



Comments of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres  
on fundamental aspects of the proposal of the European Commission  
for Horizon 2020

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HELMHOLTZ  
| ASSOCIATION

The Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres with its almost 33,000 employees and an annual budget of 3.3 billion euros is Germany's largest research organisation and one of the largest in Europe. The Helmholtz Association participates in many European projects – often in a coordinating role – and benefits considerably from the established instruments of the Framework Programme of the European Union for Research and Technological Development. The instruments and actions of the Framework Programme contribute significantly towards supporting networking and collaboration between the scientists of the Helmholtz Association and researchers throughout Europe. They facilitate as well activities which cannot be realised at the national level or which provide added value in the form of collaborations at the European level.

This paper presents a consensus of the views of the Helmholtz Association and its centres.

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## Introduction

The Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres welcomes the proposal of the European Commission for Horizon 2020, in particular its clear efforts to simplify the procedures and rules, for example through greater acceptance of the usual accounting principles of the participants.

The Helmholtz Association also welcomes the stronger focus of the EU programmes on the grand societal challenges.

We see a need for clarification or improvements in the following aspects:

## Horizon 2020 Regulation

### Prioritisation in favour of collaborative research:

As in FP7, there should be an annex listing the funding instruments that clearly prioritises flexible collaborative research projects as the core instrument of Horizon 2020 for the programme areas “Societal Challenges” and “Industrial Leadership”. The tendency towards increasingly large structures such as Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs), Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) in the framework of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and, most recently, Future and Emerging Technology (FET) flagships should be pursued sparingly and with great caution.

While these instruments can consolidate resources, at the same time they can discourage smaller actors from taking part in EU projects, with the consequence that the crucial input of these actors is lost. Moreover, an increasing proportion of resources intended for research and technological development (RTD) must be devoted to the internal administration of these large initiatives. Collaborative research projects should therefore remain the main instrument in Horizon 2020 and correspondingly receive adequate resources. The accompanying statement on collaborative research further elaborates on the important role of this instrument in Horizon 2020.

### More financial resources for research infrastructures (RI) in the Horizon 2020 budget:

Without world-class RI, top-level research is impossible in many scientific fields. The European RI programme allows researchers with promising project ideas to make use of e.g. research airplanes or research vessels regardless of whether their home country owns such facilities. This increases the efficiency of the European science system as a whole, an effect which can only be achieved through support at the European level. RI represent a central focus of the European Research Area and are the object of two of the commitments in the “Innovation Union”: opening of Member State-operated RI to the full European user

community;<sup>1</sup> and implementing 60% of the ESFRI projects by 2015.<sup>2</sup>

These ambitious goals cannot realistically be achieved with the proposed 3% of the Horizon 2020 budget to be devoted to RI. A significant budget increase was also recommended by the Expert Group that carried out the interim evaluation of FP7.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in view of the Horizon 2020 focus on innovation, industry-oriented RI and test infrastructures should be given more consideration than in the past. The accompanying position on RI in Horizon 2020 expands the relevance of the European RI programme in more detail.

### Governance:

In view of the importance of the work programmes, which will stipulate which instruments are to be used and which funding scheme is to be applied, it is important to clarify what decision-taking procedures are to be in force and how the stakeholders are to be involved.

### Funding instruments:

As in FP7, the funding instruments should be described in an annex to the framework programme. This enhances transparency, allows for earlier discussion and provides researchers with more clarity, and thus simplification.

### European Institute of Technology (EIT):

It would be desirable to evaluate the experiences with the first KICs before reserving further significant budgets for new KICs of the EIT.

## Rules for Participation

### Stable funding rates, Article 22.2 of the Rules for Participation:

Funding rates should not change from work programme to work programme, but rather remain constant according to the instrument used. It is essential for the long-term planning of European activities carried out by researchers that the funding rates in the different programme areas of Horizon 2020 remain reliable and constant over the course of the entire programme, rather than changing with each annual work programme. Accordingly, the sec-

<sup>1</sup> See Innovation Union commitment No.4 in the communication of the European Commission on the Innovation Union SEK(2010) 1161, COM(2010)546.

<sup>2</sup> See Innovation Union commitment No.5.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Expert Group on the interim evaluation of FP7, Sect. 3.3: “The Expert Group concludes that RIs are a good example of added value at the European, but that they are not yet having as great an impact on ERA as they could [...] more emphasis should be given in FP8 to the creation and exploitation of RIs, not least to foster Innovation Union and Digital Agenda goals.”

ond sentence of Article 22.3 should be deleted without any revision.

#### Separation of research and demonstration, Article 22.3 of the Rules for Participation:

In view of the lower funding rate foreseen for demonstration projects, it will be less attractive, or even impossible, for research organisations and universities to provide research input to this type of project. This will lead to a strict separation between research projects and demonstration projects and discourage collaboration between industry and academic partners. Article 22.3 should therefore allow for combinations of both types of activities. This would allow for a more realistic reflection of how actual value creation chains work. In addition, it should be clear that “experimental development” does not include research and development activities.

#### Option to reimburse real indirect costs, Article 24 of the Rules for Participation:

In addition to the option of a 20% lump sum contribution towards indirect costs, the Rules for Participation should allow non-profit organisations the option of having their real indirect costs reimbursed. This would greatly increase the attractiveness of Horizon 2020 for many major public research organisations, which otherwise would be receive significantly less funding than in FP7, making participation in Horizon 2020 much less attractive for them.

#### Coordination of EU projects:

Both the direct and the indirect costs for the administrative management of projects are reimbursed at a rate of 100% in FP7. If Horizon 2020 allows only a fixed rate of 20% for the reimbursement of indirect costs instead, support for management activities will be significantly reduced. Many actors could thus be discouraged from taking on the coordinating role for projects in Horizon 2020



# BRIEF PORTRAIT OF THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION

In the Helmholtz Association, 18 German research centres have joined forces to share their resources in strategically oriented programmes to investigate complex questions of societal, scientific and technological relevance.

They concentrate on six major research areas: energy; earth and environment; health; aeronautics, space and transport; key technologies and structure of matter. The scientists work closely together across the centres on these issues.

The Helmholtz Association provides the necessary resources, a framework for long-term planning, a high concentration of scientific competence and an outstanding scientific infrastructure with major projects, some of which are unique worldwide.

The research objectives of the Helmholtz Association are set by the funding bodies after discussions with the Helmholtz centres and the Helmholtz Senate and Assembly of Members. Within this framework, the scientists of the Helmholtz centres determine the themes of their research through strategic programmes in the six research areas across centres.

(Source: "Strategy of the Helmholtz Association," Berlin 2009, updated 2012)

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## Helmholtz Centres

- Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar und Marine Research
- Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron DESY
- German Cancer Research Center
- Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt
- Deutsches Zentrum für Neurodegenerative Erkrankungen
- Forschungszentrum Jülich
- GEOMAR | Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel
- GSI Helmholtz Centre for Heavy Ion Research
- Helmholtz Centre Potsdam GFZ, German Research Centre for Geosciences
- Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ
- Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research
- Helmholtz-Zentrum Berlin für Materialien und Energie
- Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf (HZDR)
- Helmholtz-Zentrum Geesthacht Centre for Materials and Coastal Research
- Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health
- Karlsruhe Institute of Technology
- Max Delbrueck Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC) Berlin-Buch
- Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics (associated member)

