

Hon. Antonio Tajani

Vice President of the Council of Ministers

Hon. Anna Maria Bernini

Minister of Universities and Research

Hon. Tommaso Foti

Minister for European Affairs, the PNRR and Cohesion Policies

Hon. Adolfo Urso

Minister of Enterprises and Made in Italy

Honourable Ministers,

Research is one of the main drivers of economic and social development, capable of generating concrete benefits for countries, citizens, and businesses. Investing in basic research means fostering innovation, increasing competitiveness, and more effectively addressing major global challenges such as the ecological and digital transitions.

The Horizon Europe Framework Programme is the European Union's main instrument for supporting research excellence, talent training, and the development of new frontier knowledge and technologies. It has contributed decisively to building the scientific, technological, and human capital foundations on which many strategic European value chains now rely.

Fundamental research, collaborative research, and high-risk technological innovation are the driving force of Europe's future industrial success and cannot be directed or evaluated exclusively on the basis of immediate economic returns.

European universities and research organizations, which have always been pillars of the European Union's competitiveness, resilience, and strategic autonomy, while recognizing the need to modernize the European budget and strengthen investments in competitiveness, agree that the nature, objectives, and operating mechanisms of European research and innovation programmes must not be compromised, nor progressively subordinated to logics predominantly oriented toward market deployment.

Programmes with different purposes, such as Horizon Europe, and instruments oriented towards industrial growth and deployment, such as the European Competitiveness Fund, must operate in a complementary manner, each preserving its own mission, intervention logic, and governance structure. Their merger or overlap would risk undermining the effective functioning of both.

The quality and effectiveness of European research and innovation policies depend on the substantive involvement of scientific communities in the programming processes, not through mere consultation, but as structured and qualified participation. The definition of research and innovation priorities and calls must remain firmly anchored to the principle of scientific and technological excellence, assessed by independent experts of recognised international scientific and technological standing.

In light of the above, CRUI and CoPER, representing the Italian scientific and academic system, call for:

1. The protection of the strategic and operational autonomy of Horizon Europe, avoiding excessive subordination to instruments mainly oriented toward industrial deployment, such as the European Competitiveness Fund.
2. The establishment of clearly distinct governance frameworks for Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund, particularly with regard to comitology mechanisms and decision-making processes related to annual programming.
3. Functional and accounting separation between research and deployment. Resources allocated to Horizon Europe must remain fully oriented toward supporting research and long-term innovation, avoiding mechanisms that pre-determine their allocation toward specific deployment phases or industrial application domains only.
4. Dedicated lines for industrial valorization of research results. Within the European Competitiveness Fund, provide funding instruments specifically oriented toward industrial valorization and deployment of Framework Programme results, including support for scale-up and industrialization pathways in strategic areas.
5. Recognition of Horizon Europe's enabling role. Fully recognise Horizon Europe as a foundational "infrastructure" of the European innovation ecosystem, enabling competitiveness-, industrial development-, and strategic autonomy-oriented instruments that effectively and sustainably enhance its results along the entire value chain.

The entire Italian scientific and academic community recognizes Horizon Europe as an essential pillar for strengthening human capital, raising the quality of the university system and public research, and related innovation, while also being crucial for attracting talent and knowledge-intensive investments to the continent.

Protecting Horizon's identity and the autonomy of its governance therefore means contributing responsibly to the construction of industrial and competitiveness policies grounded in robust, innovative, and durable scientific foundations.

We therefore call upon European and national institutions to commit to preserving the autonomy of Horizon Europe and of research at low and medium technological readiness levels, and to defining a financial and governance framework that fully enhances the role of research and innovation within the new European project.

Yours sincerely,

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President, CRUI

Antonio Zoccoli
President, CoPER