

## **BUT HOW DOES THE EP REPORT ON FP10 AFFECT ME?**

*This article is also [available on our website](#), including a PDF.*

### **Introduction**

But how does the EP draft report on FP affect *me*? I bet a lot of people in the European R&I space were asking themselves that question. I know I was, too.

Clearly, if the suggested expert-led governance of pillar 2 comes to pass, players in the research system will have to change their ways.

A Commission official I spoke to put it in existential terms. “But will I still have a job in FP10? I withered missions and strategic planning, but what will I do in the next Horizon Europe if the EP draft report goes through?” said this official, who has been drafting calls since FP7.

And so, this is my attempt to systematically think through the consequences for four groups of actors: researchers, research organisations, member states, and the Commission.

In this article, I will address the following:

- Why researchers would find this appealing.
- Which research organisations might struggle to adapt, including research support offices.
- How national administrations could gain from their enhanced powers, including national contact points.
- Why this is the natural next step in DG RTD’s development and could eventually strengthen the Commission’s position within the wider European research and innovation landscape.

This is clearly a thought experiment, and a personal one at that. The draft report was unfinished, and I haven’t examined the proposed amendments or included speculation on what might survive trilogue negotiations. The goal is to consider how the model would operate in practice, and where it could be fine-tuned.

The bottom line is this: Europe must urgently invest more in R&I. While all of Europe might invest 3 trillion euros over the next seven years, China will invest 4.5 trillion. An effective and enlarged Horizon Europe is therefore indispensable, whether it’s funded at 220, 200, or even 175 billion. That case is best built through a first-in-class framework programme, as Draghi noted.

Finally, the chapters are structured as follows:

1. Researchers, including (1) the attractive career steps, (2) research at the cutting edge, and (3) conflicts of interest.

2. Research organisations, including (1) long-term planning, (2) proposal preparation, (3) a new engagement strategy, and (4) personnel policy.
3. Member states, including (1) power and governance, (2) coordination at home, (3) national priorities and expert teams, and (4) a changing role for NCPs.
4. Commission, including (1) a different kind of control, (2) a different job, (3) a brief history, and (4) why this is the natural next step.

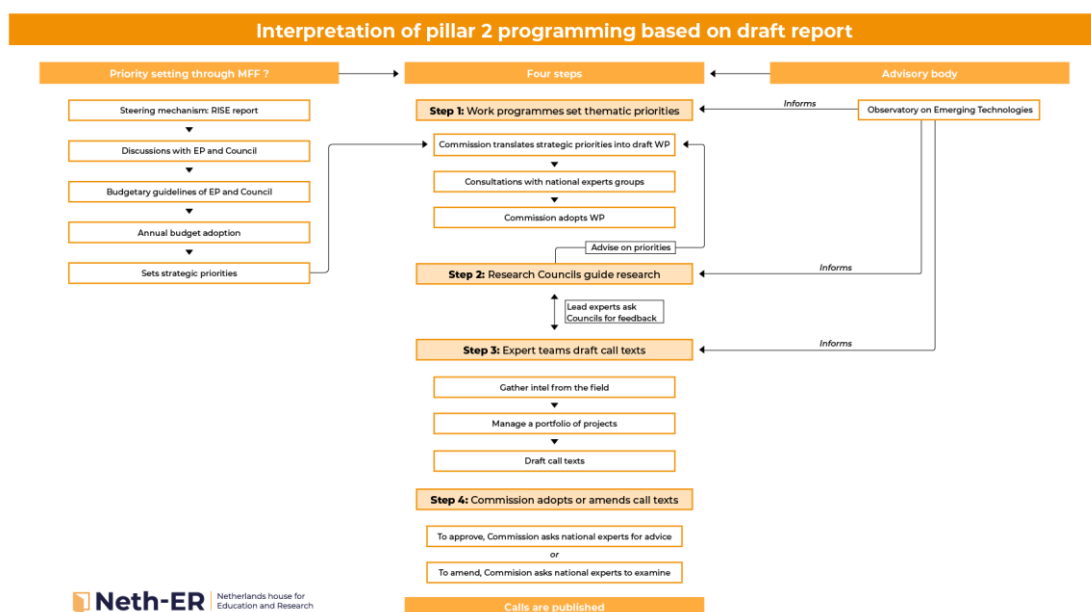
## A quick recap of expert-led governance

Before getting started, a quick recap of the suggestions made by the draft report.

