



PLATFORM

PLATFORM POLICY BRIEF

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The future of cooperation and collaboration in public-public partnerships between Member States – ‘Think Back, Act Forward’



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The future of cooperation and collaboration in public-public partnerships between Member States – 'Think Back, Act Forward'

Context

As Horizon 2020 changed conditions and settings for the Member States coordination activities profoundly, there is a necessity to think about new, sustainable and alternative models of future cooperation and collaboration between national publicly funded research programmes. Main challenges within existing instruments of collaboration need to be identified and improved schemes of future collaboration in public-public partnerships between Member States need to be envisioned, designed and discussed. Therefore PLATFORM has organised in March 2015 a World Café Workshop 'Think Back, Act Forward' on collaboration between Member States. Several concerns are raised on the implementation of the H2020 instruments Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) and European Joint Programme (EJP).

General concerns

1. Scattered resources of funding agencies

In the Bioeconomy there many different initiatives fostering the European Research Area (ERA): over 20 ERA-NETs, 9 European Technology Platforms (ETPs) with mirror groups, 3 Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), 1 Joint Technology Initiative (JTI), etc. Most of these initiatives ask for a contribution from National funding agencies, either in financial- and/or human resources. PLATFORM would like to stress that the introduction of FPA and EJP needs to have a positive impact on the deployment of resources. The new instruments should offer solutions for a scattered resources of funding agencies. The consequences have to be evaluated carefully.

2. Development and decisions on topics

By having the ERA-NETs in the Work Programme, the development and decisions on topics follows the same procedures as for collaborative research projects. For the ERA-NETs in the Bioeconomy this means that Member States are engaged in the process both through

the Programme Committee (PC) and through the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR). Consultation may be sought from various expert groups, existing ERA-NET Actions and joint programming initiatives, the platform of Bioeconomy ERA-NETs, and other stakeholders, in particular those that develop or implement strategic research agendas. Changing the embedding of ERA-NETs means that the preparation and decision processes will have to be rethought as well.

3. Lack of funding for implementation of calls

Member States see great opportunities in pooling research funding in ERA-initiatives like ERA-NET Cofunds and JPIs. Between 2004 and 2013, covering the period of FP6 and FP7, 153 ERA-NETs and 23 ERA-NET Plus actions were created. The networks have organised some 325 joint calls with a total of estimated € 2.4 billion public funding in the Bioeconomy area alone. A main bottleneck for effective implementation of these initiatives is the lack of a proper instrument to fund implementation of calls through international "call secretariats". Based on the Commission presentation, neither FPA nor EJP will fund call implementation, therefore this problem seems to remain unresolved. The FPA/EJPs needs to provide a possibility for funding of the call administration.

4. Lack of instrument for networking and additional activities

The context against which calls are developed is dynamic and changes over time. Therefore, there is a need for exploring new areas for ERA collaboration, for scoping activities, for networking and for building bridges between disciplines and sectors. The ERA-NET managers call for instruments that take into account the need for networking and various other additional activities to build longer lasting collaborations and means for creating more impact from a joint call.

Specific concerns regarding the implementation of Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA)

5. Complexity of legal contracts

The past years we have seen great improvements in simplification and diminishing the administrative burden of participating in European projects. However, the administration concerning contract signing and contract amendments remains an extremely complex, meticulous and time consuming task. An FPA will be a single contract with an estimated 100 partners. Each Cofund partner will need to sign at least three legal contracts: the FPA, the consortium agreement to the FPA, and the Specific Agreement to each of the Cofund actions to which they allocate research budget. Moreover, many funding agencies, like national science councils or national enterprise agencies, finance research in various areas, and so the number of contracts will multiply accordingly. We fear that the administrative burden of management of FPA's will increase the overhead of implementation of ERA-NET Cofunds.

6. Bioeconomy is by definition not limited to a single societal challenge

Research in the Bioeconomy is not limited to a single societal challenge. This is reflected by bioeconomy related projects and ERA-initiatives in H2020 under health, agriculture & food, marine research, ICT, biotechnology and environment. Initiatives are more and more working together to foster multidisciplinary research. However, each individual FPA will cover only one specific societal challenge. We fear the FPA will, in this way, raise a new barrier to fund multidisciplinary research in ERA-NET Cofunds.

7. Extra barriers for international collaboration

Cooperation between the European Research Area Networks and organisations in global research can benefit the bioeconomy. Global cooperation can increase the outreach and impact of ERA-NET activities through having access to the best available knowledge and avoiding duplication of efforts and can address research areas with a clear global dimension. It is unclear if funding agencies or initiatives from outside Europe will benefit from the FPA; however they will need to accede to the FPA contract in order to participate in ERA-NET Cofunds. Consequences for international collaboration in terms of FPA raising additional barriers have to be evaluated carefully.

