



YERUN reaction to the MFF Consultation on Funding for Competitiveness

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission's (EC) public consultation on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2027 on European funding for competitiveness.

In an ever more complex geopolitical landscape, YERUN asserts that **a strong political vision recognising research, innovation, and higher education as key pillars for European competitiveness and resilience, is more critical than ever**. This position paper highlights key priorities: safeguarding the Framework Programme (FP), its budget and its collaborative nature; emphasising strategic and long-term priority areas while ensuring stable funding and academic freedom; enhancing collaboration between public and private sectors to increase trust and reduce the innovation gap; boosting international cooperation, and improving policy coherence while reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.

Safeguarding Europe's Strategic Advantage in Research & Innovation within the next MFF

YERUN calls on the EC to reflect on the **sudden change in narrative** from the publication of the [Political Guidelines \(2024-2029\) by President Ursula von der Leyen](#) to that of the [Competitiveness Compass](#) and the negative reactions this has generated in the R&I sector. While in the former R&I was placed *at the heart of our economy*, in the latter, research is being instrumentalised in favour of technological competitiveness to the point that its flagship programme is not mentioned and presumably absorbed by a larger Competitiveness Fund (see [YERUN's reaction to the Competitiveness Compass](#)).

The European Union (EU) Research and Innovation Framework Programme is the largest research programme in the world and represents a critical European strategic advantage. The programme's unique scale and collaborative nature make it indispensable for fostering impactful research while pooling the best talent, and it should remain a central pillar of the European Research Area (ERA) and the next MFF, as set out in the EU treaties. It must be safeguarded and strengthened as a **standalone** programme to ensure Europe can remain a knowledge powerhouse and operationalise its innovation and social development ambitions.

Therefore, YERUN strongly supports the calls by the [European Parliament](#) and [EU Research Ministers](#) to **double the budget** of the next framework programme – FP10. YERUN warns against **proposals that would allow for the diversion of FPs' funds away from its purpose and towards unpredictable changing policy-led priorities not set by the experts, researchers**. Decoupling budgets from programmes comes with significant risks, and YERUN worries that such budget flexibility may be a gateway to instability, distrust, and ultimately compromise the effectiveness and attractiveness of European research funding. In order to avoid that, FP funding within the next MFF should be **ringfenced** to provide stability and predictability for researchers and institutions, and to ensure that as much excellent research as possible is supported.

Rethinking European Competitiveness: Challenges

Research, Innovation and Strategic Technologies

YERUN agrees that **closing the innovation gap in strategic technologies** with third countries is extremely important for European competitiveness. To that end, it is vital to:

1. **Recognise that innovation does not take place without discoveries** and research should be placed as its backbone, protected through a ringfenced FP budget;
2. **Strengthen the entire research development chain, including bottom-up basic research** as a key precursor of disruptive innovations;
3. **Secure substantial and sustained funding for pre-competitive collaborative research** to further advance research ideas, strengthen cross-sector collaborations, foster the valorisation of research outputs, and build trust among actors within innovation ecosystems, and
4. **Include interdisciplinary approaches and a focus on social impact** as crucial to embedding a human-centred dimension in technological development and to accurately assess its effects on society. Losing sight of the role and contribution of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) poses a serious risk of narrowing perspectives.

Neglecting these elements risks limiting Europe's vision and undermining future innovation potential.

Strengthening Trust and Talent in the Innovation Ecosystem

Strengthening Europe's capacity to **translate innovation into marketable technologies** is key and requires **inclusive and sustained collaboration across the innovation ecosystem**. This involves closer cooperation between public institutions (universities) and private companies - not only through large, established partnerships, but also by actively involving smaller actors and emerging innovators. **Building trust among all stakeholders is essential to encourage private investment in academic research outcomes at all levels**. Evidence from YERUN's knowledge transfer offices highlights that long-term financial support -often extending beyond five years- is crucial to achieve

ving meaningful results and bringing innovations to market. In this context, increased investment in knowledge transfer offices and the promotion of Science and Technology Parks can help bridge the gap between academia and industry, while fostering more diverse and trust-based innovation ecosystems.

Talent is equally crucial. While it is the lifeblood of Europe's future, we are standing at a critical crossroads. As demographic decline accelerates across the continent, the need to **attract the best talent** becomes more prominent. While Europe is fortunate to have exceptional researchers, entrepreneurs and qualified workers, too many countries still fail to offer the conditions needed to retain them. Without bold action to improve opportunities, environments, and incentives we risk not only not attracting talent from abroad but losing the very minds that fuel European competitiveness.

