

## The Guild's position on the draft reports of Dan Nica and Christian Ehler on Horizon Europe

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## 1. Scientific excellence as a guiding principle for Horizon Europe

The Guild shares the European Parliament's two rapporteurs' call for Horizon Europe to become an ambitious and effective programme, with a budget of at least €120bn in constant prices for 2021-2027. Considering the importance of the framework programmes to European research and innovation, The Guild together with other university associations has called for an even more ambitious investment of €160bn for Horizon Europe. For the programme to build on its proven successes and support the best researchers in Europe, the share of the ERC needs to be increased to 25% and the MSCA to 12% of Horizon Europe's budget.<sup>1</sup>

The Guild calls for a firm approach from the co-legislators to guarantee that fostering scientific excellence remains the core objective of the programme. Scientific excellence should not only be the focus in the first pillar of Horizon Europe, but it should underpin all the activities in Horizon Europe to maintain its high standards and reputation as a programme for world-class science.

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<sup>1</sup> Amendment 110 of Dan Nica's report.

This entails emphasising the role of scientific excellence in the legal texts and refraining from the introduction of additional evaluation criteria increasing the focus on political objectives as suggested by Dan Nica,<sup>2</sup> which would reduce the openness of the programme. It's important to respect academic freedom and avoid politicising the programme, which could result in the loss of interest from the best researchers to participate.

Maintaining scientific excellence as the sole evaluation criterion for the ERC is of utmost importance, which is why we oppose Dan Nica's proposal to change this.<sup>3</sup> The Guild is also against limiting the focus of the ERC to young researchers, as the programme should be open to the best scientific talent regardless of their age or the stage of their career.<sup>4</sup> We also call for the ERC Proof of Concept grants to be reserved for ERC grantees, to maximise the impact of the breakthrough scientific knowledge produced with the support of the ERC.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As proposed in amendment 183 of Dan Nica's report.

<sup>3</sup> Objecting to amendment 184 of Dan Nica's report.

<sup>4</sup> Amendment 246 of Dan Nica's report.

<sup>5</sup> Objecting to amendment 20 in Christian Ehler's report.

## 2. Fostering fundamental research across the three pillars

Dan Nica highlights fundamental research as an “essential asset and an important condition to address EU policy objectives and priorities,” which should be explicitly mentioned in the legal texts and adopted as a principle across the three pillars.

The Guild warmly welcomes both rapporteurs’ demands for Horizon Europe to support all stages of research and innovation, and for fostering fundamental collaborative research.<sup>6</sup> Guaranteeing enough resources for collaborative research should be done by adopting an additional action type specifically reserved for collaborative research (Research Action<sup>7</sup>), as suggested by The Guild and 13 university associations. It should also form the basis for the implementation of missions.

We welcome both rapporteurs’ calls for the introduction of a “Fast track to research and innovation” modality as an action supporting bottom-up collaborative projects especially at the low TRLs.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Guaranteeing the role of academia in the strategic planning

As Dan Nica states in his draft report, academia has received limited attention in the EC’s proposal. If decision-makers want Horizon Europe to remain convincing in its distinctive mission to focus on research and innovation that sets it apart from other EU programmes, it is crucial that the irreplaceable role of leading researchers and academic experts is recognised in the implementation of the programme. This can be done by considering them a priority when the upcoming expert groups, boards for the management of missions and the EIC are being planned. In addition, The Guild calls for expert groups consisting of stakeholder representatives (Advisory Groups) to be continued and further strengthened in Horizon Europe, to guarantee high-level and state of the art scientific advice in the strategic planning process and in the production of the work pro-

grammes. The role of these groups should be acknowledged and highlighted in the legislation.

When it comes to the new strategic planning process, The Guild calls for strong academic leadership in the bi-annual priority setting of Horizon Europe.<sup>9</sup> This is a precondition for the cutting-edge research and innovation activities that underpin the reputation of the programme. It is crucial that the definition of research priorities is not subjected to political processes that threaten the sustainability of its overall objectives and increase uncertainty related to its implementation. It is in the interest of all beneficiaries that the decision-making processes include a structured dialogue with stakeholders and result in the timely adoption of work programmes and calls for proposals.

## 4. Safeguarding support for research in the social sciences and humanities

The Guild supports the two rapporteurs’ proposals to pay attention to the differences between the two thematic priorities included in the “Inclusive and Secure Societies” cluster as proposed by the Commission. The Guild strongly supports the proposed budget of €1.8bn for the part of the cluster that focuses on research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH).<sup>10</sup> This is an essential step towards making sure that research stemming from SSH disciplines has adequate resources to contribute to the challenges in democracy, societal transformations and cultural heritage, that are critical for the well-being of Europeans as well as the relevance of the EU. The role of SSH has never been as important as it is today, considering the social, political and cultural challenges that affect Europeans across national boundaries.

