**Reflection on the preparation of the 10th EU Framework Programme for research and innovation from the perspective of the Danube Region**

*(by the EUSDR Priority Area 7 - Knowledge Society)*

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) as one of four EU macroregional strategies provides an integrated framework for strengthening cooperation between countries within the region. Bringing together 115 million people from nine EU member states and five EU candidate countries, it has an important integrative and cohesive function. It has to be stated that the Danube region is one of the most heterogeneous European regions. Due to a different historical and political development, dissimilarities between countries and within countries persist. This also applies for research and innovation performance.

The main role of the Priority Area 7 of EUSDR – Knowledge Society (PA7) is to contribute to the development of a knowledge society in the Danube region through cooperation in research, education and information technologies. A very important aim is to promote integration of the Danube countries in the European Research Area (ERA) also through participation of Danube countries in EU framework programmes for research and innovation (R&I).

Based on the experiences of PA 7 coordinators, steering group members, working group leaders and flagship project coordinators (in particular the Horizon Europe project POLICY ANSWERS) this document aims at defining (some) key points that are relevant for competitiveness and innovation in the next programming period focusing on the needs typical for the Danube region.

We acknowledge the main principles for R&I support, such as **excellence, green and digital transformation, increasing role of AI, stimulation of public-private cooperation, data-driven economy, and the autonomy, integrity and security of research;** however, these are by far not the only factors. We are convinced that the **geographical location, regulatory environment and market dynamics** alsoplay an important role in shaping innovation outcomes. If we want the whole of Europe to be more competitive, we also need to take into account these contextual elements.

To support the full integration of all European countries into the ERA and achieve a maximum impact of the instruments in the Framework Programme we have to:

* **continue to support capacity building through Widening calls and/or similar schemes** like „Advancing Europe“[[1]](#footnote-1) in order to strengthen research excellence in all Member States and candidate countries;
* allow for ambitious **catch-up instruments** to align with European R&I standards (also with complementary funding via e.g. the Structural Funds, the European Semester etc.);
* **avoid supporting “isolated islands of excellence”** and without ecosystem impact;
* increase the available budget to **raise success rates**, especially for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and collaborative projects;
* maintain continuous support for schemes with geographic approach to **build up experience,** e.g. with project coordination while maintaining excellence as a priority;
* support **projects with macro-regional focus**  to guarantee regional-level impact on competitiveness and on solving dedicated challenges in innovative ways (e.g. addressing specific ecological, societal and health challenges);
* continue support for **regional projects focused on specific aspects required for faster integration into the ERA;**
* **overall, to strive for a strong and independent EU research programme after 2027, which allows for continuation of the successful schemes of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.**

1. [Align, act, accelerate - Publications Office of the EU](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2f9fc221-86bb-11ef-a67d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)