An interview with Mrs Iliana IVANOVA

European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

What is your assessment of the Horizon Europe programme?

Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, has made remarkable progress. We've received an impressive 58,000+ proposals in our calls, and we see a significant increase in both quality and success rates compared to its predecessor, Horizon 2020. There's a growing participation from widening countries, which is heartening. Also, over a third of the beneficiaries in Horizon Europe are newcomers, primarily from the public and private sectors. Detailed performance figures will be presented in the forthcoming 2023 annual report. Furthermore, the interim evaluation slated for early 2025 will be a pivotal moment. It will allow us to comprehensively assess the programme's first three years. However a clear conclusion is already emerging: we need a strong budget in order to fund even more of the high-quality proposals that we receive.



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Could you give us a few examples of disruptive research and innovation projects funded by the European Innovation Council?

The European Research Council is our launchpad for revolutionary technologies and

innovation, as evidenced in the recently published EIC Tech Report[1]. This report, with a focus on early-stage projects funded after thorough independent expert review, offers insights into several cutting-edge areas:

- Green hydrogen production: portfolios of projects using electricity, solar energy and/or biomass as input sources;
- Quantum Computing: a range of approaches addressing stability and scalability of qubits, the smallest data storage units in quantum systems;
- Cancer Treatment and Biomarkers: efforts to clinically validate new biomarkers with potential to revolutionize cancer treatment.

I encourage readers to delve into this report to find out more about these exciting technologies funded under Horizon Europe.

What measures have you taken to harmonise research activities with the European Union's economic priorities?

The interplay between research and innovation (R&I) and economic priorities is absolutely vital, especially in today's world, characterized by disruptions and geopolitical tensions. R&I plays a critical role not only in driving economic recovery but also in accelerating the essential green transitions and enhancing the EU's technological sovereignty. The EU has made notable progress in further aligning research policies with its economic goals. Key achievements include:

1. Launching 49 European Partnerships with the private and public sector.
2. Making substantial advancements in the EU Missions, addressing major societal challenges.
3. Strengthening the EU's position as a leader in market-creating innovations through the European Innovation Council.
4. Harnessing R&I's potential for the sustainability transition through synergies with other programmes.
5. Improving the EU's business environment and innovation capacity through the New European Innovation Agenda.
6. Connecting various actors, systems and regions within the European Research Area.
7. Increasing the uptake of research and innovation investments and reforms within National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

Furthermore, the longstanding cooperation between the European Commission and organizations such as the OECD, the European Investment Bank and the World Bank on R&I aspects is instrumental in shaping a resilient and forward-thinking EU economy.

How is the European Commission supporting the creative industries as a driver of innovation?

The European Union offers a variety of funding instruments specifically tailored to support the cultural and creative sectors:

1. Horizon Europe's "Culture, creativity and inclusive society" Cluster features calls focusing on cultural heritage and the cultural and creative industries. Several calls are currently open.
2. EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) for Culture & Creativity under Horizon Europe, set to launch in January 2024, will offer new funding opportunities for the cultural and creative arenas.
3. Creative Europe's "Culture Moves Europe" Mobility Scheme is a boon for artists and cultural professionals. Currently, two calls are open.
4. Creative Innovation Labs call for cross-sectoral projects, to be launched soon, aims to bring together various cultural and audio-visual sectors through innovation and new technologies.

For those interested in exploring these opportunities further, the CulturEU web tool provides detailed information about EU funding available for the cultural and creative sectors.

Could you tell us about the European University Initiative? Which Belgian universities are involved?

The European Universities initiative represents a significant stride in fostering transnational collaboration among higher education institutions. As of now, the initiative boasts 50 European Universities, which collectively include over 430 higher education institutions spread across Europe. They collaborate closely with nearly 1,700 associated partners ranging from NGOs and enterprises to local or regional authorities. Belgium plays a prominent role in this initiative, with 15 of its higher education institutions participating as full partners. Examples include the Catholic University of Leuven, which is a member of the Una Europa alliance, and Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), which is part of the CIVIS alliance.

How do you view the participation of Belgian players in European research programmes?

Belgium's commitment to research and innovation (R&I) is indeed noteworthy, as reflected in its recognition as a Leader Innovator in the European Innovation Scoreboard 2023[6]. Not only does the country rank second in Europe in terms of R&I expenditure per

inhabitant, but it also boasts an astounding 6,539 researchers per million inhabitants. Belgium ranks sixth both in terms of participation and budget (Net EU Contribution) share in the Horizon Europe programme. There are presently 486 grants in preparation, in addition to the 1,927 grants already signed. The success percentage of eligible Belgian applicants is 27.07% (EU-27 average of 22.71%), and Belgian participants have received EUR 1.8 billion so far.

Could you give us a few examples of projects financed by European funds and involving Belgian researchers?

The success of Belgium in Horizon Europe is illustrated by several remarkable projects, underscoring the country's innovation and research capabilities. Among the numerous successful ventures, a couple of standout examples are:

- Veoware[7], who conducted an in-orbit demonstration of their Control Moment Gyroscope technology earlier this year, which improves the manoeuvrability of satellites, allowing faster operating times and better connection.
- Sunrise[8], a revolutionising home sleep testing, to improve access to treatment for the 1 billion people worldwide who suffer from sleep apnoea.

These projects are just a glimpse into the breadth and depth of innovation that Horizon Europe funding is facilitating, particularly highlighting Belgium's role in pushing the boundaries of technology and healthcare.

How can players in the fields of research, innovation and training be given more support to keep pace with the transitions that are underway?

Horizon Europe provides a range of opportunities for R&I actors to adapt to the dynamic global environment. Participation in the programme, including its parts such as the European Research Council (ERC) and the European Innovation Council (EIC), offers not just financial support but also invaluable opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration. Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)[9] are another part of Horizon Europe. They work at the intersection of education, research and innovation, creating an ecosystem conducive to nurturing talent and facilitating transitions within the European Research Area (ERA)[10].

Beyond Horizon Europe, Erasmus+[11], the EU flagship programme in education, or NextGenerationEU[12], complement the EU's comprehensive approach to fostering a resilient, innovative, and interconnected R&I landscape. I encourage everyone to explore the opportunities our programmes present.

1. EIC Tech Report
2. Horizon Europe Cluster 2
3. Culture Moves Europe
4. CulturEU Funding Guide
5. European Universities Initiative
6. European Innovation Scoreboard
7. Veoware Project
8. Sunrise Project
9. Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
10. European Research Area
11. Erasmus+
12. NextGenerationEU