This is the second part of a two-part series. In part one, I broke down the [suggested governance for pillar 2 into four steps](#).

1. The Commission and member states set priorities through work programmes.
2. Two Research Councils, staffed by experts, advise on how to carry out that assignment.
3. Expert teams draft call texts and manage a portfolio of projects, staffed by separate experts.
4. The Commission and member states approve call texts or adapt them if serious concerns arise.

Crucially, the draft report suggests a system where the Commission and member states set priorities and have full control over funding allocation, including by approving call texts, while also empowering experts to deliver a better Programme, including by being more agile. The underlying notion is that public authorities should make political decisions, while experts provide advice on substance.



Interpretation of pillar 2 programming based on the draft report.

## 1. Researchers

I have little doubt that individual researchers would find this approach extremely appealing.

Researchers are the dedicated individuals who submit proposals, work on projects, and conduct evaluations, and who would also staff the Councils and expert teams. While they probably will not read this article, I am discussing the framework programme with them in mind, because they are at the forefront of knowledge and innovation.

I will address three topics that directly affect them: the double career opportunities offered by expert roles, the likely impact on their research, and the issue of conflicts of interest.

---

### 1.1 An attractive career step

First, both the expert teams and the Councils offer attractive career opportunities.

The draft report suggests that lead experts and their teams are appointed full-time for up to five years. They draft calls on a rolling basis, engage broadly with academia, industry, and the investment community, and manage a portfolio of projects across their lifetime. For a senior researcher with a strong track record, this is a compelling proposition.

Think about what the role involves: setting the intellectual agenda for a major funding priority across the Union, meeting a wide range of leading researchers and innovators, and doing so with a degree of institutional backing that an individual academic position rarely provides. This is, in effect, a senior research leadership role without departmental admin duties.

The non-renewable term is limiting, but it also creates a clear narrative: if you do this, you return with an exceptional network, deep knowledge of the European funding landscape, and a level of visibility hard to build any other way.

The Research Councils add a second opportunity. Members serve part-time for five years, renewable once. This is a more familiar model for senior researchers, comparable in spirit to serving on an ERC panel or advisory board, but with a more sustained and strategic remit.

Researchers who take on these roles will likely find that the question is not whether they are wanted after their term ends, but by whom.

## **1.2 Research at the cutting edge**

Second, for most researchers, the more consequential change is how expert-led governance affects their proposals, given the handful of experts involved.

It has been a persistent complaint throughout the current Horizon Europe that call texts have become increasingly prescriptive and policy-laden. Calls specify not only the challenge to be addressed but also, often, the methodology, the consortium composition, and the expected outputs, in such detail that the researcher's job is less to propose a novel approach and more to translate an administrative template into a project.

And, to put it plainly, the number of coordination and support actions that should have been tenders instead has not gone unnoticed.

Expert-led governance addresses this directly. Call texts drafted by experts operating at the frontier of their field should look different from those drafted by EU officials navigating programme committees. They should be more attuned to scientific or technological opportunities and less administratively prescriptive. The explicit requirement that expert teams gather intelligence broadly reinforces this.

For researchers, the net result should be a pillar 2 that is harder to game and more rewarding to engage with honestly, which is precisely the kind of programme that attracts the best proposals.

---

## **1.3 Conflicts of interest**

Finally, researchers will be concerned about conflicts of interest.

A first concern is acute: could a researcher be excluded from a call that their former colleague designed? Could an expert team leak a draft call text to their home institution ahead of publication?

