Position on 10th Framework Programme

The Jožef Stefan Institute (IJS) and the National Institute of Chemistry (NIC) from Slovenia are growing fundamental science research organisation, prominent in the Central European HEU landscape, with participation in more than 360 Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects, coordination 77 of them.
Our recommendations below aim for concrete changes to be considered for the Tenth Framework Programme.

Purpose of 10FP

We recommend:

- A renewed emphasis on funding fundamental science, to enable leadership, global competitiveness and sovereignty of the European union.
- Reinforced support for fundamental research, centred at academic excellence and disruptive innovation.
- There should be a renewed emphasis on returning fundamental scientific capacities to Europe, to facilitate breakthrough technologies and allow a more independent future EU R&I landscape.

Budget

We recommend:

- Projects with the »Seal of Excellence« should be automatically financed from the European Regional & Development Fund (ERDF) through all the Member States.
- Budgets should be shifted from more applied to more fundamental science by 25%.
- The gap between Member States should be reduced to enable mobilization of the talents throughout EU, and the budget for Widening should be doubled with an emphasis on building urgently needed new infrastructure.
- Budget for research and innovation activities within 10FP should be strictly ringfenced within the Multi-Annual Financial Framework of the European Union.

Openness

We recommend:

- European researchers must be encouraged to engage in international cooperation outside the EU, and financial compensation of associated countries must be transferred directly to the 10FP budget, which should be increased accordingly.
- Openness of the 10FP should be incorporated in the eligibility costs of the projects to allow attendance and presentation of project results at prominent events worldwide.

Structure

We recommend:

- Support all RD&I actions of the EU under a single programme including Digital Europe Programme, European Chips Act, etc.
- Smaller grants, shorter grants, and more bottom-up funding opportunities are urgently needed and need to be created.
- Consider the creation of calls only for bottom-up fundamental scientific collaborative research projects.
- Quantum science should be added as separate new scientific field for targeted support and development.

European Research Council

We recommend:

- The ERC must remain independent and focused on breakthrough scientific achievements.
- The budget for ERC should be increased to enable funding all projects that demonstrate breakthrough potentials
- The ERC evaluators should be instructed to focused on the scientific content and not score the other administrative features, as for example milestones and Gantt charts.

European Innovation Council

We recommend:

- The EIC funding should finance the infrastructure such as laboratories, reactors, machines and other research devices to ensure development of deep-tech innovations.

Open Science

We recommend:

- More freedom for each scientific field to evaluate and specify how open science can be best supported in their field, without a “one size fits all” expectation.
- Open science should be recommended, not required, by funding mechanisms.
- Open science should not limit the freedom of researchers to select their type of result dissemination to maximize the impact

Research and Technology Infrastructure

We recommend:

- 10FP should support investments into single-site research infrastructure, which is not part of the ESFRI, as the infrastructure is established to be shared EU-wide. Single-site RI can support European cooperation by other means, such as exchanges, visiting positions, technology exchange, complementary RIs.

Widening

We recommend:

- Transition support to the Widening countries by upgrading it to *Strengthening the European Research Area*.
- As Widening country expertise grows, the need for investments in new high-value research infrastructures must be put first for prioritisation of funding.
- The gap between Member States should be reduced, with doubling of the budget for Widening, providing excellent science if supported in research less intense states.
- The portfolio of instruments should be more focused, encompassing support to younger mobile researchers, collaborative research, and creation of competitive research environments. The requirement for the participation of a non-Widening country should be dropped.
- As a necessary measure, concrete national roadmaps should be required to achieve 3% funding for research efforts, and there should be an annual review mechanism to assess performance towards the 3% budget goal.

Missions

We recommend:

- Missions are very useful, and only related R&I budgets should be held within the FP10 programme.
- Focus should be on a smaller number of missions with clear objectives.

Evaluation of Proposals

We recommend:

- The reduction of all call evaluation criteria to only include scientific excellence and a brief impact declaration.
- Reviewers must be recognized experts in their fields and trained to recognize scientific excellence and innovation.
- All complementary issues (gender, open science, management, IPR, exploitation, dissemination, communication, AI and ethics, public outreach, networking, etc.) should be removed from the proposal and the evaluation, as they are now the matter of best practice. The EU should publish best practice guides that awardees are bound to adhere to. Evaluators are not trained in these issues, and so their evaluation is neither meaningful nor accurate.
- The removal of all management formalisms for small and individual grants (for example, Gantt charts for a single person MSCA PF), which could support the shift

towards the elimination of "grant support agencies", which are unique to EU, that siphon substantial amount of funding and do not contribute to the scientific results.
- There should be a renewed emphasis on accurate scoring, and openness with evaluator feedback. This is opposed to the typical feedback of "(issue) is not adequately addressed".

Administration of Projects

We recommend:

- All R&I programmes should have unified rules which are in-line with national rules, so that they do not represent an additional administrative burden for researchers.
- Projects receiving funding from other programmes should report according to the same rules and have the same reporting periods (the project is funded partially by EC funds, partially by national funds; unified rules should apply for both funders; applies for Marie Curie Co-fund, Digital Europe).
- Administrative requirements should be greatly reduced and simplified.
- All research and academic organisations should be funded 100%, and indirect costs should be increased from 25% to 35% of direct costs (due to higher electricity and other energy costs, as well as high inflation).
- Labour costs should be calculated on an hourly basis rather than a daily rate as in FP9. Labour costs should be defined similarly to Marie Curie scholarships, to avoid significant discrepancies between EU countries. Researchers should be employed based on these values under special contracts and also receive salaries.
- The budget for accepted projects should be adjusted for inflation upon signing of contract (the budget increases with inflation), as the period from application to signing is prolonged and circumstances may change during this time.
- Increase the correction factor for Marie Curie scholarships for work in the USA and other high-cost countries as current funds do not cover living expenses.
- Audits on projects should only be conducted during the project duration until the receipt of the final payment for the project.
- For lump sum projects, the unification of national and EU accounting rules and methods should be required to simplify accounting.