

TO2 Federation Position Paper (March 2026)

On the Next Framework Programme (FP10) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)

The TO2 Federation, wherein the five Dutch Research & Technology Organizations (Deltares, MARIN, NLR, TNO and Wageningen Research) work together, welcomes the European Commission's proposals for the next Framework Programme (FP10) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF).

TO2 strongly supports the ambition to invest more in R&I to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and bridge the innovation gap with global competitors. TO2 institutes have a crucial role in this ambition; ensuring that every euro of public EU investment delivers maximum impact for Europe's economy and society, thereby addressing one of the key challenges identified in the Draghi report.

Like other European Research and Technology Organizations (RTOs), the TO2 institutes play an important enabling role in bridging scientific discovery and market deployment through collaborative research. Strengthening the role of RTOs as connectors between FP10 and ECF is therefore essential to ensure a coherent and effective investment journey, from idea to market.

RTOs are key to Europe's seamless investment journey – from Idea to Market.

A seamless innovation to investment journey, from fundamental research, build further upon via applied research and technology development to market uptake and societal impact, is vital for Europe's future competitiveness and the twin green and digital transitions. RTOs are key enablers throughout this journey, guiding its many phases and complexities. While innovation pathways are rarely linear, continuity across Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) is essential. Through applied research, deep industrial networks and venture-building capacities, RTOs are well positioned to accelerate the translation of knowledge into market-ready solutions, ensuring that research and innovation delivers tangible value and impact. Lastly, RTOs are vital in translating national and regional policy ambitions (e.g. societal goals) into research and innovation, and in carrying these forward throughout the innovation chain, which is especially important given the innovations needed in the fields of defence, security, the energy transition and sustainability.

RTOs are well positioned to support this journey by:

- ***Connecting fundamental research with market deployment***
RTOs act as the strong bridge between fundamental research and industrial application. Their multidisciplinary expertise, their technology infrastructures, their close collaboration with both academia and industry enable promising ideas to be translated into concrete solutions. By validating and demonstrating technologies in relevant environments, RTOs help innovations overcome both the early-stage (R&D to market) and late-stage (scale-up to industrial deployment) "valleys of death". This bridging function ensures that Europe's public research investments translate into tangible economic and societal value and impact.
- ***Aligning EU with national priorities***
As nationally embedded organizations with strong regional and international connections, RTOs help align EU priorities with national and regional policies and research programs, creating synergies across funding at all levels.

- ***Feeding EU policymaking with evidence and insights***
By translating research results into policy-relevant insights, RTOs strengthen evidence-based policymaking in strategic areas such as climate, digital and security. They follow thematic priorities, shape research content, and support the achievement of policy objectives. Their portfolios and expertise are also oriented towards European ambitions, ensuring that RTOs not only foster coherence but actively contribute to realizing EU goals.
- ***Navigating and simplifying the EU funding landscape***
As experienced partners and coordinators in EU consortia, RTOs help guiding companies (especially SMEs) and research partners through the complex EU funding landscape, from collaborative research and innovation projects to demonstration and market deployment.
- ***De-risking public investment and mobilizing private capital***
By working closely with industry, RTOs de-risk public investments and attract private partners. This cooperation multiplies the impact of EU funding and supports the EU's goal of reaching 3% of GDP in R&D expenditure.
- ***Providing access to world-class technology infrastructures***
RTOs operate and develop key technology infrastructures that enable startups, SMEs, and industry to test, scale, and validate products, critical for accelerating Europe's time-to-market and industrial competitiveness.¹
- ***Creating, building and supporting new ventures***
RTOs do not just support innovation, they actively create their own spin-offs and play a decisive role in building new ventures. Beyond this, they help startups and scale-ups grow through hands-on involvement in venture building and by providing access to extensive industrial networks.

Our policy recommendations

- ***Highlight RTOs as strategic actors in design & governance of FP10 and ECF***
Include RTOs explicitly in the governance and design of both instruments, such as the proposed ECF Stakeholder Board. Their involvement in the governance of FP10 and ECF is essential to ensure sufficient cross-sectoral and disruptive innovation initiatives. RTOs inherently work on emerging technologies and align closely with EU priorities, making their expertise indispensable in agenda-setting.
- ***Strengthen the role of RTOs in leveraging private investment***
Consider incentives for RTO-led consortia that demonstrate strong private-sector engagement and co-investment. This approach would maximize the leverage effect of public funds and accelerate the translation of innovation into market impact, fully supporting the achievement of EU objectives.
- ***Invest in technology infrastructures***
According to the EIB, an estimated €13-16 billion in capital investment is required by 2030 to develop and upgrade technology infrastructures across the European Union. Technology infrastructure operators in Europe rely heavily on grants and internal reserves to fund their investments, and although this model has enabled many to operate successfully, the overall volume of available funding for the scale and urgency of current and future investment needs.²
- ***Enhance synergies and simplification across funding instruments***
Develop a single EU portal and interoperability framework linking FP10 and the ECF, drawing on the positive outcomes of the STEP-platform. Moreover, simplification measures (e.g. lump sums, broader calls) must not weaken cooperation or quality. Clear call scopes, balanced

¹ See for more information: EIB paper. UNLOCKING INNOVATION: ADDRESSING THE FUNDING NEEDS OF EU TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURES. [*Unlocking innovation: Addressing the funding needs of EU technology infrastructures](#)

² *Ibid.* p. 8

administrative requirements and evaluation systems are needed to avoid disadvantaging SMEs, universities and RTOs relative to large industrial actors.

- ***Promote strategic coherence between EU and national investments***

Engage RTOs together with Member States in aligning EU priorities with national investment agendas, ensuring synergy, efficiency and maximal impact of public funding.

- ***Ensure a balanced continuum across TRLs***

Maintain strong support for collaborative research and innovation across the full innovation chain, primarily through grants, covering low to high TRLs. The current FP10 proposal weakens Pillar 2 relative to other pillars, undermining Europe's capacity to translate research excellence into competitiveness. To safeguard seamless TRL continuity and Europe's industrial strength, collaborative R&I under Pillar 2 should represent at least 60% of the Horizon budget.

By fully using the potential of RTOs in creating a seamless investment journey from idea to market, the next Framework Programme and the European Competitiveness Fund will deliver on their objectives. This will help close Europe's innovation gap with global competitors and ensure that every euro of public investment contributes to Europe's prosperity, sustainability, and strategic autonomy.