Even if **overregulation is not included in the consultation**, it constitutes another strong hindrance to both, research and innovation.

Minding the Budget Gaps: Dual-use

Currently, the budget does not address **fertilisation between civil and military research and development**. In 2024, the EC launched a consultation on dual-use technology, but no results have yet been published. Meanwhile, an **amendment to the Horizon Europe regulation** (Regulation (EU) 2021/695) has been recently proposed by the EC under a [broader regulation](#). The amendment would allow support for technologies with potential dual-use applications under Horizon Europe, concretely on the EIC Accelerator.

YERUN acknowledges that, given the current geopolitical context, greater space for dual-use research or applications may be necessary. However, such a shift must be approached with caution and **balance**. First, a **clear and common definition** of dual-use must be established, as the distinction between civilian and military applications is often blurred. Second, robust safeguards must be put in place to **prevent a shift of research funding towards military-focused projects**. Third, any expansion of support for dual-use technologies must be **accompanied by an overall increase in the research budget**, to ensure that funding for civilian research is not diluted or compromised.

Rethinking European Competitiveness: Measures

While YERUN recognises the importance of also directing the EU budget and R&I funding towards key priorities, **greater emphasis should be placed on future-oriented priorities**, guided by a long-term vision and **prioritised by researchers**. Research funded on these should include open calls so it is experts who can direct their own research. **Academic freedom is a hallmark of Europe** - an invaluable asset and a growing competitive advantage. Protecting and nurturing it is imperative, as it is at the very core of the open, creative environment where innovation emerges, collaboration thrives, and successful societies are built. On a similar note, YERUN also calls for partnerships to be selected with a focus on **critical challenges and priorities** that are vital for Europe's future - particularly those that cannot be effectively addressed by individual Member States alone. Universities play a central role in the innovation ecosystem as key providers of knowledge for businesses and society.

YERUN agrees that **some degree of flexibility towards allocating funds to specific areas may be necessary during critical situations**. However, this must not come at the expense of diverting funds from other essential areas. A new Framework Programme must have a **ring-fenced budget** that guarantees financial stability and **protects research funding from being redirected due to shifting political agendas**.

Looking inwards, **aligning industrial and research policies and investments at both EU and national levels** is important to increase coherence, prevent fragmentation, and maximise the impact of public funding. Greater coordination can enhance synergies between research outputs and industrial needs, accelerating the translation of knowledge into market-ready solutions. However, while YERUN welcomes stronger coordination to ensure more effective use of resources, this **must not come at the expense of diversity and flexibility in research priorities**. Focusing too narrowly on a few selected areas risks leaving Europe unprepared for future challenges that are not yet foreseen. A balanced approach is needed: one that strengthens strategic alignment without undermining breadth and adaptability.

Looking outwards, **increasing international collaboration** with like-minded non-EU partners is crucial to broadening access to knowledge, talent, and technologies but also to strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy by nurturing alliances that share common values and standards.

Although not essential to European competitiveness, YERUN:

- **Warns against applying common rules, timelines and eligibility criteria to all EU funds** as programmes have different objectives, target audiences, and operational realities. Horizon Europe (and future FP10) is fundamentally different from structural funds or agricultural subsidies;
- Considers that **while reducing the number of programmes may prove useful in reducing overlaps, better coordination and synergies amongst them should be the priority**. The number of programmes may not serve as an excuse to pool resources and undermine each programme's original purpose without a proper analysis of their impact;
- Welcomes **measures focused on reducing administrative burden and increasing trust in consortia** yet warns that not all measures will fit all cases.
 - A results-focused approach may reduce reporting burden but not always be achievable in all disciplines, research stages or Technology Readiness Levels.

Conclusion

The next MFF offers a unique opportunity for Europe to reaffirm its leadership in research, innovation, and education. YERUN calls on the EC to prioritise investment in future-driven research; preserve the collaborative nature, independence, and budget of the Framework Programme; emphasise priority areas respecting academic freedom, strengthen public-private collaboration outside of partnerships, and improve policy coherence without undermining breadth and adaptability.

Only by investing boldly and wisely in knowledge can Europe stay true to its values and lead through change.

- 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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