A second concern is systemic: are experts impartial? A quantum computing expert will naturally think about the field's challenges through the lens of quantum computing. Expert teams drawn from specific research communities will, consciously or not, design calls that advantage those communities.

I am not particularly worried about the first concern, because safeguards are in place at every stage. Teams have multiple members, including one EU official, and receive feedback from the Councils. Call texts are approved by the Commission and member states, and today's independent proposal evaluation process remains unchanged.

Indeed, it would be quite difficult for an individual expert to consistently favour their former employer in a way that could survive all those checks.

On the systemic concern, the honest answer is that the risk is real, but probably smaller than the current risk of political distortion. Call texts shaped by member state programme committees represent a different form of bias towards national priorities and consensus.

Expert-led governance trades one form of influence for another. Whether the trade is beneficial depends on having the right experts, which is ultimately a question of selection quality, and on ensuring that the Research Councils provide genuine oversight, not merely a rubber stamp.

---

**To summarise**, I believe the draft report offers researchers attractive career opportunities (DARPA programme managers come to mind) while addressing the oft-heard complaint of prescriptiveness. Concerns about conflicts of interest should be addressed, but this is an argument for taking the design very seriously, not against the model.

---

## 2. Research organisations

Research organisations would need to adapt to remain successful.

These organisations support and employ individual researchers. I treat them separately from researchers because institutional needs differ from personal interests. I do not differentiate between public and private organisations, however, as I believe the effects on each will be similar.

I will address four key areas affecting them: the need to revise their approaches to long-term planning and support for individual researchers, and new ways of interacting with expert teams and their own staff.

---

### 2.1 Long-term planning

First, research organisations will need to reconsider how they plan ahead.

Research organisations require operational predictability. They rely on the EU to consistently fund collaborative research, and on multi-year work programmes to arrange collaborations in advance.

Formally, this will not change under the draft report. The time between publication of a call and the submission deadline is a separate decision from the governance model, and the draft report makes no mention of it.

But the operational question is different: when do research organisations first see the call text? Under the current programme, it is a public secret that draft work programmes circulate before adoption. Science Business has made it something of a principle to publish them.

Research institutions use these drafts to plan ahead, form consortia, identify partners, and, sometimes, shape their research portfolios. For many, this has become an operational reality that EU funding strategies are built around.

Under the draft report, the programming phase is structurally different. Work programmes set thematic priorities for three years and are publicly available. In spirit, they could be quite similar to the current strategic plans, allowing a similar kind of institutional forecasting.

But the call texts emerge later.

Consequently, institutions that currently rely on early access to draft texts—through contacts in the Commission, programme committees, or executive agencies—will face a more level playing field.

---

## **2.2 Proposal preparation**

The good news, however, is that calls will be more scientifically or technologically relevant and less politically mediated. For organisations whose research genuinely sits at the frontier of a pillar 2 priority area, this is an improvement.

Under the current programme, a significant part of research support involves translating call texts: converting EU policy jargon into language that researchers can understand and respond to, and helping researchers understand what the Commission is really looking for.

Under the new system, this translation function diminishes. If expert teams draft calls based on their reading of where the field is going, calls should be closer to the frontier and less burdened by the need to reference every relevant policy document.

A different kind of research support grows in importance: monitoring the three-year thematic priorities and identifying where the organisation's research strengths fit. To some extent, that also means institutional confidence that one's research strengths can respond to any call, no matter how it's phrased.

For organisations that have built their strategy around navigating the political layer of call texts, however, the calculus changes.

---

### **2.3 A new engagement strategy**

Third, the suggested governance model introduces a new area of institutional strategy: engagement.

In the draft report, expert teams are explicitly tasked with engaging broadly with academia, industry, civil society, and the investment community. They are supposed to gather intelligence on where the field is going, what the real needs and opportunities are, and which directions would generate the most scientific and economic value. Savvy research organisations will recognise this as an invitation, not just a procedural note.

