

*The TO2 Federation, in which the five applied research Dutch institutes cooperate, would like to share its position regarding the importance of European Collaborative Research in light of the next research and innovation framework programme (2028-2034).*

## **Introduction**

European collaborative research is the cornerstone of research, development, and innovation (RD&I) across Europe, a foundation that no single country, entity, or RD&I actor can replicate independently. The European Framework Programme (FP) serves as an unparalleled collaborative arena that enables companies, researchers, and institutions to tackle the major societal challenges the EU is facing, drive technological advances, and strengthen the EU's competitiveness. As the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) approaches, it is important to emphasize the added value of European collaboration in RD&I, strengthen the link between research and industrial policy, already demonstrated successfully for instance in the Chips Act, and create a programme that addresses Europe's geopolitical, environmental, societal and industrial challenges.

## **Why European Collaborative Research?**

Europe's approach to collaborative research brings five major benefits, unmatched by national or single-entity initiatives:

### **1. Impact and Valorization at Multiple Levels**

Collaborative projects enhance impact not only through technology development and commercialization which fosters economic growth and prosperity in Europe but also by influencing EU policy, standardization, and regulation. The results from RD&I projects feed into EU-wide policies that drive innovation and ensure alignment with broader societal and environmental goals.

### **2. Leverage of private RD&I investment**

The RD&I intensity gap between the EU and its main competitors largely stems from insufficient private RD&I investments. Collaborative research has proven to significantly leverage private investments, as seen in Horizon 2020's evaluation. These private investments are vital for achieving the 3% GDP target as advocated by Commissioner Zaharieva.

### **3. Access to and sharing Expertise, Facilities, and Data**

European RD&I projects enable access for research institutes and industry, including SMEs to leading expertise, advanced facilities, and unique datasets that transcend national boundaries. The interconnected ecosystem supports high-quality, multi-disciplinary research that no single Member State can realize independently, pushing as well the frontiers of technology and scientific insights, and the acceleration of its application.

### **4. Integration of the Internal Market**

Internal market fragmentation is hampering Europe's economic growth and competitiveness. Simultaneously, collaborative research, through its influence on EU policy, standardization, and regulation, is helping industries, including SMEs, more easily to engage in cross-border economic activities, thereby strengthening the Single Market.

### **5. Networks for Stakeholders and Talent Management**

The FP projects build a network of diverse stakeholders, new industry partners including SMEs and national policymakers, that strengthens the EU RD&I ecosystem. These projects foster high-caliber cross European environments that attract and retain top talent, which is essential for sustaining Europe's competitive edge in global markets.

## **How to Structure Effective Research Collaboration in FP10**

To maximize these benefits in FP10, specific strategies and structures should guide program design and investment:

### **1. Adequate, stable and balanced Funding for the whole continuum of collaborative research**

A commitment to a budget of at least €200 billion for FP10 will provide the necessary and adequate support and continuity for RD&I investments, ensuring that projects can be ambitious and long-term. Such funding will secure Europe's competitiveness and support a resilient, innovation-driven economy. Only with such an investment, that also aims for attracting additional private R&DI expenditure, the 3% target of GDP target becomes realistic.

### **2. Strong Focus on Collaborative Research**

Collaborative research remains the heart of the FP, delivering value that cannot be replicated by any single country or entity. The next FP must prioritize projects that foster collaboration and projects between academia, RTOs and industry, regardless of their Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), ensuring that the program supports a diverse and high-performing RD&I environment across Europe.

### **3. European Strategy for Technology Infrastructures**

A coordinated strategy for technology infrastructures will optimize national and EU investments in applied research facilities that accelerate technology maturation and industrial adoption. By avoiding duplication and assuring uniform access, FP10 will increase the visibility of critical infrastructure for industry including SMEs, facilitate technology transfer, and strengthen Europe's position in key technologies.

### **4. Incentivize Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**

PPPs have worked greatly to organizing Europe's RD&I landscape around strategic topics. FP10 should incentivize private co-investments to share risks, mobilize resources, and engage entire innovation value chains. These partnerships not only bring shared knowledge but also connect companies to RD&I networks, fostering innovation ecosystems that are critical for European competitiveness.

### **5. Implement Effective Governance and Participation Rules**

The success of FP10 depends on clear and effective implementation of governance and participation rules. Program structures should reduce administrative burdens, clarify evaluation criteria, and foster transparent processes that encourage broad participation across the RD&I community.

## **Conclusion**

The next European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation must strengthen Europe's RD&I leadership in a rapidly evolving global landscape. With robust funding, strategic priorities, and an emphasis on collaborative research, FP10 can enhance Europe's competitiveness and address geopolitical, environmental, societal and industrial challenges. Europe's collaborative approach to RD&I is not only the key to innovation but also crucial for a resilient and competitive Europe.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CKroeze'.

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