

EERA statement on European Commission’s Expert Group’s report “Align, Act, Accelerate: Research, Technology, and Innovation to Boost European Competitiveness”

The European Energy Research Alliance (EERA), the largest low-carbon energy research community in Europe and beyond, comprising over 250 leading organisations from more than 30 countries, welcomes the publication of the “Align, Act, Accelerate: Research, Technology and Innovation to Boost European Competitiveness” report (also referred to as the “Heitor Report”). The report outlines the trajectory for Horizon Europe’s remaining years and sets out a vision for its successor, Framework Programme 10 (FP10). EERA is particularly pleased to see that it echoes several of the recommendations put forward in [its position paper published in the lead-up to the report’s release](#), all documents closely aligning with the ambitions of Ursula von der Leyen’s Political Guidelines as well as the Letta and Draghi reports.

Responding to mounting global pressures – including adapting to disruptive technologies, climate change, resource scarcity, and geopolitical tensions – **achieving a resilient, net-zero society by 2050 must remain a central priority for the EU**. EERA therefore applauds **the report’s recognition of R&I’s critical role in tackling these challenges while strengthening EU competitiveness**, a point EERA has consistently emphasised in its work. In this context, EERA strongly supports the report’s call to leverage political momentum around R&I and recalibrate the framework programme to address pressing needs in a strategic and forward-looking manner.

In this respect, **EERA welcomes the proposed €220 billion budget**, which would represent a significant increase in funding compared to previous Framework Programmes. Additionally, **EERA strongly supports the 35% budget earmark in Horizon Europe for tackling climate change and calls for its expansion in FP10** to meet the EU’s decarbonisation goals. However, **the €220 billion budget must focus on the entire spectrum of research, development, and innovation, with careful allocation across all Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)**. It is particularly essential that medium TRLs are adequately funded to overcome the ‘valley of death’ in innovation. The increased budget is also **crucial for funding a significant proportion of excellent project proposals**, fostering both incremental and disruptive technological innovations, and creating a more inclusive and attractive ecosystem through stronger infrastructures. Furthermore, EERA supports the recommendation to revamp the EU’s innovation procurement strategy to stimulate demand for low-carbon energy solutions.

While EERA appreciates the recognition of key instruments such as the European Innovation Council (EIC), the European Research Council (ERC), and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), which play a vital role in fostering excellent breakthrough research and should be extended to the Euratom Treaty, **there is a pressing need to invest significantly in collaborative, pre-competitive research involving close industrial cooperation for accelerated upscaling and collective spillover effects**. This approach balances immediate innovative breakthroughs with sustainable, industry-led development, which is essential for long-term economic growth and environmental sustainability. In contrast, [the European Parliament’s draft report on this matter](#), which stipulates a 50% budget share for the ERC and EIC, appears arbitrary and neglects the key role of pre-competitive collaborative research. EERA therefore strongly urges that this recommendation is not adopted in the further stages of the file.



EERA also stresses the **importance of leveraging funds at the European level to ensure equitable access to resources across member states** and warns that the proliferation of co-funded programmes could lead to **greater disparities among them, as such programmes risk benefiting countries with the largest available budgets**. Furthermore, co-funded programmes are highly complex and impose an enormous administrative burden, posing a significant risk to the efficiency of the process. Regarding this specific aspect, but also more broadly, EERA strongly endorses the recommendation to **reduce administrative burdens on researchers, simplify programme complexity, design open, non-prescriptive calls, and prioritise a user-friendly, science-led approach** with a view to contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and attractive ecosystem for researchers.

As proposed in the report, **strengthening partnerships through a portfolio approach and reducing fragmentation** is an essential step towards maximising efficiency and promoting industry-led activities. Partnerships constitute a vital ecosystem where research organisations, universities, and industrial stakeholders can collaborate effectively. **Enhancing support for these partnerships will also encourage greater financial participation from industry**, enabling the funding of a broader range of topics beyond those currently addressed under the framework programme.

EERA nevertheless wishes to **caution against implementing too many drastic changes** in the transition from Horizon Europe to FP10 without thoroughly evaluating their impact, feasibility, simplification potential, and user-friendliness, as these could create new challenges for researchers and organisations. For instance, **replacing the Widening initiative with "Advancing Europe" would require careful consultation with stakeholders** to ensure continuity and robust support mechanisms.

Regarding collaboration with third countries, as an organisation representing over 30 countries and recognising the global nature of many challenges, particularly environmental ones, **EERA welcomes the emphasis on international cooperation while stressing the importance of safeguarding strategic autonomy and energy security**. The proposed **nuanced, purpose-driven "case-by-case" strategy is acknowledged as a prudent approach** in this context.

EERA would also like to **warn against placing research exclusively under a competitiveness umbrella linked solely to the notions of economic productivity and growth**. It fears that such an approach would restrict the focus to purely economic aspects, whereas **the impact of research extends far beyond this, encompassing societal and environmental benefits on a larger scale**. In this regard, **EERA advocates for the broader concept of sustainable competitiveness to be firmly acknowledged at the EU level and beyond** – one that incorporates not only economic considerations but also social and environmental dimensions, recognising the integral role research plays in advancing all aspects simultaneously. In this respect, **EERA welcomes the proposed establishment of both an Industrial Competitiveness and Technology Council and a Societal Challenges Council**, which would address topics related to industrial competitiveness and broader societal issues, respectively. **However, it emphasises the need for these bodies to be guided by the common principle of sustainable competitiveness and genuine interdisciplinarity**. This synergistic approach should translate into maintaining the current structure under Horizon Europe, which groups energy, mobility, and climate topics within a single cluster.

Finally, **EERA is eager to engage in constructive dialogue with policymakers, industry leaders, and the research community to shape the final years of Horizon Europe and its successor, FP10**, reaffirming the central role of low-carbon energy research and innovation in enhancing EU competitiveness while ensuring the Union remains on track to achieve net-zero by 2050.