

Neth-ER response to the ITRE draft report on the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)

Neth-ER welcomes the draft report by rapporteurs Christian Ehler (EPP) & Dan Nica (S&D) as a constructive step towards a more credible and predictable ECF. Five key elements, and proposed amendments, that deserve particular attention:

- **A concrete proposal for the ECF-Horizon Europe relationship**
- **Increased predictability**
- **R&I representation in ECF governance**
- **Defence R&I contained to ECF**
- **Support for research and technology infrastructures**

A concrete proposal for the ECF–Horizon Europe relationship. The report takes a welcome step by offering a clearer articulation of how the two programmes relate to one another. The report replaces the Commission’s broad “collaborative research and innovation actions” in the ECF with more narrowly defined Horizon Europe Pathway Actions. This is an interesting option: the Framework Programme funds research and innovation, the ECF supports deployment and scaling of its results. The proposed approach attempts to reduce the risk that the ECF’s policy window structure fully steers the research agenda of Pillar II. At the same time, it recognises the importance of a clear pathway from research and innovation to industry.

Increased predictability. The report strengthens budgetary predictability across the ECF in several ways, from introducing ceilings on internal reallocations, to clearly differentiating budget lines within policy windows, to anchoring the principle of funding stability directly in the legal text. Taken together, these provisions signal that the ECF should offer a credible long-term investment rather than serve as a reserve for ad hoc reprogramming. This aligns with the call for protected, predictable R&I funding that allows researchers and institutions to plan with confidence.

R&I representation in ECF governance. The draft report gives a more prominent place to the research and innovation sector in the governance of the ECF, with explicit recognition of research and technology organisations as stakeholders. This is a positive development that creates institutional channels for the knowledge community to contribute to the design and implementation of the fund. Neth-ER stresses the importance of maintaining this direction in the final text.

Defence R&I. The report proposes to fund defence research exclusively through a dedicated DARPA-style instrument within the ECF’s policy window on security, critical raw materials, defence and space through a ringfenced budget. By housing defence R&I within the ECF, the primarily civil character of FP10 is preserved – a direction already set by the earlier removal of the term ‘defence’ from the windows in Pillar II in the draft report on FP10.

Support for research and technology infrastructures. Neth-ER welcomes the recognition of the importance of research and technology infrastructures for European competitiveness in amendment 4. Investment in infrastructures is a key enabler of innovation.