

Finland's preliminary views on the 8th EU Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Innovation (FP8)

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In this position paper, Finland presents its preliminary views on some general aspects of the next EU Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Innovation (2014 –). Finland's position is based on a national consultation process among key stakeholders including representatives from research and industrial communities in addition to authorities (Specific preparation section of the Committee for EU Affairs).

Key Messages

Mutually approved strategies (e.g., the Europe 2020 strategy) and the considerable challenges related to fostering of sustainable growth and development require a novel approach and well co-ordinated and focused new measures from EU research and innovation policy.

All EU-funded research, development, and innovation activity should be integrated into the same Framework Programme, with innovations also taken into account in evaluation of the programme's impact and in promotion of enhanced exploitation of research results.

We must be able to find solutions to the grand challenges of our time through mutually selected means. What we need is basic research, research with clearer strategic goals, and exploitation of full innovation value networks. The results of EU-funded research must be disseminated and exploited as extensively and effectively as possible. We need new concepts that increase the financial and social impact of new knowledge.

The role of the research infrastructures in the framework programme must be strengthened. High-quality research infrastructures are essential for top-level research and attractiveness of the research environment as well as for response to the needs of social decision-making and industry. Development of research infrastructures calls for a broad-based, common European approach. Measures are needed to support both the existing and new research infrastructures.

We must continue determined efforts aimed at simplification of the implementation of the Framework Programme. The practices and interpretation of rules must be harmonised both within the Framework Programme and among all EU programmes financing research and development. The key goal is to improve the attractiveness, flexibility, and effectiveness of financing instruments for research and innovation. The processing procedures for projects must be made clearer, simpler, and faster. These activities must be based on balance between trust in researchers and the control practised, which can increase the willingness of both public and private R&D organisations to participate in increasingly close international co-operation.

Any activity funded from the Framework Programme must be based on high-quality research and innovation. In conjunction with this, emphasis must be laid on the various measures' impact on financial and social development in Europe, and on the generation of European added value.

Enhancement of European competitiveness, endorsement of sustainable economic development, and the grand challenges of our time all require investments in R&D, innovation, and education. Finland supports measures that will enhance the status of, and resources available for, education, research, and innovation activities. The Framework Programme for Research is a unique competitive asset for Europe, offering opportunities and ready-made financing and co-operation models for various kinds of actors.

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Finland considers the following elements to be especially important in the next Framework Programme

- Integrating R&D and innovation activity into the same Framework Programme, and taking innovations into account when evaluating the impact of the programme and promoting enhanced exploitation of research results;
- Meeting the grand challenges of our time with relevant logical and solidly co-ordinated thematic approaches and flexible models of operation;
- Supporting the development of top-level research infrastructures; and
- Considerably simplifying the programme's administrative procedures from the stakeholders' point of view.

General Goals of EU R&D&I Activity

R&D, education, and innovations based on knowledge and expertise are key factors for competitiveness, sustainable economic growth, effective use of resources, generation of new jobs, and enhancement of well-being in Europe. The essential question is how prepared we are to respond to the grand global challenges, long-term forces of change, and competition for experts.

Finland supports measures that will enhance the status of, and resources available for, education, research, and innovation activities. The Europe 2020 strategy and all of its flagship initiatives play a central role in the enhancement of economic growth, creation of new jobs, and good social welfare in Europe.

The EU Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development are the most important form of public financing for research and development at the European level. The Framework Programmes also contribute to the development of the European Research Area (ERA). The Framework Programmes are a unique competitive asset for Europe, offering opportunities and ready-made financing and co-operation models for research, development, and innovation activities (R&D&I) as practised by companies, institutions of higher education, and research institutes, as well as public financiers and individual researchers.

The EU R&D&I programmes and initiatives are in need of further development. We need a novel comprehensive approach to research, development, and innovation, along with fresh implementation methods, in order to enhance the measures' impact.

General Starting Points

The Framework Programme must create genuine European added value. Research carried out within the Framework Programme must complement national research and development and must focus on advancing the kind of project 1) where both European and national interests can be served by combining resources and expertise from various Member States and 2) that could not be implemented at a national level.

Any activity funded from the Framework Programme must be based on high-quality research and innovation activity. In conjunction with this, emphasis must be placed on the impact of the measures on the financial and social development of Europe. Increasing the impact calls for, among other elements, close co-operation between the private and public sector. The Framework Programme for Research must not be used to support regional cohesion, as other EU-level instruments exist for this.

In planning of a new Framework Programme, it is important to find the right balance between continuity and new elements, where both the thematic areas and instruments of implementation are concerned. Collaborative research – i.e., multilateral co-operation of various countries and other actors – has always been one of the strengths and key elements of the Framework Programmes, and it should continue to be so. The simplification of research and innovation programmes must continue in accordance with the conclusions of the Council. Instruments that do not work properly must be discarded.

