First meeting of the High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes
Meeting report

7 December 2016, 09:00 – 16:00
Brussels

1. Approval of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming the participants. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public.

3. List of points discussed

DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD) presented Horizon 2020, the state of Europe’s research and innovation (R&I) performance and current challenges faced, including:

- The new features of Horizon 2020 including coupling research with innovation, adopting a challenge-based approach to collaborative R&I and measures which target lower-performing EU countries;
- Excellence as a core guiding principle;
- Simplification of rules as a top priority in the design of Horizon 2020;
- The structuring effect of Horizon 2020 on R&I in the EU (its budget represents between 5 and 10% of total public research spending in the EU) and its role in catalysing reforms at national level;
- The leverage effect on private R&I investment through the public-private partnerships supported through Horizon 2020;
- Low success rates (just under 12% on average) for Horizon 2020 calls as a downside of efforts to simplify the programme;
- The relative lack of radical disruptive innovation in Europe which creates new markets. How could the EU reward daring and risky proposals, and how to attract the best innovators?

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1 Published in the Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities, code number E03484.
- How to embed R&I systematically within current EU policy priorities, given its proven contribution to spurring economic growth;
- The vital importance of EU added value, especially in achieving economic impact and in determining the potential costs if the EU did not support R&I activities;
- Effective public engagement in building a positive case for R&I, along with mobilising political will at a high level.

Examples of issues for consideration when formulating future programmes include: the type of projects to be supported and the balance of funding instruments used; how to integrate global R&I activities; which type of innovation to support; how much continuity and how much change; and the potential future role of defence research.

The High Level Group (HLG) report will be published in June 2017. The forward-looking set of recommendations in the report will complement a Commission Staff Working Document, to be published in May 2017 and which will be the evidence base for the Interim Evaluation. A stakeholder conference is planned for 30 June 2017 in Brussels where the report will be presented, and it will be discussed at a meeting of EU Science and Research Ministers in Tallinn on 24/25 July 2017. Also in July 2017, the European Parliament will adopt a report on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020.

The mandate and the Working Arrangements for the HLG were adopted. It was agreed for the Secretariat to develop an official message outlining the Group’s approach to meetings with stakeholders at the February and April meetings, which will be made public on the HLG website.

The Rules of Procedure for the HLG were adopted. Instead of appointing one rapporteur from amongst the HLG members, the Chair proposed that rapporteur duties would be collective contributions to DG RTD and that the finalisation of the report would be collectively carried out by the HLG. This was agreed by the HLG.

During a first tour de table on potential issues for consideration, the topics highlighted by HLG members included:

- Citizens’ involvement in EU programmes (i.e. through challenge-based funding) and better communication;
- To improve complementarity and synergies between national and EU funding programmes;
- To revisit and potentially broaden the understanding of innovation, capturing social as well as economic value;
- To recommend reforms to national R&I systems;
- The use of Structural Funds in relation to Horizon 2020;
- The balance between fundamental, applied and multidisciplinary R&I;
- The contribution of Horizon 2020 to transdisciplinarity;
- To clarify the differences and connections between research and innovation;
• The role of regulation and standards in driving forward innovation; identify the non-financial drivers of innovation;
• To put in place better mechanisms for educating and supporting young entrepreneurs;
• How to stimulate and incentivise participation from low R&I performing countries;
• How to ensure effective R&I cooperation between different sectors;
• To determine the key goals for the EU programme (i.e. whether creating jobs, enabling private investment in R&I, breakthrough discoveries, training people);
• Find new ways of proposal evaluation, i.e. involvement of citizens;
• More societal involvement, to involve citizens in defining challenges and in finding solutions; mainstream civil engagement in all R&I activities.

In order to structure the HLG’s tasks in preparation for the upcoming meetings, a three-stage framework was proposed by the Chair and agreed by the HLG members. Firstly, to gain a full and clear picture of the knowledge and innovation ecosystem of the 21st century (also using global benchmarks) and how it functions. Secondly, to address the broad question of how to improve this ecosystem in Europe and look at what is working well and not so well. Thirdly, to make recommendations on what EU R&I programmes should prioritise as a means of applying solutions to the identified problems.

DG RTD outlined that several short Issue Papers are under preparation and will be provided to HLG members (and published online) on key issues of current relevance to EU R&I programmes. Further papers will also be provided which summarise key emerging findings from the Interim Evaluation. HLG members requested to receive further input on social sciences and humanities, responsible R&I and alignment with national R&I programmes.

Commissioner Moedas joined the meeting and underlined that excellence, openness and impact are his three guiding principles for future EU funding programmes. On excellence, he emphasised that a funding instrument supporting excellence in disruptive innovation is currently lacking at EU level, that the existing range of funding schemes is too complex and that funds must be complemented by follow-up activities.

To improve synergies with structural funds, he emphasised that a ‘seal of excellence’ has been launched. On openness, he highlighted the need to build bridges internationally through associating countries so that global challenges can be tackled, and the need to use data in a much more open way to achieve real impact of R&I funded by the EU (open science, open data and open access). Currently in the EU we do not pass data between different projects. The future place for defence research at EU level was described as an open question.

Commissioner Moedas then took questions from HLG members on: the role of the HLG in recommending reforms to EU Member States; how innovation is supported within the Commission; what could most usefully arise from the HLG report. He concluded by speaking about the need to reconnect with EU citizens in a meaningful way.
4. Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 8 February 2017 in Brussels.

5. List of participants

HLG members present: Pascal Lamy (Chair), Martin Brüdermuller, Mark Ferguson, Cristina Garmendia, Iain Gray, Nevenka Maher, Maya Plentz Fagundes, Lucyna Woźniak, Milena Žic Fuchs.

Apologies received from: Lykke Friis, Jan Gulliksen, Harri Kulmala.