

view from the top manfred horvat

Horizon 2020 needs a plan for international cooperation

There are several differences between how cooperation with non-EU regions is handled in Horizon 2020 and how it was in previous Framework programmes. Cooperation has been 'mainstreamed' in all aspects of the programme, rather than being a separate strand, and emerging economies must provide national co-funding to receive European Commission funds.

This strategy, along with multilateral initiatives by member states, is a response to the opportunities and competition presented by a growing number of global research powers. But the decline in international participation during Horizon 2020's first year shows that we cannot simply devolve international initiatives to the programme's various strands and expect them to take care of themselves.

That is why the Commission's Horizon 2020 Advisory Group on International Cooperation, comprising 14 members from 11 countries, has called for a master plan to make international cooperation a cross-cutting dimension of Horizon 2020's 2016-17 work programme, which is in development.

Within the master plan, each of the programme's schemes must have its own individual plan for cooperation. The master plan must also include mandates to facilitate and monitor the strategy's implementation, and provide strategic intelligence and foresight.

This does not mean starting from scratch. Some instruments from Framework 7, such as collaborative projects and targeted calls, should be continued. Coordinated and joint calls, as well as programme-level coordination, will be important in implementing flagship initiatives.

Coordination with other initiatives could also improve. Actions funded by Cost, the European inter-governmental framework for cooperation on science and technology, could be gateways for international researchers and launching platforms for consortia. The

advisory group recommended that Cost consider aligning its participation rules with those of Horizon 2020.

Europe needs people with experience and understanding of emerging economies. The best way to build strong personal and institutional relationships with these nations is through immersion in their research and innovation systems. The staff exchanges funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions can give early-career researchers such experience.

Europe also needs to attract excel-

lent researchers from around the world, in the face of growing competition for talent. The European Research Council has an important part to play in this: the advisory group recommends that the ERC should encourage Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellows coming to the EU to apply for its Starting Grants to prolong their stay.

Innovation-oriented research needs specific provisions separate from basic research. There should be strategies for the internationalisation of public-public and public-private partnerships for 2016-17 and beyond. Joint Technology Initiatives have proved to be powerful instruments for research and innovation in Europe.

Similarly, the Knowledge and Innovation Communities run by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology should strengthen their outreach and links, include international experience in their entrepreneurship initiatives and help start-ups to access markets in non-EU countries.

Horizon 2020 could also develop a joint scheme with the Eureka intergovernmental network for industrial R&D, which has the potential to get small and medium-sized businesses more involved in international cooperation. A joint scheme could build on the successful Eurostars programme.

Europe's strategy for international cooperation will not be devised or implemented unilaterally, of course: roadmaps and flagship initiatives will be prepared and funded jointly with non-EU countries. Topics related to flagship initiatives should be highlighted in calls, as should information about funding sources.

The new funding rules also make it important to convince authorities in partner countries to co-fund collaborations. Mexico is a positive example: in October its national funding council, Conacyt, earmarked a budget for participation in Horizon 2020.

Ultimately, people will only make good use of these structures and schemes if they know how to engage with them. That is why the advisory group's final recommendation is to reinstate the national contact points for international cooperation that were lost when international cooperation ceased to be a separate strand. These provide a vital first source of information and help for researchers aiming to forge international links.

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'We cannot expect the programme's international initiatives to take care of themselves.'