MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND SPORT OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

RESPONSE TO THE GREEN PAPER

ON THE COMMON STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR EU RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FUNDING
Slovakia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the EU Commission Green Paper on a Common Strategic Framework for future EU Research and Innovation Funding (CSFRI). Slovakia supports the leading principle presented in the Green Paper which aims to bring the key EU funded research, technology and innovation programmes under one framework and simplify access to EU funding. The Green Paper raised several important issues. In its response to the consultation Slovakia would like to stress the following aspects:

**The importance of creating research and innovation landscape**

European R&D funding has been instrumental in raising the quality and quantity of research in Slovakia in our universities, institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, national research institutes and R&D industrial companies. In fact, R&D funding through the European Framework Programmes ensures that researchers in Slovakia forge strong, lasting links with their European colleagues. Therefore, CSFRI as an instrument of the Innovation Union should cover all elements of research and innovation landscape (from basic research through applied research and experimental development to market and user-oriented activities). It is crucial that these elements will be inter-dependent. The contribution and connectivity of each element should be fully understood and supported appropriately with respect to the innovation agenda (taking into account also social and cultural innovations, not only technological innovation).

The CSFRI is bringing together more complex landscape. The new European Innovation Platforms aim to bring together different initiatives and instruments. Therefore, an open discussion between all the relevant actors is crucial and at the same time it is important factor in the success of this new approach.

**The principle of excellence and EU added value throughout the CSFRI**

CSFRI should aim to support research of the highest quality that will be measured in terms of international competitiveness. In terms of building up excellence in research and innovation, cohesion funding should play an important role. Therefore, **scientific and technological quality standards** should be maintained as the backbone of the funding criteria of the EU funding programmes.

There are areas of the current Framework Programme that are excellence-based and have high
European added value. These also offer **opportunities for all Member States to develop their researchers, research institutions and research infrastructures, therefore they should be maintained.**

One of the initiatives are Marie Curie Schemes. The Marie Curie Programme has funded Slovak researchers at all stages in their careers from PhD to postdoctoral and senior researchers. It has promoted the international mobility of researchers in all disciplines. The programme has also helped to developed R&D capacity in companies medium and small. For expanding the R&D capability of organisations and for linking universities and Institutes of the Slovak Academy Sciences to industry we hope that researchers in Slovakia will continue to compete successfully for Marie Curie funding. One of the crucial features of the Marie Curies Actions is that they help not only individual researchers but also institutions to benefit from the structured exchange of knowledge. It provided opportunities for universities, research centres and businesses to reinforce or develop new competencies through the recruitment of experienced researchers from another country.

However, despite the success of the **current programme, it would benefit from a reduction in the number of schemes. Funding should be more bottom-up oriented** in comparison with current state and be more focused on the individual fellowships and training networks.

Another core of the programme that should be adequately supported is transnational access to research infrastructures. To raise the visibility of research infrastructures, there should be a **separate specific programme dedicated to Research Infrastructures.** High-quality research infrastructures are essential for top-level research and for attractiveness of the research environment. Therefore, all investment in infrastructure, whether for construction, accessibility or integration, should be based on an understanding of how European research infrastructures can meet current and future needs of the scientific community. With that in mind, the measures that will support both existing and new research infrastructures are needed. Also flexible funding arrangements for access to research infrastructures will help to boost international researchers’ mobility. Linking together researchers and research infrastructures is crucial for the success of CSFRI.

### Balance of bottom-up and top-down activities

It is essential to find a balance between policy-driven (top-down) and science-driven (bottom-up) research activities. ERAB’s suggestion\(^1\) of allocating 50% of EC research funding to frontier, high-risk research and development is an example guideline that should be taking into account within the new EU funding programme. However, at the same time, EU funding should be provided both for scientific research based on the ideas and expertise of researchers, and for research stemming from the need to tackle grand societal challenges. The threefold approach suggested by the interim evaluation panel of FP7, where researchers, industry and civil society actors set the FP research agenda, should be

\(^1\) “Preparing Europe for a New Renaissance”, ERAB 2009
Strengthening European Research Area

In general it is important to preserve and reinforce the Framework Programme’s central place in the European R&D system in terms of budget as well as key instruments such as collaborative research and smaller projects. Despite the fact that CSFRI equates to only about 5% of total public funding in EU, it is a major source of transnational public project-based research funding in Europe. As such, it is aimed to solve grand challenges. Therefore, it requires to find a balance between smaller and larger R&D projects. Especially, strengthening the focus on smaller projects should be considered in order to support economic competitiveness and completing the European Research Area.

