

# YERUN's Response to the Competitiveness Compass

The first major initiative of the new European Commission (EC), the [Competitiveness Compass](#), announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her [political guidelines](#), building on Mario Draghi's report [The Future of European Competitiveness](#), was adopted today.

## Guiding Europe's transformation

YERUN welcomes the EC's initiative to strengthen Europe's innovation, accelerate decarbonisation, and enhance security amid geopolitical tensions, global technological competition, and resource challenges. The Compass builds on the **three transformational imperatives** around which the Compass is structured: (1) closing the innovation gap, (2) a joint roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness, and (3) reducing dependencies and increasing security.

While previous documents placed research and innovation (R&I) at the core, the Competitiveness Compass takes a different approach, favouring innovation and **instrumentalising research in favour of competitiveness**. Research is featured most prominently in the first imperative, where there is a strong emphasis on applied research, with insufficient acknowledgement of the critical role advancing further in fundamental and bottom-up research plays in developing disruptive technologies.

Increased innovation and creative solutions require working across all levels of the R&I continuum, and with an interdisciplinary lens. **An isolated focus on applied research and on technological competitiveness poses fundamental risks** to the possibilities of Europe to innovate across systemic challenges, thereby undermining the quality and potential of European innovation.

Furthermore, the Compass aspires to align the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Innovation Council (EIC) in their strategic interests to foster closer collaboration. We caution against applying a prescriptive approach to ERC-funded research, as its disruptive nature thrives on flexibility and spontaneity, not pre-determined planning.

## The Innovation Imperative

Within the first imperative, the initiative **A Start-Up and Scale-Up Strategy** will 'improve' the relations between universities and business, but it does not specify how, and leaves important questions unanswered. For instance, will cross-border mobility of talent be circular, enabling movement not only from universities to industry but also vice versa? Will the Single Market include the fifth freedom—the free movement of knowledge? And will innovation support be also targeted at enhancing university valorisation and knowledge transfer offices? Similarly, the research and technology infrastructure facilities under the **European Innovation Act** should explicitly guarantee streamlined access for universities to foster broader collaboration.

We agree with the EC's impetus to create a more flexible EU regulatory environment by pushing to **simplify** processes while striving for greater **coordination** between EU and Member State (MS) policies. We applaud the acknowledgement that change needs to start with the Commission and they must walk the talk on simplification.

In a similar vein, YERUN highly supports the proposal for a **European Research Area Act**, which seeks to increase R&D investments to 3% of GDP and enhance talent circulation across Europe. Yet, full alignment of EU and MS funding priorities should not come at the price of fewer opportunities for bottom-up research and interdisciplinary approaches at the national level. This concern is especially pertinent if EU research funding becomes conditional on national reforms, potentially stifling the diversity of research agendas and undermining long-term scientific impact under the Competitiveness Coordination Tool.

## Future of the European knowledge ecosystem

While YERUN understands the goal of simplifying funding access for industry within a new Competitiveness Fund, we emphasise **the importance of maintaining the independence and integrity of the next Framework Programme (FP10)**. A standalone yet well-coordinated Framework Programme is essential for Europe to remain a global leader in knowledge creation while fostering the right opportunities for research and innovation to be more flexible, creative, and impactful. This requires a solid vision, long-term strategy and bold funding that goes beyond short-term political or industrial priorities. FP10 must remain an autonomous programme with a strong commitment to the research continuum, emphasising primarily collaboration and supporting projects across all TRL levels, disciplines, and sectors.

YERUN celebrates the emphasis given within the horizontal enablers to **skills**, as it aligns with our vision for inclusive, dynamic, and future-oriented education systems. Investments in skills and life-long learning approaches are key to ensuring Europe remains competitive, equipping citizens with the necessary skills and competences to be creative and agile in a rapidly evolving global landscape. We emphasise the crucial role of universities in this effort and advocate for their inclusion as key players in the future **Union of Skills**.

Lastly, YERUN appreciates the EC's commitment laid out in the Compass to **stakeholder engagement** and recognises the importance of fostering a collaborative dialogue between policymakers, universities, industry and other stakeholders. We welcome the opportunity to contribute and emphasise the need for an inclusive and transparent process that ensures academic institutions play a key role in shaping Europe's competitiveness strategy.

## - About YERUN -

YERUN - Young European Research Universities Network - founded in 2015 and based in Brussels, brings together excellence and value-driven young research universities. The network's objective is to strategically represent its members in the decision-making process at EU level, thus shaping their future and promoting their role in European societies. Further to its policy advocacy activity, the network also strengthens cooperation opportunities among its members in areas of mutual interest and raises their visibility via a dedicated communication strategy.

## - YERUN Members -



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