However, The Guild cannot support both rapporteurs’ proposals<sup>11</sup> related to the boosting of the cultural and creative industries. The focus of Horizon Europe should remain in fostering excellent research and innovation, and not in subsidising sectors. The Creative Europe programme is al-

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<sup>6</sup> In line with amendment 93 of Dan Nica’s report.

<sup>7</sup> Addition to amendment 268 of Dan Nica’s report.

<sup>8</sup> Amendment 52 in Christian Ehler’s report

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<sup>9</sup> Amendment 37 in Christian Ehler’s report.

<sup>10</sup> Amendment 116 in Dan Nica’s report.

<sup>11</sup> Objecting to amendment 3 of Christian Ehler’s report and amendment 253 of Dan Nica’s report

ready in place to support the activities of the cultural and creative industries as proposed by Christian Ehler, and it is essential to prevent a scenario where Horizon Europe starts to fulfil the mission of another EU funding programme whilst losing its focus on research and innovation.

We also welcome Dan Nica's acknowledgement of the social and human impact that Horizon Europe should be aiming for, and that it should be taken into account when evaluating the success of the programme as a whole.<sup>12</sup> However, to make sure that SSH disciplines fully contribute to the challenge-driven research and innovation activities fostered in pillar 2, the integration of SSH should be added as a cross-cutting activity guaranteeing its mainstreaming in all thematic clusters. The Guild together with other university associations has proposed a number of amendments to point to the areas in the legislative files where this should be taken into account.

## 5. Sharing excellence without compromising the core principles of the framework programmes

The Guild is pleased to see the approaches that the rapporteurs are presenting in order to contribute to the closing of the research and innovation divide between different parts of Europe. As it is important that Horizon Europe contributes to this objective, The Guild has suggested increasing the budget of the proposed Sharing Excellence instruments to 2.5% of the total budget of Horizon Europe. However, whilst bridging the research and innovation divide needs to be a priority for national and European policymakers, The Guild is not supportive of Horizon Europe becoming the main instrument for capacity-building related to this mission, which is covered by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) with its substantial budget.

The Guild also recognises the challenges posed by differing salary rates in different parts of Europe. However, we don't consider Dan Nica's proposal to adopt a single salary rate for all researchers participating in Horizon Europe to be a realistic

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<sup>12</sup> Amendment 283 of Dan Nica's report.

solution to this problem<sup>13</sup> given the current diversity of employment frameworks used in different European countries.

To increase the diversity of Horizon Europe's beneficiaries, The Guild has proposed an additional evaluation criterion to proposals receiving equally high scores at the last stage of evaluation. The criteria would include considering the geographical diversity as well as the gender balance of the applicants in the final decision of the evaluation panel.<sup>14</sup>

The Guild also supports the new approaches the rapporteurs are proposing to make the existing instruments for Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence more effective. We also welcome Dan Nica's support for researchers wanting to return to their home country as an action fighting against brain drain, as well as the new Widening Fellowships of MSCA that enable excellent applicants to have their project funded through the Sharing Excellence budget in situations where budget constraints prevent them from obtaining funding through MSCA.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Fostering international collaboration and ensuring strong links with European countries

It is important that Horizon Europe contributes to the attractiveness of Europe as a leader in research and innovation that is open to international talent and new levels of collaboration across continents. The Guild is concerned that limiting the focus of R&I activities and their impact on the EU Member States<sup>16</sup> might have effects that would harm its international prestige and its ability to address global challenges. The participation of third countries should be encouraged, not limited, if Europe wants to attract research and inno-

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<sup>13</sup> Objecting to amendment 196 in Dan Nica's report.

<sup>14</sup> The Guild proposes only to include these aspects in amendment 183 of Dan Nica's report.

<sup>15</sup> Amendment 227 in Christian Ehler's report.

<sup>16</sup> Objecting to amendments 166 and 173 in Dan Nica's report.

vation excellence from all parts of the world to contribute to its success.<sup>17</sup>

The strengthening of the European Research Area is naturally one of the core objectives of the programme, the impact of which goes beyond the EU Member States. The Guild considers it a priority that associated countries such as Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom will be considered full participants of all parts of the programme. Associated countries should retain the same rights as they have had in Horizon 2020.<sup>18</sup>

## **7. Ensuring that the Open Innovation pillar bridges the gap between research and innovation**

We welcome Christian Ehler's approach to the European Innovation Council (EIC), which addresses the need to bring research and innovation closer together to create effective pathways to innovation. It's essential that there won't be any silos between the three pillars of Horizon Europe and that the Open Innovation pillar provides a point of connection to the first pillar and its proof of concept funding, as well as the collaborative projects supported in the second pillar to further support the transition from research to innovation. Universities play an important role in these activities, which is why The Guild objects to the proposition of Dan Nica to earmark 80% of the EIC's funding to start-ups and SMEs.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Objecting to amendment 149 of Dan Nica's report.

<sup>18</sup> Objecting to amendments 152, 163 and 169 in Dan Nica's report.

<sup>19</sup> Objecting to point 2 in amendment 103 in Dan Nica's report.



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