Organisations that position themselves as credible sources for intelligence gathering—whether through sectoral platforms or direct engagement—will be better equipped than those that wait for the call text to be published. This is not a conflict of interest; it is exactly what the system is designed to do.

---

### **2.4 Personnel policy**

Finally, research organisations will have to be strategic about personnel.

Expert team members are appointed full-time. For an employer, that means a member of their staff—often a senior one, since the selection criteria emphasise scientific expertise, innovation track record, commercial experience, and management skills—would leave their day-to-day role for up to five years.

The smart response is to treat this as a sabbatical: keep the position open, maintain the researcher's affiliation, and welcome them back with a structured reintegration plan.

A returning expert is an extraordinary asset. They know the programme from the inside, have built a European network, and have developed a strategic overview of their field that is almost impossible to acquire in any other way. Organisations that systematically accumulate that knowledge by sending strong researchers into expert roles will be better placed than those that do not.

The risk, of course, is that they do not return. That Brussels or the intellectual stimulation redirects their career elsewhere.

Research organisations that handle this proactively, by framing the expert role as a career development opportunity, are likely to find themselves better positioned in the new landscape than those that treat an expert appointment primarily as a staffing problem.

---

**To summarise**, I believe the draft report compels research organisations to reconsider their approach to research support. The locus of long-term planning and proposal preparation will shift. Meanwhile, an institutional approach to engaging with sitting experts and potential candidates among their top researchers is called for.

---

### **3. Member states**

National administrations would play a key role in the new system, which, in many ways, suits them well.

This section covers member state representatives, focusing on their roles in programming and at national contact points (and noting that these roles sometimes overlap).

I will address four topics affecting their influence: the changing balance of power, required domestic homework, alignment with national priorities, and the changing role of NCPs.

Member states pay for the EU budget, and that reality should never be forgotten. Who decides on public funds is the main concern of pillar 2, and member states have a strong, constitutionally grounded interest in that question.

---

#### **3.1 Power and governance**

First, the draft report changes the balance of power.

The point of comparison, however, should be the Commission's FP10 proposal, not the current programme.

Under the Commission's proposal, collaborative research calls in pillar 2 would be incorporated into ECF work programmes and adopted under ECF comitology. That means research ministers and their experts would be involved, but within a governance framework dominated by DG GROW rather than DG RTD, with direct consequences for who sits at the table.

The draft report restores separate Horizon Europe decision-making for pillar 2, while maintaining the tight connection to the ECF on substance. For research ministers

who have consistently insisted on retaining their role in shaping the programme, that alone is a significantly better outcome.

But there is more. The draft report proposes adopting work programmes as delegated acts rather than as implementing acts, as is the current format. This is one of the more contested legal questions in the draft report. When Marc Lemaître, head of DG RTD, appeared before Parliament's research committee in March, he was explicit that the Commission considers this approach legally problematic (and politically, too).

But here is the thing: if the delegated act format survives, member states end up with something that is formally stronger than today's examination procedure in FP9, and much stronger than the proposed advisory procedure under ECF.

Under the examination procedure, member states vote on a work programme, but the Commission can override them in certain circumstances. Under the advisory procedure, member states give non-binding advice. Under a delegated act, member states are consulted on the substance first, and Parliament and Council each have a window to block the outcome afterwards.

In practice, this power is almost never used. The political cost of invoking it is high, and the procedure is designed as a backstop rather than a working tool.

But its existence shapes behaviour earlier in the process, providing an additional incentive to produce work programmes that member states can accept. For member states, this is a meaningful shift in the balance of power, provided the legal question resolves in Parliament's favour.

That said, the day-to-day reality changes. In the current programme, national representatives engage with work programme drafts in considerable detail, line-editing call texts. Under the Commission proposal, this is reduced to advising on priorities and call texts. The draft report gives member states a greater say in priorities, but their role in the design of call texts is confined to final approval, with the grounds for intervention deliberately narrow.

