

Preparations for the next European Programme for research funding

The European Commission has intensified preparations for the future European research and innovation funding instrument that will succeed the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7) from 2014 onwards.

One thing that has been decided is its name. After having been called FP8 by some and having had to carry the less than appealing working title Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation (CSFRI), the next programme from now on can be called by its definite name 'Horizon 2020'.

The European Commission (EC) had launched a public stakeholder consultation in February 2011 to gather input from stakeholders on 'Horizon 2020'. The consultation foresaw two types of responses: either through answering a questionnaire of 27 questions or by submitting a written position paper. The consultation closed on 20 May 2011, by which time 1303 responses on the questionnaire and 775 position papers had been submitted by stakeholders. Overall 55 responses were submitted from Switzerland.

Parallel to the public consultation, the EC has started preparatory work on central issues of 'Horizon 2020' through internal EC workshops. Under the lead of Directorate General for Research and Innovation (RTD) and in consultation with other Directorate Generals of the 'research family', some fundamental issues regarding the legal framework, the structure of 'Horizon 2020' and the timeline leading to its adoption have been agreed upon inside the EC.

The basic structure of 'Horizon 2020' will be made up of three pillars, each dedicated to specific aims of the overarching research and innovation policy as determined by the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU flagship initiative 'Innovation Union' and other EU policy frameworks. The three pillars will be separate specific programmes and currently carry the working titles: 'excellence in the science base', 'societal challenges' and 'industrial leadership and competitive frameworks'. The EC has placed emphasis on the need for strong linkages and synergies between the three pillars.

- 'Excellence in the science base'

The first specific programme will be composed of instruments that address bottom-up and excellence driven projects as well as basic research and actions for research careers and mobility. Existing instruments that received positive interim evaluations and strong support during the public consultation such as the grants by the European Research Council (ERC) and the Marie Curie Actions (MCA) will be kept, although changes to the corresponding instruments (such as reducing the number of MCA) are likely.

- 'Societal challenges'

Aside from the underlying principle of top-down, policy oriented nature of this pillar and of the fact that it will most likely address large, cooperative projects, little has been defined

regarding the second specific programme. The EC is organizing expert and stakeholder workshops to define the content of this pillar.

- 'Industrial leadership and competitive frameworks'

The third specific programme addresses the innovation goals of the CSFRI and will contain funding opportunities for industry and small and medium enterprise (SME), alongside financial instruments to facilitate the transition from research into marketable products and services. Those parts of the current Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) which are directly relevant to research and innovation activities will be integrated into the Horizon 2020 and placed within its third pillar. This pillar will also include new financial mechanisms to support innovation activities and the competitiveness of industry such as (pre-commercial) public procurement, instruments to facilitate access to venture capital and an enhanced window for SME within the Risk Sharing Financing Facility (RSFF).

The EC will adopt the proposal for 'Horizon 2020' by the End of 2011. The budget is one crucial element that is still missing and will depend on the overall budgetary planning of the EU for the period 2014-2020. Based on the budget of the current FP7 programme of €54 billion, a budget for its successor is expected to come in somewhere between €65 and €85 billion.