Specific concerns regarding the implementation of European Joint Programme (EJP)-Cofund

8. Long term financial commitment vs short term work programme

The EJP-Cofund demands that member states, more specifically funding agencies, give a commitment for a programme of 60 months. However the work programme of a specific EJP will be for 12 months, to be submitted 90 days before the end of a reporting period and to be evaluated by the European Commission. This way the European Commission will gain control over national funding without any obligation to consult Member States about the work programme of the EJP.

9. Cascading funds

The EJP-Cofund offers the opportunity, like an ERA-NET Cofund to fund research through competitive calls (so-called Cascading funds). However, unlike in ERA-NETs the funding rules cannot be adapted to national funding rules; the rules and reimbursement rates of the EJP always apply. Furthermore, projects under the EJP-Cofund scheme cannot run beyond the 60 months of the EJP. This means that, even though the EJP claims critical mass in funding, integration and maturity of the research, projects will typically run for a duration between 2 and 4 years. We fail to see the benefit of this instrument - with these conditions- for funding agencies.

10. Type of Activities

The European Joint Programme ('EJP') under Horizon 2020 is a co-fund action designed to support coordinated national research and innovation programmes. The EJP aims at attracting and pooling a critical mass of national resources on objectives and challenges of Horizon 2020 and at achieving significant economies of scales by adding related Horizon 2020 resources to a joint effort. The EJP-Cofund can fund a wide range of activities, ranging from research to coordination and networking activities, including training activities, demonstration and dissemination activities, support to third parties etc.

This "look and feel" of the EJP-Cofund scheme is reminiscent of the failed instrument of Network of Excellence (NoE). The NoE was an instrument under FP6 and FP7 aiming at attracting and pooling a critical mass by funding coordination and networking activities, including a joint research programme, training activities, demonstration and dissemination activities. The NoE was abolished as an instrument after very critical reviews in the midterm and *ex-post* evaluations on FP6.

Introduction to PLATFORM policy briefs

The Platform of bioeconomy ERA-NET Actions brings together funders and programme managers in European Research Area Networks (ERA-NETs) in the fields that make up the bioeconomy: food, agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry, climate, biodiversity and biotechnologies. PLATFORM aims to improve exchange and cooperation and to strengthen the impact of the ERA-NET Actions on the European Research Area and the European bioeconomy.

PLATFORM was supported by FP7 in 2012-2014 (Grant number 288422) and is currently supported by Horizon 2020 (Grant number 652635) for the period 2015-2017. PLATFORM has become a robust forum and offers mutual learning and networking opportunities to the ERA-NET actors, thus enhancing coordination and maximising synergies. The project also engages other public-to-public (P2P) coordination networks, such as Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) Working Groups.

During its current course, PLATFORM will publish at least three policy briefs to communicate results of analysis and discussions to decision makers at national and European level. The policy briefs are produced in frame of the Work Package 2 Policy: “Bottom-up recommendations to improve impact”. The intention of policy briefs is to support and inform national programme owners and managers in their endeavours towards better coordination, the need for P2P cooperation and also towards opening up to currently underrepresented Member States that would be interested to join. The actors within the existing ERA-NETs and JPIs have, collectively, a good oversight and expertise and are well-positioned to explore opportunities for collaboration, as well as to give recommendations on new networks needed.

Policy Brief No. 1

This Policy Brief is the outcome of the discussions that took place at the PLATFORM World Café workshop ‘Think Back, Act Forward’ on collaboration between Member States, held March 27th, 2015 at Schiphol Airport in The Netherlands. It has been sent as a letter to the European Commission Directorate General Research and Innovation (DG-RTD) and Directorate General Agriculture and Rural Development (DG-AGRI), to the members of the Standing Committee of Agricultural Research (SCAR) and the Programme Committee (PC) for Societal Challenge 2 (Bioeconomy) (SC2). The letter was sent with a list of questions based on the conclusions of the workshop. The main conclusions of the workshop were provided as input for the EC workshop on April 27th, 2015 about the new instruments for Cofund Actions in SC2. The PLATFORM World Café Workshop focused on sustainable and alternative models for cooperation between public research programmes. Topics of debate were the new instruments the Commission proposes to introduce in the 2016-2017 Work Programme of SC2, the main challenges, and improved schemes for collaboration between Member States. Nineteen managers of ERA-NETs and JPIs from nine countries: France, Germany, Belgium, Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Denmark, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. We thank all participants for sharing information and ideas and their contributions to the debate. The content of the policy brief has been prepared by the leaders of the PLATFORM Project Tasks 1.1 and the Project Coordinator. It reflects the views of the authors and is not an official position of the ERA-NET Community.

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