

Dr Nicodemos Damianou, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy
c/o Secretariat of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU 2026
13 Lord Byron Avenue
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Dear Ministers

Our organisations represent research universities in four countries associated to Horizon Europe. Some of us have been part of the programme for many decades; others have more recently associated. We all share a deep commitment to research partnerships across borders, particularly with EU member states.

Horizon Europe is the world's largest collaborative research programme. It is also an increasingly global, as well as European, convener for research and innovation. It supports researchers and innovators in like-minded countries to work together. As a result, it has become an extraordinary asset to European science diplomacy in an ever more uncertain world.

Associated countries are eager to play a full part in Horizon, because they know it offers networks no one country can replicate alone. Their growing role in the programme – adding around a third of its budget again – is good for everyone. A wider-ranging Horizon Europe is a larger Horizon Europe, drawing on a stronger research base and delivering greater impact.

This is a striking European success story, on which the EU can build in Framework Programme 10. The Commission has already taken a major step in this direction, with a standalone programme focused on research and innovation, which we fully support.

To seize the opportunity, it is vital that FP10 remains attractive to associated countries and meaningfully open to associated-country participation. To guarantee this, we hope the EU ensures Horizon Europe remains open and research-led. The following measures would support this:

- A collaborative Pillar II which remains firmly research-led, complementing the European Competitiveness Fund.
- Ensuring that associated country observers retain their clear role, so they can feed into the governance of Pillar II as at present
- Protecting the role of curiosity-driven, fundamental research in all pillars, with a fully independent ERC and fully bottom-up MSCAs.
- Keeping topic exclusions to a minimum and ensuring associated countries are treated equally in applications and collaborations.

The expansion in the number of associated countries is a tremendous diplomatic and scientific achievement. To build on this, we hope the Council will work to ensure smooth and rapid association for trusted partners, so they can take part in FP10 from day one. Political discussions at an early stage would instil confidence and help maximise the benefits, to both the EU and its partners, of a stable, long-term research relationship.

As geopolitical competition intensifies, it is more important than ever to invest in research relationships between long-standing and trusted partners. FP10 can become a crucial platform to maintain and strengthen those relationships. If it does, all our societies and economies will benefit.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Libby Hackett, Chief Executive of the Russell Group



Robert Asselin, Chief Executive Officer of U15 Canada



Dr Luciana Vaccaro, President of swissuniversities



Professor Neil Quigley, Chair of Universities New Zealand

Cc. Ms Ekaterina Zaharieva, Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation
Dr Christian Ehler MEP, Rapporteur on the Proposals for Regulations establishing
Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund
Mr Makis Keravnos, Minister of Finance
Ms Marilena Raouna, Deputy Minister for European Affairs