In the Framework Programme, increasing attention must be paid to exploitation of research results. Accordingly, from the Framework Programme for Research we should move over to an integrated Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The innovation approach must be an integral and comprehensive part of all Framework Programme activities.

Structural and Content-related Starting Points

Mutually approved strategies (such as the Europe 2020 strategy) and the considerable challenges related to fostering sustainable growth and development require of EU research and innovation policy a novel approach and solidly co-ordinated and focused new measures. The Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Innovation is a key instrument for achieving these goals.

We must be able to find solutions to the challenges through mutually selected means. We need basic research, research with clearer strategic goals, and exploitation of full innovation value networks.

The Framework Programme must focus on the grand challenges of our time, which require determined EU-level R&D&I measures and new kinds of partnerships between the private and public sector. However, the content and co-ordination of the broad themes must be organised in such a manner that they form logical thematic entities that are easy for the applicants to find.

The growing importance of innovative and solution-oriented services and of their development in industry, public administration, and society as a whole should be more visible in the future Framework Programme than it is today. Emphasis must also be placed on the role of innovation in public administration.

It is important that the Framework Programme be able to meet unforeseen research needs as well, generated, for instance, by social or emerging needs in research. One of the solutions suited to this purpose might be the expansion of such financing schemes as the one for Future and Emerging Technologies, FET.

Considering the Needs of Businesses

Corporate research, development, and innovation play a key role where economic growth, emergence of innovation, and employment are concerned. It is important to boost competitiveness and reform of companies and the development of new business opportunities.

We must encourage companies to join the Framework Programme. To attract their interest, it is of vital importance that the content of the programme remain interesting and relevant, and that the operation procedures be user-friendly. The company view must be taken better into account in the planning of the content of the Framework Programme, by means of, for example, more systematic exploitation of strategic research agendas drawn up by the European Technology Platforms (ETP) and the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI). It is also important that companies be able to launch projects bottom-up. In addition, we must create mechanisms with whose support SMEs in particular can flexibly participate in projects, in the stage of the project that best suits them.

Key Technologies

With a view to industrial competitiveness, the research and development investments of European high-tech companies play the key role. Finland considers it important that Framework Programme support can be channelled to development of, for example, technologies that are crucial when one aims at an knowledge-based low-carbon economy, or the development of a digital economy, among other things. These technologies include inter alia nano, material, biological, information, and communication technologies. Typically, such technologies are knowledge-intensive and characterised by active R&D, rapid innovation cycles, heavy capital expenses, and highly educated labour.

Basic Research

High-quality basic research creates the conditions needed for new initiatives and successful innovation activity. Finland considers it important that the operation of the European Research Council (ERC) be continued in accordance with the principles and practices already approved. The amount and duration of financing granted by the ERC must be such that it can attract the best researchers and research groups.

The ERC administration and procedures must support the financing of high-quality European basic research in a flexible and customer-friendly manner. Even in the future, the Scientific Council with adequate autonomy must remain the highest executive body of

the ERC, while the responsibility for the administration and finances must belong to the European Commission. It is also justified that, even in the future, the Member States have an opportunity to monitor the implementation of the programme through a consultative programme committee.

Researchers' Mobility and Training

Smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth requires experts. One of the cornerstones of European economic growth and the European Research Area is how attractive a career as a researcher seems. Finland supports common measures to advance researcher careers and attractive research environments in Europe.

We must improve the mobility of experts and researchers and generate a common labour market for researchers – one that functions in practice. Mobility between companies, institutions of higher education, and research institutes is important, as is that across national and sector boundaries. In addition to the mobility section of the Framework Programme, mobility goals must be implemented in all Specific Programmes, as applicable, and flexibly as part of research projects.

In addition to researcher mobility, the Framework Programme should foster pan-European researcher training in order to boost its quality and strengthen the European research community. Grand societal challenges require, for example, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches and new ways to solve problems, which are goals that pan-European researcher training programmes would support as well.

Research Infrastructures

It is important that research infrastructures be given a more emphasised role in the 8th Framework Programme. High-quality research infrastructures are essential for top-level research and for attractiveness of the research environment, as well as for response to the needs of social decision-making and of industry. The measures are needed to support both existing and new research infrastructures. The needs of companies as exploiters and users of research infrastructures must be better observed even early on, in the planning stages.

The development of the research infrastructures requires a broad-based, common European approach. European co-operation must be made more effective in the planning, building, utilisation, and exploitation of a common research infrastructure. We should continue to use the Framework Programme financing to support both access to infrastructure and building of strong infrastructure networks, as well as investigation and development projects concerning new infrastructures.

The establishment of new, major European research infrastructures and financing of their operation should also be included in the Framework Programme financing schemes. This is justifiable when such activities result in European added value and when they serve common European needs. The Framework Programme must have a special role in the development and implementation of the roadmap projects of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).

