

## Joint statement on

### **Widening participation and spreading excellence component in the next EU framework programme for R&I**

Dear Commissioner Ivanova

Dear Commissioner-Designate Zaharieva,

In light of the ongoing deliberations and forthcoming negotiations on the successor to Horizon Europe Programme, the undersigned coalition of 15 EU Member States — comprising Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia — wish to emphasize the paramount significance of the continuation of the 'Widening participation and spreading excellence' component in advancing research excellence within the European Union.

The above-mentioned Member States perceive the continuation of the spreading excellence program not merely as a vital tool in addressing existing disparities but as a testament to the collective strength of the EU's research landscape. By retaining and enhancing these measures, we aim to maximise their impact on our research and innovation capabilities, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across the Union's borders.

Despite improvements in participation from Horizon 2020, the integration of these Member States into established networks championed by the Framework Programme remains a challenge. The recent Commission Report on the 'Ex-post evaluation of Horizon 2020' demonstrated this, noting the scope for improvement to the Framework Programme in this regard. Thus, the sustained implementation of targeted measures under the 'Widening participation and spreading excellence' component is crucial for bolstering the EU's research and innovation potential and its overall excellence. These measures are essential to further boost and support Member States efforts in reaching the EU target of investing 3% of EU GDP in research and development and ensuring the successful realisation of the European Research Area.

The above-mentioned Member States anticipate with great commitment engaging in constructive and equitable negotiations concerning the next EU research and innovation Framework Programme (FP10), particularly in the context of the measures aimed at enhancing excellence across the EU. We advocate for continuous scrutiny and evaluation of the efficacy of these specific measures within Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.

Successive calls under Widening in the Horizon Europe programme have shown to be popular instruments not only for the above-mentioned Member States, but also for the more advanced Member States that have benefitted from such instruments. In this context, we call for an increase in the share given to the above-mentioned Member States under the Widening measures; and to (at least) double the investment currently implemented under the Horizon Europe Programme.

At this juncture, the above-mentioned Member States firmly assert that FP10 should retain key elements from the spreading excellence program while simultaneously integrating other actions across the programme to genuinely enhance the R&I collaboration across the entire Europe and overall participation of all EU Member States in all pillars of the FP10. To this end, we advocate

for a comprehensive approach tailored to the diverse needs of a heterogeneous group of all the Member States mentioned above that recognize the necessity and urgency for a more integrated European research and innovation landscape. We insist that negotiations on this aspect of the programme commence early in the process and not be deferred to the programme's conclusion, as was the case with Horizon Europe Programme.

Yours sincerely,

**Prof Galin Tsokov**, Minister of Education and Science  
Bulgaria

**Dr Nicodemos Damianou**, Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy  
Cyprus

**Ms Kristina Kallas**, Minister of Education and Research  
Estonia

**Mr Balázs Hankó**, Minister of Culture and Innovation  
Hungary

**Ms Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė**, Acting Minister of Education, Science and Sport  
Lithuania

**Ms Maria Mrówczyńska**, Undersecretary of State  
Poland

**Mr Bogdan-Gruia Ivan**, Minister of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation  
Romania

**Dr Igor Papič**, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation  
Slovenia

**Prof Radovan Fuchs, Ph.D.**, Minister of Science, Education and Youth  
Croatia

**Mr Mikuláš Bek**, Minister of Education, Youth and Sports  
Czechia

**Ms Zoe Rapti**, Deputy Minister for Development, Competent for Research and Innovation  
Greece

**Ms Anda Čakša**, Minister of Education and Science  
Latvia

**Mr Keith Azzopardi Tanti**, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Research and Innovation  
Malta

**Ms Ana Paiva**, Secretary of State for Science  
Portugal

**Mr Tomáš Drucker**, Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth  
Slovakia