---

### **3.2 Coordination at home**

Second, the draft report compels member states to review their domestic workflows (as would the Commission model, for that matter).

During the programming phase, there are three formal moments of influence, whereas now there is only the programme committee. These are the steering mechanism that guides work programme priorities, the actual adoption of the work

programme in national expert groups, and the approval of call texts in programme committees.

Whether this creates opportunity or chaos depends entirely on the coherent handling of those three moments. Savvy national administrations should make sure their representatives on expert groups and programme committees work closely together. Preferably, the same individuals serve on both.

A further challenge arises from the parallel ECF and Horizon Europe programme committees, which the draft report requires to meet jointly on relevant topics. For a national administration, this means that the people responsible for ECF and Horizon Europe need to be talking to each other regularly—not just at Brussels meetings, but also in the preparation of national positions. (Again, the same would apply under the Commission proposal linking FP10 to ECF.)

This is not a hypothetical challenge. It is already evident in the current negotiations on FP10 and the ECF in the Council, where countries with integrated research and innovation ministries—or strong coordination mechanisms—are navigating the discussions more coherently than those with siloed portfolios. The same dynamic is seen in FP9 programme committees, where the quality of internal coordination has always varied considerably.

In sum, countries that treat science, technology, and innovation as multiple parts of a single strategic question will be more effective.

---

### **3.3 National priorities and expert teams**

Third, a persistent concern is that expert-led governance will produce calls that are disconnected from national priorities or will not reflect the full diversity of the Union.

This concern is understandable but probably overstated, and it points toward a more important strategic question.

First, thematic priorities are set in work programmes, and that is precisely where national input is most impactful. Experts operationalise a priority through call texts only after it has been politically endorsed. If a member state seeks funding for a particular research direction, it should be addressed in the work programme, not in an individual call text.

The underlying argument is that public authorities set priorities and have full control over funding allocation, including by approving call texts, while also empowering experts to deliver a better Programme by being more novel and ambitious. That is broadly good for the system's legitimacy.

Second, a more direct form of influence is expert selection. Expert teams are chosen via an open call for expressions of interest. Research Councils, appointed by the Commission, must reflect national diversity. This provides a new lever for national administrations to pull.

A country whose researchers are well represented has influence over the substance of calls, not through the political approval process, but through the intellectual process of drafting them. That is a qualitatively different and arguably more powerful form of influence.

Lastly—and this is uncomfortable but worth saying directly—if something is a genuine national priority and a country has genuine research leadership in that area, the most effective strategy may just be to ensure their researchers are informed about the opportunities. Merit-based selection will do the rest.

---

### **3.4 A changed role for NCPs**

Finally, national contact points would transition from a translation role to an intelligence focus, similar to institutional research support offices.

NCPs are the people who, in practice, help researchers understand and respond to calls. Their current role involves a substantial interpretive function, explaining what a call is really asking for, and is heavily weighted toward the project phase.

Under the new model, the translation function diminishes, as call texts become more self-explanatory. Replacing it are upstream intelligence work and the ability to mobilise researchers quickly once a call appears.

On the intelligence side, the most valuable NCP service in the new system will be to help researchers understand the thematic priorities, track the direction of expert teams, and position their work relative to anticipated calls.

On the mobilisation side, the short window between call publication and approval creates a premium on speed. NCPs that proactively facilitate consortium-building based on anticipated calls, rather than reacting after publication, provide a qualitatively different service.

Both intelligence and mobilisation require a deliberate shift in how NCP services are designed and resourced. National administrations that recognise this early will provide a genuine competitive advantage to their research communities. Those that continue operating as they do today will find themselves less useful than they expect, and their researchers less competitive than they could be. (And again, the same would apply under the Commission proposal linking FP10 to ECF.)

**To summarise**, I believe the draft report gives national administrations greater influence than the Commission's proposal, but the extent of that influence depends on how well member states can coordinate internally, position top researchers, and redesign their national contact points.

