This contribution builds on this position and with some additions which has emerged since then.

Main message: Research and Innovation is essential in building a competitive, greener, and fairer Europe. Supporting research should be a priority on its own and not only as a means to deliver on other EU-policies.

1. What major challenges (scientific, social, economic, technological) should still be attempted to be addressed in the second half of HE (2025-27) and further addressed by a future FP (FP10)?

All challenges identified in HE are still very much valid. For the second half of the HE the biggest challenge is to stop the dilution of the programme by supporting other policy areas (e.g. STEP and the Chips Act) rather than solely focusing on research activities. HE should focus on what is laid down in the Treaty: ‘The Union shall have the objective of strengthening its scientific and technological basesand shall encourage enterprises including SMEs, research centres and universities in their research and technological development activities.’

A budget increase for HE for the remaining years of the programme would certainly address all four challenges above as so many top-scoring projects are not funded today. A third of ERC projects with excellent ranking cannot be funded. This is a serious waste of talent in Europe which we cannot afford. The budget will certainly become an even a bigger challenge in negotiations of FP10.

Other challenges, supporting a higher budget, are new global threats pushing the EU to be more self-sufficient and being better prepared for pandemics and crisis. Research is the best, and the most economical, instrument to reach this preparedness. It is important to point out that a higher budget for FP10 does not imply a higher overall budget for the EU. We need a ring-fenced budget for FP10.

FP10 must be much better utilising the full potential of interdisciplinary research, including SSH, to tackle challenges. This can be done i. e. by design of calls within the work programmes.

¹ The [University Alliance Stockholm Trio](#) forms a dynamic academic environment that promotes the interaction between different disciplines and raises the quality of the international research and educational environment that the three universities – Karolinska Institutet, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and Stockholm University – form in the capital of Sweden. The Stockholm Trio has an Office in Brussels together with the Stockholm Region EU Office. The Stockholm Trio is together the largest ‘university’ receiving funds from Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.

2. Which are the major successes of the current HE (2021-2023) and which are the major “roadblock”/threats for success?

It is too early to judge the outcome/success of HE. The most obvious success is the pillar 2 as for the first time we have one common part/pillar for collaborative Research and Innovation. The vaccine for COVID has clearly shown the success of the FP, and particularly the ERC, even if this was credited to earlier FPs. This is the ‘problem’ with research, i.e. we can often not see the success until 10-15 years after discovery. Thus, politicians cannot expect numerous of short-term impacts to be generated from the framework programme.

A roadblock for success is lack of predictability. Policy and priorities should of course always be open to change, and the FP should be an agile programme. However, sudden removal of expected calls creates unnecessary uncertainties in the system. This also includes budget changes, and re-priorities, where the FP has been used as an “ATM” in some instances to fund other policy areas.

The major threat for FP10 is the budget uncertainty. We see more and more funding of areas/partnerships/missions in HE which are not really research and technological development in line with the Treaty. We either need funding from other budgets/programmes or these areas should be lifted out from the FP, i.e. Widening, Missions (research actions can be kept), EIT/KICs and EIC. A thorough evaluation is needed of the mission-concept ahead of FP10.

3. Which sub programmes of HE should be to be preserved and strengthened in a future FP (i.e., FP10) and which should be altered?

How far a future FP (i.e., FP10) should keep/alter the current basic three-pillar architecture of HE (i.e., Pillar 1: Excellent Science; Pillar 2: Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness; Pillar 3: Innovative Europe)?

The structure should be kept with the three pillars. Pillar 1 is a very good research ecosystem. Pillar 3 should become an Innovation ecosystem which it isn’t today with a narrow EIC.

Pillar 2 should be strengthened too and ‘go back’ to the main purpose of the FP, i.e. to support pre-competitive collaboration on lower TRL in order to secure future innovations. Research Actions (RA) should be introduced as a complement to RIA and IA. Lower TRL-projects will also facilitate global cooperation and the motto is still: as open as possible and as restricted as necessary. Indirectly lower TRL will also facilitate the ‘dual-use’ concept. This is entirely in line with the Treaty as quoted earlier.

We should not forget the horizontal pillar where ERA should constitute a clear separate part. Widening is/can be a part of ERA or a separate action. The goal should be that Widening is not necessary in the future and the budget for widening should not increase in each FP. The discussion on a 5th freedom in the internal market strongly supports a separate action for ERA and the important role of research and innovation to make sure Europe is competitive.

4. What would be a catalyst to overcome current roadblocks of HE and be implemented in a future FP (i.e., FP10)?

The FP is getting more and more complicated to navigate in with different instruments such as the partnerships and missions. We risk losing the best researchers as well as industry from getting involved. For the partnerships we need more transparency. Widening countries have even more problems as the partnerships require national funding. Projects are getting too big and complex involving actors from basic research to end users. Of course, we must show impact, but it doesn't mean all actors have to be involved in all projects. Instead, we need instruments to connect the 'dots' between the outcome of results from the different types of projects especially between pillar 2 and 3. We already observed a few such embryos e.g. the pathfinder where we see links to the ERC. The support for Knowledge Valorisation/Transfer should be an instrument available in pillar 2. Pillar 3 needs to become an Innovation Ecosystem which could be facilitated by e.g. test-beds and demonstration facilities.

We need to improve synergies between the FP and other EU-programmes and the easiest way is to have the same rules for researchers when they are needed in a programme.

Further simplifications are needed, and simplifications should focus on the beneficiaries of the FP.

Last but not least in order to deliver on Research and Innovation it is necessary for EU to live up to the 3% goal.

What should be the most important innovations to be considered in a future FP (i.e., FP10)?

We should avoid having too many 'innovations' in every FP. We have now 40 years' experience, so stability and continuity are more important than 'innovation'. The problem is that Commissioners and politicians always want to set a footprint of the FP. Maybe the next Commissioner's major innovation, for the first time in history, would be continuity or even better the discontinuation of some activities and align the FP with the Lisbon Treaty.

Research is essential in building a competitive, greener, and fairer Europe. Supporting research should be a priority on its own and not only as a means to deliver on other EU-policies.

In the long-term, one could consider if all the parts in pillar 3 should really be funded through the FP, or if it would be better to use e.g. EIB-sources for EIC. The same goes for the Widening component. The goal of widening should be that it one day will no longer be needed. With the expected EU enlargement it is even more urgent to find support for these countries in other parts of the EU-budget.

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