International Co-operation

Finland considers it important that the Framework Programme be open to researchers and research groups from all countries. In order to enhance the quality and impact of research and innovation activity and to foster global co-operation, the EU must increase its co-operation with third countries and parties within separately defined and carefully selected sectors, through the instruments most suitable for this purpose. Co-operation with the leading countries in science and technology as well as with the emerging economies is especially important. The co-operation must be based on reciprocity and benefit both parties.

We must continue co-ordination and increased exchange of information concerning bilateral co-operation between the Member States and key third countries on a voluntary basis. The work done by the Strategic Forum for International Scientific and Technological Cooperation (SFIC) and the international activities within the Framework Programme must be complementary and mutually supportive.

Co-ordination Actions and Reducing Fragmentation

For efficiency of research and innovation activity and the effectiveness of funding, it is essential that the key programmes and structures funded by the EU (including the Framework Programme, ERC, EIT, JTI, and JPI) and the work carried out under the auspices of the most significant European research co-operation structures (such as ESA, CERN, and EMBL) be strategically complementary and therefore not cause further fragmentation. Where the EU R&D&I entity and the reciprocal relationships among its various parts are concerned, it is important that the roles of, targets of, and division of labour among, for example, the Framework Programme, COST, and EUREKA remain clear and that said operations be mutually supportive.

Finland considers it important that the development of the co-ordination of national research, technology, and innovation programmes and implementation of common activities, along with related measures, be funded from the Framework Programme. Networking of national programmes (e.g., ERA-NET measures) must be targeted at sectors within which networking will bring clear European added value, not contributing to further fragmentation. Member States' participation must be voluntary, efficient, and effective. The implementation of any measures must be significantly more flexible and faster than it is today.

Exploitation of Results and Broad-based Innovation Activity

The actual success of the Framework Programme depends on how well its results can be exploited. The results of EU-funded research must be disseminated and exploited as extensively and effectively as possible. We need new concepts that increase the financial and social impact of new knowledge. It is of key importance that, through the Framework Programme, it be possible to support the introduction and commercialisation of research results thus generated.

Through the Programme, funding should be provided, for example, for demand-driven innovation activity, proof-of-concept and other piloting, demonstrations, test beds, and standardisation supporting research. It is important to introduce instruments for fostering the exploitation of research results in business activities. With a view to exploitation, collaboration between the public and private sector is of great importance. The rules concerning dissemination and exploitation of results must be clear, just, and encouraging for all stakeholders.

Finland considers it important that the Framework Programme expand the openness of access to public research data. Open access to data forms the basis for scientific research and enables creation of new innovative solutions. Verification of research results and further research require that background materials and results of earlier research remain readily accessible. New innovations often emerge by combining information across disciplinary boundaries in new ways. We must ponder the opportunities open innovation might offer.

Budgetary Perspectives

The volume of the Framework Programme must be evaluated as part of a more comprehensive entity of EU research and innovation activity and in view of the effectiveness of previous programmes.

The EU budget must reflect the requirements of the Europe 2020 strategy and support achievement of the goals presented in it. In Finland's preliminary views, the share of research, development, and innovation in the EU budget must increase in the 2014–2020 funding period. The increase must be linked with the impact of this activity, and correlated with the programmes generating added value, growth, new competencies and knowledge, and innovations. However, the additional EU-level resources must not be used to replace national investments in research; instead, they must produce added value beyond that generated through national measures.

In connection with the EU budget, it is important that more and more development of European research and technology be able to be financed by means of loan and guarantee instruments of the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund, in order to eliminate deficiencies occurring in the market. For instance, in the light of the first experiences, the Risk Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF) has emerged as a promising instrument.

Streamlining of Governance

We must continue the determined measures aimed at simplification of governance in the Framework Programme in accordance with the agreed policies. The practices and interpretation of rules must be harmonised both within the Framework Programme and among all EU programmes financing research and development (such as CIP and structural funds). Furthermore, the application processes, and acceptance and reporting rules related to expenses of R&D&I programmes under the responsibility of the Commission's various Directorate Generals, must be made as similar as possible. Practices found, and acknowledged, to be good at a national level should be approved.

The key goal is to improve the efficiency, flexibility, and effectiveness of financing instruments for research and innovation. Projects' processing practices must be made clearer, simpler, and faster. The concrete goal must be to halve the time it takes from filing an application to concluding an agreement from the present level. Special attention must also be paid to transparency of preparations, assessment and selection procedures, good scientific practice (including ethical principles), and procedures' compliance with IPR agreements.

In the implementation of the Framework Programme, we need procedures based on trust. We must find a balance between trust in researchers and, on the other hand, sound management of funds and financial control mechanisms.