---

## **4. Commission**

The Commission will assume a new role in pillar 2, but I believe not in a bad way.

Certainly, the Commission has been unusually forthright in its pushback. Marc Lemaître, head of DG RTD, told the Parliament's research committee that the Research Councils would add “more complexity, heaviness and costly coordination, while undermining Commission implementation prerogatives and financial accountability.” Maive Rute, deputy director-general for industrial policy, said the Parliament was “misreading” what the Commission proposed.

These are not the words of an institution that thinks the Parliament is simply elaborating on its own ideas, [as I wrote in part 1](#).

Still, I want to argue that this is ultimately the natural next step in DG RTD's development, and that, over time, this will strengthen the Commission's position within the broader European R&I landscape rather than diminish it.

This final section covers three topics: how the Commission's role and the duties of its officials will change, and why this will benefit their position.

---

### **4.1 Full control, but a different kind**

First, the Commission will give up some prerogatives while gaining others.

On the face of it, the Commission has less say: it does not draft call texts and can only reject calls on the grounds of scope, illegality, or overlap.

But look at what the Commission retains.

It sets thematic priorities in the work programme. It appoints the Research Councils and the expert teams. It places one official in each expert team. It has final approval over call texts. And when it does reject a call text, the text goes to the programme committee under the examination procedure, meaning the Commission can, if it chooses, use a rare rejection to signal a direction to member states.

More important is what the Commission gains in exchange for losing the day-to-day drafting function. Calls that are genuinely better are more likely to produce the scientific and technological impact that justifies the programme's long-term budget.

The Commission has a strong institutional interest in the programme's success. A pillar 2 that consistently funds cutting-edge collaborative research and produces visible results in areas that matter for European competitiveness is a much stronger political asset than one that produces workmanlike output on politically managed topics.

The Commission does not lose influence over the programme by making the programme better; it gains it.

---

#### **4.2 A different job**

Second, the job of programme officers will change, but by no means diminish.

Currently, as one official described it to me, programme officers perform a triple task. They need to stay current in their field; many have doctoral backgrounds. They need to turn that knowledge into a call text that is not immediately rejected. And they need to defend the text through the committee process without losing what makes it scientifically or technologically valuable.

Under the draft report, that role changes.

Programme officers become, in effect, managers of expert teams. They ensure the team stays within scope and within the law, take part in broad consultations, and bring the call text to approval alongside the lead expert.

This job is by no means trivial. And for many officials with scientific backgrounds who feel that the political grind has taken them further and further from what they know and care about, it may also be more satisfying.

---

#### **4.3 Fifty years of becoming a policy DG**

Finally, the draft report represents a logical continuation of DG RTD's development, rather than a rupture.

To understand why, it helps to look at how DG RTD, then DG XII, started in 1974, and where it's headed.

Over the past five decades, DG RTD has been moving, not always comfortably, in a specific direction: from fund manager to policymaker.

When the framework programmes begin in 1984, DG XII is essentially a fund manager. Its internal structure mirrors the thematic organisation of the FP itself: directorates correspond to scientific domains, and the DG oversees calls, evaluates proposals, and manages grants.

A first structural shift comes with FP5 in the late 1990s, when research moves from discipline-based to problem-oriented policy challenges. FP5 also formalises selection through peer review, delegating evaluation to external experts.

The European Research Area, created in 2000, adds a new layer. DG RTD now requires departments focused on shaping research conditions, not just managing grants. A policy DG emerges alongside the fund manager.

The next decisive moment is the creation of the executive agencies in 2007, which transfers grant management tasks away from the Commission's main body. The ERC and EIC establish autonomous governance structures for the parts of the programme where independence is most valued.

Meanwhile, the Innovation Union in 2010 and the appointment of a Commissioner for Startups, as well as Research and Innovation, in 2024, further push DG RTD to take the lead on the EU's overarching innovation strategy.

By the time FP10 is being designed, DG RTD is already operating as a policy DG that retains, somewhat uncomfortably, a direct hand in content through the work programme process.

