

On the synergies between the European Structural and Investment Fund and HORIZON 2020

WORKING GROUP 2 (FINANCE) OF THE COST-BESTPRAC PROGRAMME

Whereas:

1. Europe is facing huge competition from the emerging countries as far as innovation is concerned and needs to enhance a common research, innovation policy and improve its innovation standards and performance.
2. The 2014-2020 cohesion policy – through its financial tools, the European Structural and Investment Funds (hereinafter referred to as “ESIF”) - contributes to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020) and focuses on a limited number of common thematic objectives to ensure maximum impact for their investments: innovation and research, digital agenda, support for smart and medium-size businesses and low-carbon economy. The ESIF partly support innovation and research, especially as far as the improvement of regional research and innovation capacities and eco-systems are concerned. ESIF are managed by regional, local implementing bodies, which define the implementation procedures and allocate funding to final beneficiaries based on local needs, priorities and assets (smart specialization).
3. Individual research and innovation projects tackling the whole circle of innovation selected based on impact and excellence criteria are financed through programmes directly managed by the European Commission, i.e Horizon 2020 (H2020), COSME, Erasmus+, Creative Europe, EaSI and Connecting Europe Facility (digital services).
4. In spite of the increasing budget of H2020 and innovation and competitiveness budgets devoted to the cohesion policy, the creation of synergies between ESIF and the funding programmes in the field of research, innovation and competitiveness directly managed by the European Commission (hereinafter referred to as “innovation programmes”) is of utmost importance to maximize the impact and efficiency of public funding and face the increasing competitive pressure from global markets.
5. Synergies between ESIF and the innovation programmes are intended as a combination of project and funds. There are different types of synergies, i.e. simultaneous/cumulative use of funds; parallel use of funds in separate projects; upstream sequential combination of funds; downstream sequential combination and alternative funding through ESIF.

6. The European Commission elaborated a medium, long-term strategic framework integrating ESIF and the other research and innovation funding. The staff working document issued in March 2014¹ describes the typology of possible synergies and provides recommendations to policy-makers and implementing bodies to accomplish those synergies.
7. The effective fulfillment of the synergies between the ESIF and innovation programmes is hindered by the lack of a comprehensive design which would allow to overcome the operational shortcomings due to the different management levels, system of ESIF and innovation programmes – such as the misalignment of the submission deadlines and selection timeline and the lack of common financial reporting/cost schemes - and scares awareness by the stakeholders.
8. Acknowledging the pivotal role that the European Commission - DG Research and DG Region in particular – has in enabling the coordination among the authorities and stakeholders and guarantee effective synergies between the above mentioned funds

RECOMMENDS the following to the European Commission (DG Research and DG Regio):

1. Mention synergies between ESIF and innovation programmes (hereinafter referred to as “synergies”) in relevant European strategies (such as the next 2020 Strategy) as a strategic tool to strengthen innovation and competitiveness.
2. Include synergies in the cohesion policies strategic frameworks and operational documents. In particular, the next regulation laying down common provisions of ESIF (2021-2027 programming period) shall mention synergies in its preamble as a means to achieve the innovation and research objectives of the cohesion policy. The design of the synergies shall be a requirement of the strategic policy frameworks and operational provisions to create the conditions for an effective accomplishment of synergies should be envisaged in the operative programmes.
3. Include synergies in the regulatory documents of the innovation programmes for the 2021-2027 programming period. The work programmes shall consider synergies both in the proposal and management phase of the project. The design of possible synergies shall be a requirement in the proposal while their fulfillment should be monitored through the periodic reports. The latter fulfillment shall also be one of the criteria against which the project is assessed.

¹ *Enabling synergies between European Structural Funds and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020 and other research, innovation and competitiveness-related Union programmes. Guidance for policy-makers and implementing bodies*, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/synergy/synergies_en.pdf



4. Reinforce the role of national agencies and European contact points in raising awareness on synergies among regional research and innovation stakeholders and potential beneficiaries, creating synergies with regional and local ESIF implementing authorities.
5. Set up rules for audits related to innovation programmes, taking into account the specificities of projects implying simultaneous/cumulative use of funds.
6. Settle a monitoring mechanism and study on the modalities, extent of the actual fulfillment of the synergies as well as its impact on innovation and cohesion in the EU, starting from the 2021-2027 programming period. This monitoring would allow to identify the factors hindering synergies and to take actions to effectively enable them.