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Stockholm Trio's response to the European Commission's White Paper on "options for enhancing support for research and development involving technologies with dual-use potential"

The University Alliance Stockholm Trio¹ expresses its appreciation to the European Commission for its call for feedback on its White Paper on dual-use potential. Below, comments of each of the three options presented in the White Paper follow.

In summary, Stockholm Trio prefers Option 1, i.e., continue with the current set up with civil application in the FP², and look to build synergies with other programmes. An overall approach the Stockholm Trio would like to call for is to build on what we already have. The dual-use aspect is an additional argument to have more calls on lower Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) in FP10, as this will generate more possibility for synergies. Regarding Option 2, this would be a big step to take and could imply vast practical and administrative changes. After close consideration, the practical difficulties its implementation would mean for universities has made us opt out of removing the exclusive focus on civil application in the FP. We also see the strength of the FP's role in promoting international collaboration and science diplomacy, where the FP is an excellent tool, but a tool that would risk becoming less sharp and useful internationally if a dual-use component were to be added. Option 3 could complicate an already complex EU-funding landscape, and possibly make synergies even more difficult to achieve.

Option 1. Going further based on current set-up

Civil application has been the norm ever since "FP1", which began in 1984. It would be a big principal change to remove this exclusive focus in the programme. A global strength of the EU is its science diplomacy, a "soft-power" in an ever more "geopoliticised" world. The FP is unique, globally one of a kind, and supports the EU's science diplomacy. It would be a safeguard for the EU's science diplomacy if the FP continues to exclusively focus on civil application. Option 1 also simplifies for European universities with a civil clause, otherwise risking excluding them.

An important advantage of Option 1 includes using and building on what already exists in the European research and innovation system. Exploring how e.g. the EDF, EIB Investments, and the InvestEU Programme could support dual-use synergies with the FP would be interesting. Another advantage is that Option 1 could be put into practice immediately, already during Horizon Europe, meaning we do not have to wait until 2028 to pursue dual-use research.

¹ The University Alliance Stockholm Trio (Karolinska Institutet, the Royal Institute of Technology and Stockholm University) is a dynamic academic environment that promotes the international research and educational environment and the three universities together. One of the largest receivers of European funding.

² FP – Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

Option 2. Remove the exclusive focus on civil applications in selected parts of the successor programme to Horizon Europe

What Stockholm Trio has found as the strongest point of Option 2 is that a removal of the exclusiveness principle on civil application could open the FP to new actors that are not able to apply today, due to their dual-use focus, or even pure military research. However, too many challenges and down-sides have been identified, countering the positive aspect of Option 2. Stockholm Trio is calling for more information and analyses to be made before such a big step would be taken. We call for the Commission to adapt a “make haste slowly” approach when it comes to Option 2.

Several practical challenges have been identified with Option 2, which we would further like to highlight to the Commission:

- Option 2 would introduce research with military applications to research environments not used to handling the kind of confidentiality associated with defence research. What would the effects on freedom of research be?
- Option 2 could be self-defeating: Restricting access to environments acquiring research funding with military purposes would significantly decrease the recruitment base. This, in its turn, would threaten excellence and thus the very reason for universities to be useful to strengthen European security and defence.
- With Option 2, research and support offices could be expected to grow and expand in order to provide adequate support to researchers. This would require additional national research funding and a skill set rare at the labour market and needed within the defence industry.
- With Option 2, there is a risk the attractiveness of the FP for third countries, and those interested to associate, would be affected, as Option 2 could mean more calls being closed for non-EU members.

Additional questions raised: how much focus and parts of the budget would be dedicated to dual-use? What would the implications be for other parts of the FP, and the budget allocated to the ERC, the EIC, the partnerships, etc? How would those FP parts, similar to EDF, reflect on the current EDF structure - for instance, how would they be aligned? Would security clearances become necessary? (Incl. national staff, but also for project partners?)

Option 3. Create a dedicated instrument with a specific focus on R&D with dual-use potential

The European research and innovation system already has an intricate and complex nature. There are many kinds of programmes, initiatives, and projects to be aware of, often with their own application processes, rules for participation, and ways of working. Therefore, we opt for building on what we already have, and not create yet one more instrument, which also could make synergies even more difficult to achieve. Stockholm Trio would like to urge the Commission to make further analyses and studies in case this option would be applied.

A few questions which need to be raised regarding Option 3.

- Budget wise, the question is if this kind of tool could mean less budget for the FP, if funds are taken from the FP to finance the dedicated instrument?

- Could this kind of instrument lead to the deviation of funding for certain fields, including the lowest TRL-levels? Simply, could an effect of Option 3 be that topics such as cyber security, which is today found in the FP, could be moved and only be found under the option of dual-use potential?
- Could Option 3 affect inbound investments and cooperation from non-associated members and third countries?