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Statement of the Max Planck Society on the European Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe

1. EU Must Remain on Track Regarding Investments in R&D

In order to maintain a competitive European knowledge-based economy, it is essential to strengthen investment growth and meet the need for highly qualified scientists. The Lisbon target of investing 3% of GDP in R&D across Europe is far from a reality. Major efforts are needed to ensure that the European Union remains on course. It is more important now than ever before to maintain and improve the attractiveness of the European Research Area (ERA) as a site for world-class research. In this context, the EUR 100 billion for Horizon Europe suggested by the European Commission come as a welcome reaction, while the suggestion by the European Parliament to agree further significant budget increases with the EU Council is also supported.

2. The European Research Area: Knowledge is Europe's resource

Europe has a rich, functionally diverse research sphere while facing tough scientific and technological competition globally. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, EU research programmes are therefore aimed at supporting high-quality research and technological development. This involves the commitment to create a European Research Area in which mobility, freedom of movement and the open exchange of knowledge can be guaranteed. Knowledge is Europe's resource. Research and innovation secure jobs and wealth which is why promotion of research at a national and European level must be characterized by a consistent focus on excellence.

3. ERC: Promoting excellence as a global benchmark

The European Research Council (ERC) is the vehicle of the European promotion of excellence as a global benchmark. Since it was founded 11 years ago, it has become an international reference point and the key driver for research excellence in Europe. Therefore, the ERC must be consolidated in Horizon Europe in its current form and expanded financially over and above the level suggested by the Commission in order to keep the urgently needed excellent researchers in Europe and attract researchers from third countries to the EU. It is unacceptable for Europe to lose its globally coveted key players because ERC projects which have been evaluated positively cannot be financed. The MPG thus supports the statement by the Scientific Council published in May 2017 to double the ERC's budget. The MPG recognizes the decision by the European Commission to confirm the ERC as the single largest financial item in Horizon Europe, while simultaneously guaranteeing the independence of the ERC via the Scientific Council analog to Horizon 2020. In this context, the MPG explicitly welcomes the prudent and balanced anchoring of ERC autonomy in law to meet the special concerns of this EU lighthouse project. Levelling down at any price would have been the end of the ERC as a success story.



4. Marie-Curie activities and infrastructures: Expand success story appropriately

The mobility, education and training of researchers in the EU via Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Activities (MSCA) as well as access to top-level research infrastructures are building blocks of scientific excellence.

The Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Programme is a successful model to strengthen the mobility, education and training of junior scientists. It should therefore be financed in line with its importance under Horizon Europe. Marie Curie networks and scholarships in particular are of central significance to promote and grow junior scientists in Europe ("capacity building"). Highly educated academics are also important for a knowledge-based economy, which must recruit experts with a European and global approach e.g. from this pool of resources in order to acquire the latest knowledge and technologies.

Where researchers have access to research infrastructures and cross-border collaboration, new knowledge and new technologies can be created and should also be promoted further with a higher budget in FP9. Infrastructure networks are indispensable for the performance of the European Research Area overall and to bridge the differences in performance to ensure access across national boundaries. The MPG takes the view that the programme should continue by focusing on access and on improving research infrastructures scientifically and technologically. The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) has been set up and should be further developed together with the stakeholders.

5. Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness: Having the courage to simplify

The MPG acknowledges the considerations of the Commission concerning Pillar 2 "Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness" with interest. It is brave, purposeful and right to plan to further simplify funding instruments. The MPG prioritizes funding instruments, especially grants, which finance small to medium-sized projects and cooperations from basic research through to application. The MPG cannot currently identify which strategy will be prioritized during implementation. The MPG is hoping for a flexible design in order to ensure that applicants can enjoy globally competitive framework conditions when applying for, selecting and managing projects. This should be bottom-up at the level of the applicants and offer challenges for knowledge-driven research in teams of a manageable size. The MPG takes the view that the focus should be on transnational cooperation projects, meaning collaborative research.

Research policy postulates a public acceptance deficit due to the fact that the positive effects of a promotion of research can often only be felt in the long term. The opportunities of improved participation on drawing up research objectives - especially missions - are used to counteract this deficit. However, experience shows that science reaches the highest quality only if it can develop freely and without disruptions. Predictions are almost impossible and promises can even be harmful. Therefore, citizen involvement must be organized using suitable formats, which do not restrict the freedom of research as a guarantee for excellence and scientific breakthroughs. The MPG supports



an implementation with the involvement of science during selection and later on in decision-making of the partnership instruments in Horizon Europe.

The MPG explicitly welcomes the thematic anchoring of research in the Humanities in the cluster Inclusive & Secure Society. The MPG emphasizes the importance of sufficient financing for all funding blocks because the required bases for a sustainable, wealthy and free future of Europe relies on functioning democracies, administration applying the rule of law, as well as social and cultural coherence.

6. The European Innovation Council (EIC)

The MPG acknowledges the suggestion by the Commission to set up a European Innovation Council in Pillar 3 of Horizon Europe. The MPG welcomes the suggestion by the European Commission to the extent that a European Innovation Council can act as an umbrella association for a consolidated portfolio for European innovation funding instruments and contribute to an improved innovation and entrepreneurial culture in Europe. Innovation culture must be optimized both at a trans-European level and at a national level. The principle of subsidiarity must be observed, however without losing sight of complementarities and synergies at transnational or European level. When setting up innovation agencies, successful international structures – such as DARPA – should be used as a model. MPG is of the opinion that an EIC promotes primarily research-driven, collaborative innovation projects, but not individual companies.

7. EURATOM and ITER:

The MPG supports European funding of fusion research. Fusion research has the potential to create an entirely new energy source without CO₂. Excellent knowledge-driven research in the field of plasma physics as well as research to prepare ITER operations are essential to enable adequate use of the ITER experiment under construction. In MPG's view, European cooperation in fusion research can serve as a model: The research required to develop a fusion power station is organized in the EUROfusion consortium, coordinated and driven forward across the whole of Europe.

8. Strengthening European Regions Less Advanced on Research

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe/Southern Europe continue to achieve lower scientific performance and excellence than Western and Northern Europe. The MPG therefore agrees with the need as suggested by the European Commission to increase the funds of the programme Sharing Excellence and Reforming and Enhancing the European Research Area. In addition to Teaming & Twinning instruments, ERA Chairs are especially suited to broadening the knowledge base in European regions. In addition, the MPG suggests using funding models which have been tried and tested by European research organizations in order to drive research development in regions less advanced on research with tangible success. The MPG takes the view that a programme focused on European competition like Horizon Europe should not employ funds to balance out inequalities in the research areas. The MPG therefore considers the possibility of financing research via structural funds to be positive if the evaluation was performed via Horizon Europe (Seal of Excellence).