

Letter to the Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation, Ekaterina Zaharieva

Madam Commissioner,

In the context of a potential Competitiveness Fund, **a strengthened and self-standing Framework Programme for Research and Innovation** is a key policy instrument for the Union's strategic autonomy and its political priorities. In 2024, the Council unanimously affirmed the unique added value of the Framework Programme in enabling R&I activities, in particular collaborative research..

We welcome the Communication and the Interim Evaluation of the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021 - 2024) published on the 30th of April.

Thematically centered collaborative research allows for cooperation of key actors from academia from all countries and can be particularly relevant for more innovative SMEs across the EU. **It creates the highest European added value as it brings together the rich skills, expertise and knowledge that can be found in different Member States**, associated states and third countries. Collaborative research and the principles of competition and excellence must therefore **remain the core of an EU funded programme** for research and innovation.

We are convinced that, only with strong **collaborative research addressing key societal and technological challenges**, the framework programme can contribute to fostering open strategic autonomy, inclusive growth, talent attraction, and long-term social stability of the EU.

At the same time, there is a need to **consolidate different overlapping funding programmes under direct management and to enhance venture-capital funding opportunities for start-ups and scale-ups**. A potential competitiveness fund must be guided exclusively by the principles of competitiveness and excellence.

We are looking forward to an **open dialogue between Member States and the Commission** on the design and implementation of “FP10” even before formal negotiations start in the Council. We are open to further discuss with you at your earliest convenience to provide an insightful perspective on the needs and wants of our R&I communities.

In alphabetical order:

Ms. Eva-Maria Holzleitner, Federal Minister for Women, Science and Research, Austria

Mr. Matthias Diependaele, Minister-president of the Flemish Government and Flemish minister of Economy, Innovation and Industry, Foreign Affairs, Digitalisation and Facility Management, Belgium

Mr. Sakari Puisto, Minister of Economic Affairs, Finland

Ms. Dorothee Bär, Minister of Research, Technology and Space, Germany

Mr James Lawless, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Ireland

Dr. Eppo Bruins, Minister of Education, Culture and Science, The Netherlands

Mr. Igor Papič, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Slovenia

Ms. Diana Morant Ripoll, Minister of Science, Innovation and Universities, Spain

Ms. Lotta Edholm, Minister for Upper Secondary School, Higher Education and Research, Sweden