

EU preference must strengthen, not undermine, international research collaboration

The Guild is concerned that the European Commission's proposal to apply the European Competitiveness Fund's EU preference rules to research activities will distort international collaboration because of an unbalanced emphasis on security. In the present geopolitical context, it is urgent to strengthen international collaboration to face the ongoing power rivalry, while also protecting researchers in Europe from undue interference caused by global rupture.

The European Commission proposes that several rules from the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) regulation apply to the next Horizon Europe Framework Programme (FP10), as per Article 20 of its proposal for the FP10 regulation. These rules include the EU preference rules, according to which the work programmes or "the documents related to the award procedure" may "[require] participating entities to be established, use facilities, or perform activities in the Member States" in order to protect the economic interest and autonomy of the European Union (Article 10 of the proposed ECF regulation). This approach is misguided, as it will weaken the EU's knowledge base and, ultimately, its autonomy.

The European Union's competitiveness, prosperity and resilience heavily rely on its capacity to produce and exploit frontier knowledge. The pursuit of its strategic autonomy must not be based on shrinking international collaboration. Horizon Europe must empower researchers in Europe to access world-leading knowledge, data, infrastructure and talent outside the EU through collaborative projects. International collaboration strengthens Europe's research excellence and scientific leadership, building Europe's knowledge base to ultimately boost its competitiveness and strategic autonomy. It is also the most relevant and effective approach to address global challenges, and a channel for science diplomacy. We need a more granular approach recognising that international scientific collaboration is, in fact, a necessity for the EU's economic and technological sovereignty.

The present geopolitical context calls for the European Commission to increase the EU's economic security. However, we stress our strong concerns about conflating research security with economic security and call for the ECF's EU preference rules not to be applicable to FP10. Research security rules and procedures must be commensurate with the risks of collaborating internationally and must recognise that risks extend outside of the security sphere. If we are unable to fully capitalise on the benefits of collaborating with longstanding trusted partners, it undermines our competitiveness. It is essential that when it comes to research, the risks of non-collaboration are fully considered. It is critical to avoid inadequate security rules to researchers, which could have a chilling effect on international scientific collaboration.

For the sake of Europe's competitiveness, we urge the European Parliament and Council to provide FP10 and ECF with autonomous and complementary legal bases, and propose an approach to research security that enables, instead of hinders, international scientific collaboration. The FP10 regulation must provide for:

- **The default openness of FP10:** any legal entities, regardless of where they are established – within or outside the EU – must be eligible for participation in FP10, provided that they meet the conditions defined in the regulation.
- **A granular approach to research security:** Security rules must be carefully calibrated to recognise that the level of risks in international collaboration varies across technologies, sectors, countries, institutions, and research and development activities. For instance, open collaboration with Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom is of strategic importance for the EU and its competitiveness and should be the default mode. However, collaboration with other third countries may require careful case-by-case approach.
- **Predictability for third countries:** Exclusion of third countries in FP10 calls must be exceptional and duly justified, especially for associated countries, and comply with the EEA Agreement. Security considerations and their implications on participation rules must be predictable, so that association to FP10 and collaboration with EU researchers remains attractive and workable for research institutions in non-EU countries.
- **Protection of core academic values:** Top-down decisions on economic strategy must be carefully balanced so that they do not affect the freedom of scientific research. Similarly, they must not excessively limit valorisation and dissemination activities. Inappropriate security rules would hamper the scientific, economic and societal impacts of researchers, instead of supporting Europe's competitiveness, prosperity, strategic autonomy and resilience.