

Position of the Czech Academy of Sciences on FP9

June 2017

About The Czech Academy of Sciences

The Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) is a public non-university research institution operating a system of 54 research institutes, the main mission of which is to conduct research in a broad range of the natural, technical and social sciences and the humanities, to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and education as well as to promote the transfer of new findings into practical uses.

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European added value as an overarching principle

Now more than ever, Europe has to rely on its common values and strengths. Strategic co-operation and cutting edge research together with knowledge and human potential can overcome current challenges Europe is facing. The future framework programme for research has to strengthen real **fair and open co-operation** and demonstrate **genuine European added value in all supported activities**.

The European added value is clearly demonstrated by the huge effect which the European Research Council (**ERC**) has had on the national RTD evaluation and funding systems. The current ERC scheme is not only addressing researchers' needs but also recognising the best ideas and research performers. Thus, ERC grants have become a benchmark of the institutional excellence. The CAS firmly believes that the ERC attracts outstanding researchers to Europe and prevents brain drain. Therefore, the scheme should be maintained also in the next framework programme and the ERC funding should be significantly increased.

Similarly, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (**MSCA**) are undoubtedly beneficial to the future of wide European research by offering opportunities for early career researchers to gain international experience. Mobility within MSCA provides these young researchers with necessary skills and competences and it is in many cases pivotal for keeping them in science. The MSCA is in that context another essential instrument which has been proven successful in building and deepening cooperation in the European Research Area. This investment into human resources secures a stable and competitive future for European research. However, **the ERC and the MSCA should not compete**, but complement one another and help researchers to gradually build their careers. While the ERC should remain an instrument awarding the brightest minds, i.e. researchers who have clearly demonstrated their excellence in research, the MSCA should be mainly an instrument which supports those promising researchers who show sufficient capacity and who have capability to enter scientific career but are still lacking results that would allow applying for ERC starting grants.

In addition, it appears that at present, the evaluation often suffers from historical and inadequate perception of institutional capacities in certain regions. Thus, the evaluations

should be adapted so that the researcher as well as the research project evaluation is completely separated from the assessment of the institutional environment. Such a modification will properly account for the new capacities created in many European regions, for example, by the means of structural funds, without compromising excellence as the main guiding principle. Similarly, the quality of the proposal in the ERC scheme should play the key role in project selection together with reduction of the weight of the track record.

Not only human resources but also world-class research environment must be the cornerstone of the EU's research and innovation policy. Here the European added value is also unquestionable. Top class research infrastructures are, irrespectively of their location, inevitable for enabling breakthroughs in science. Thereby, investments in research infrastructures and their broad distribution across Europe is not only an effective instrument of cohesion policy, but also a very efficient tool for increasing European competitiveness at large. **Long-term sustainability and accessibility of RIs** must be considered priorities for the future framework programme. It is of vital European interest to maintain this tool with significantly increased budget and broaden the category of eligible costs.

Next framework programmes should build on its open and inclusive structure and focus on actions of clear European added value to the benefits of the entire research community. CAS hereby offers its experts to effectively help with the preparation of the FP9 programmes. Variable geometry actions leading to collaborative and interdisciplinary research (for example **Widening, ERA-NET, and JPIs**) should be continued in the next framework programme. On a similar track, the achievements of **Euratom**, the research programme for nuclear research and training, are of great importance to the European nuclear safety, nuclear research and power industry. For its European added value, the programme should be maintained in the current form as a complementary to the next framework programme.

As for **administrative and financial procedures**, the new framework programme should keep things simple and user-friendly. Smaller projects and consortia perform excellent research in more flexible, effective and efficient way. At the same time, a low number of partners in consortia reduces administrative burden and improves overall success rate. Grants, not loans, should remain the main funding principle as financial instruments based on loans are not compatible with funding system of public research organizations and universities. Whenever appropriate, a bottom-up approach should be applied as the main principle to encourage excellence in research.

On the other hand, existing actions/programmes of questionable European added value should not be part of the next framework programme (for example, European Institute of Innovation - KICs). Also the design of societal challenges should be further discussed and reshaped based on the evaluation of its results and benefits. Last but not least, the role of industry and large enterprises in partnerships should be rethought in order to strengthen the collaboration among partners and improve the success rate.

The simplification of funding rules which was implemented in H2020 is a positive trend to be kept up in FP9 too. The demand for national co-financing of some programmes should also be reconsidered. It can be seen as a tool of leverage towards national funding schemes and in different environments could easily produce a discriminatory effect.

To conclude, in the next framework programme the EU should concentrate on only a few instruments, primarily on those which are proven to be successful and which are promising in order to be attractive to the best researchers. It is essential to ensure that these instruments create real added value that will enhance European excellence, competitiveness and scientific potential in the world.