#### **4.4 A logical conclusion**

The expert-led governance of pillar 2 extends this trajectory to the last major area where the Commission has retained direct control over scientific and technological content.

It delegates drafting call texts, as grant management and proposal evaluation were previously, while preserving the Commission's final say over priorities and call texts.

DG RTD becomes, unambiguously, a policy DG, retaining the functions that are genuinely political: setting strategic direction across the European research landscape, coordinating across services, engaging with member states and Parliament on the programme's long-term trajectory, and holding experts accountable across all three pillars.

This is, in the end, a more prestigious institutional position than the current one.

It is also how a department, tasked with closing the global innovation gap and kindling the innovation-to-investment journey, can ensure that research and innovation, science and technology, are finally put at the heart of our European economic and social model.

---

**To summarise**, I believe the draft report is the natural next step in DG RTD's evolution from a fund manager to a policy department, following the earlier delegation of proposal evaluation and grant management. This role overlooks the funding landscape, which is more akin to that of national ministries, and focuses on what the Commission is uniquely positioned to do.

---

## Conclusion

The most common critical question about the draft report is the one I have been implicitly addressing throughout: do research councils, expert teams, and a new approval process make the programme slower rather than faster? More governed, rather than better governed?

There is a legitimate concern here, and it deserves a direct answer rather than a dismissal.

Clearly, we are far away from creating a full-fledged body like the ERC or EIC, let alone national research funders. The draft report presents a model that, in essence, makes expert advice hard to ignore while leaving final decisions to political authorities. A new autonomous Union body it is not.

The question is which alternatives are on the table.

Member states in the Council are reportedly considering reintroducing the examination procedure for FP10, ECF, or both, which would involve line-editing all work programmes. While this increases their control, it isn't fast, nor does it address the consensus-seeking nature of programme committees.

The administrative burden on member states and the Commission would also be significant, with the combined budget under the Commission proposal roughly three times that of predecessor programmes.

To give an example, the Research Executive Agency currently employs around 1,000 people. As one official told me, REA cannot simply double its staff, calls, and evaluators in proportion to a doubled budget. Something must give.

What about the Commission proposal? Ten months after FP10 and ECF were presented, clarity remains elusive. In apparent acknowledgement of simmering

discontent, Lemaître, the director-general, assured Parliament that he would publish a detailed fiche on governance and the innovation-to-investment journey to feed reflection.

Importantly, the FP10-ECF interface should focus on joint priority setting, without trying to control the content of research calls. Given the unpredictable nature of research and innovation, researchers should conduct their work through Horizon Europe, with the ECF scaling up promising results, rather than the reverse.

In that light, my answer to the Commission official who spoke about their job prospects in FP10 was not to worry. It would be a different job, in any case, and, in the best version of this reform, a better one.

That, in itself, is the best case for substantially boosting investment in European research and innovation.

---

**“Europe has made its choice. We are choosing to start a new age of invention and ingenuity. We are choosing to put research and innovation, science and technology, at the heart of our economy. [...] We are choosing to be the continent where innovation serves humanity, where global talent is welcomed. [...] So, to every researcher, at home or abroad, to every young girl and boy who dreams of a life in science, our message is clear: Choose Science. Choose Europe.”**

► Von der Leyen at the [‘Choose Europe for Science’ event at La Sorbonne](#).

---

## Post-script

This article is the second in a two-part effort to systematically think through the implications for four groups of actors: researchers, research organisations, member states, and the Commission. The first part offered a [detailed examination of the suggested governance for pillar 2](#), discussing how a targeted, agile program could justify a 220 billion euro budget, in line with Mario Draghi's ardent warnings about Europe's decline.

Joep Roet works as Deputy Director at Neth-ER. Neth-ER is an association that brings together most publicly funded education & research organisations in the Netherlands and represents them in Brussels.

Both articles present a personal analysis, not an organisational position.