To create a functioning and sustainable ERA, there should be a strong will from the European Commission to find the solutions how to overcome current barriers to researchers’ mobility. Taking into account the success of Slovakia in the importance of Marie Curie Programme which is a key European instrument that funds excellent researchers, we strongly support inclusive approach to international co-operation within the Framework Programme.

Taking into account the development of human resources for R&D, several problems could be solved by establishing a better coordination between DG Education and Culture and DG Research and Innovation. Considering the potential of exchanging experience and best specialists between innovative companies, new tool for the company research that would enable innovative SMEs related mobility would be highly beneficial.

Strengthening competitiveness

The participation and involvement of industry in the EU programmes supporting research should be strongly supported. In particular, SMEs have a crucial role in developing novel products and services. Future EU research and innovation programmes should continue to support SMEs. Their involvement in EU level actions needs to be further strengthened in particular starting-up and smaller SMEs with prospective high-growth potential at European level. High-tech SMEs as well as SMEs with little or no research capacities should be targeted with bottom-up programmes at EU level. A SME-specific programme open for all technological fields should be foreseen, which should not be limited to R&D outsourcing (as it was in FP7). This SME-specific programme should enable cooperation among research performing SMEs, SMEs with little or no research capacities and their research partners.

Market uptake of project results should receive higher attention including criteria for evaluation of benefits for SMEs. Projects with a stronger focus results exploitation and aiming at demonstration,
testing and verification should be favoured in funding. Projects should include a comprehensive business case and demonstrate a clear economic impact for the SME participants, improving their competitiveness by creating new or expanding existing markets. Financial mechanisms should be provided to help SME in financing “post R&D phase”, which is the most critical stage. True administration simplification, shorter time to contract and two-stage submission procedures would markedly strengthen SME participation.

Focus on societal challenges

The concept of ‘grand challenges’ should be embedded throughout the CSFRI because they require serious attention in R&D. They should not be the sole mechanisms for thematic funding. Therefore, they should be tackled by replacing the current FP7 thematic priorities by components that address grand societal challenges. It is essential that there is an open discussion with Member States as to which challenges should be focused upon.

To ensure an increasing emphasis on grand challenges should be complemented by support for selected themes and emerging areas, given the CSFRI is likely to last five or more years. All areas of research, including social science and humanities should be contributing to grand challenges, themes and emerging areas, according to the required expertise. Social science and humanities should have an important and pervasive role in CSFRI. Therefore, new funding instruments, both top-down and bottom-up should be considered.

Joint Programming is an important mechanism through which Member States can play their unique role within the ERA. Societal challenges could be addressed through alignment of national activities under a common strategy. It is crucial for JPIs that they remain driven by Member States and their research communities. However, many aspects of JPIs require a larger degree of implementation and funding than Member States can achieve collectively, therefore EC has an important role to play in assisting Member States in areas where additional funding is appropriate.

Strengthening the international dimension

To maximise the quality and quantity of international participation, the joint international planning is crucial. This is an area where better dialogue is needed, especially between European policy bodies in charge of international co-operation and also more coordinated approach from the European Commission is expected. It is important that international co-operation will play a crucial role throughout the programme and at the same time will reflect the research priorities. International co-operation opportunities should be made more visible, both within and outside of the EU. International research agendas should be strongly supported.
Focus on simplification and communication

The success of the CSFRI is dependent on the simplification that will be understandable to all parties involved. This requires a number of measures that will avoid the duplication and would simplify reporting and auditing. Both, the EU and the beneficiaries should benefit from the simplification measures. These should be communicated to beneficiaries in advance of the CSFRI taking effect and documentation and training should be provided. While recognising the need for good communication, the common understanding of terminology is a vital element. Therefore, we encourage the European Commission to provide Member States with ‘crystal clear’ definitions of key terminology used in the future CSFRI.

Bratislava 19.5.2011