Position on the proposed EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), 2028 – 2034

MAX PLANCK SOCIETY

The Max Planck Society (MPG) welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a stand-alone Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. In an era of geopolitical tension, technological acceleration, and global competition for talent, Europe's strength depends on scientific freedom and scientific excellence. Excellence must remain Europe's most valuable strategic asset. By maintaining the independence of science from short-term agendas, we invest in the sustainable generation of knowledge and innovation that benefits all sectors of society. Europe's strategic autonomy requires open science that cultivates the continent's intellectual sovereignty and thus its democratic governance.

FP10 should reaffirm that basic, curiosity-driven research is one of the key foundations of Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and political sovereignty, as are the researchers themselves who dedicate their lives to this pursuit. This requires significant investment in the Framework Programme as outlined in the Draghi report.

1. Excellence and Scientific Freedom as Europe's Strategic Advantage

For centuries, Europe's unique strength has been its capacity to generate outstanding scientists and new knowledge about the natural and human worlds. Many of these insights have also given rise to new technologies with the potential to transform our societies.

FP10 therefore should enshrine scientific excellence as the overriding selection criterion across all of its funding pillars. To unlock Europe's capacity for breakthrough science, calls must remain open, flexible, and supportive of projects beyond predefined strategic areas and at all levels of technological maturity. Upholding scientific freedom in this way not only serves to attract leading talent but also safeguards our democratic values.

The European Research Council remains the cornerstone of research freedom and excellence for its top researchers. The MPG strongly supports establishing the ERC as a permanent, legally independent entity within the Framework Programme and highly recommends doubling its budget. Continuity and reliable independent structures are essential for basic science to thrive. The Commission proposal to introduce shorter time limits for the ERC presidency would undermine its strategic development capacity and should therefore be reconsidered.

2. A strong and sustainable European Postdoctoral Ecosystem

Europe's future depends on its ability to attract, train, and retain outstanding young scientists. The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) are central to this goal. In the past, many of Europe's most successful researchers gained formative experience outside the EU. Today, with the decline in postdoctoral positions and increasing barriers in global mobility for researchers, Europe must take responsibility for cultivating and maintaining this generation of talent itself, attracting the brightest minds worldwide and fostering brain circulation wherever possible.

The "Choose Europe" initiative should be embedded in FP10 on a broader basis to provide stability and clearly structured career progression: An initial three-year research-phase followed by a two-year mobility or cross-sector module would allow early-career researchers to consolidate independence, broaden their expertise, and build durable European networks with attractive employment opportunities to stay in Europe for their careers. In FP10, MSCA funding must be increased and remain fully open across all disciplines, with selection based solely on excellence.

FP10 and the "Choose Europe" initiative should evolve into a genuine EU-wide talent strategy that lowers structural and bureaucratic barriers, including visa restrictions, to ensure the free circulation and retention of researchers.

3. International Openness and Cohesion within the European Research Area

Excellence in science is inherently global. FP10 must strengthen Europe's role as both a trusted partner and an attractive destination. Swift association of the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Israel should be a top priority.

FP10 should promote cohesive excellence to enhance research capabilities across Member States without diluting scientific standards. Building on a person-centered approach, the Dioscuri programme has demonstrated how excellence and widening can go together in attracting talent and sustainably strengthening local ecosystems.

Simplified participation rules should prioritise collaboration, put the applicants themselves first, and be tailored to the purpose of each funding instrument. Extended eligibility for dual-use proposals should not come at the expense of openness and accessibility through over-restrictive security provisions.

Conclusion

To achieve its ambition, FP10 must reaffirm a simple principle: Scientific excellence and freedom, pursued in all disciplines by exceptionally talented and committed people, make innovation possible, and ensure Europe's continued prosperity and security. By doubling investment in basic, curiosity-driven research, securing ERC autonomy, and transforming the MSCA into a five-year career pathway, the EU makes the European Research Area (ERA) not only an attractive destination for talent, but also a trusted collaboration partner in the world. This will enable the EU to safeguard the epistemic values that underlie its prosperity, resilience, and democracy.