The Flemish Advisory Council for Innovation and Entrepreneurship – VARIO – is an independent body which advises the Flemish Government and Parliament on matters related to research, innovation and entrepreneurship. VARIO publishes its advisory reports both on its own initiative and on request. The Council consists of ten experts from the scientific world and the business community, who take part in a personal capacity. Lieven Danneels chairs the council.

Media Campaign on the VARIO memorandum 2024-2029 (Spring 2024)

At the end of 2023, ahead of the Flemish elections of June 2024, VARIO presented its priorities for the next Flemish Government in relation to science, innovation and entrepreneurship in the form of a memorandum. To keep the messages under attention, in the weeks prior to the elections, through the VARIO website, newsletter and social media, interviews were spread with four top innovators who reflected on how Flanders can strengthen its position as an innovation leader.

© VARIO - From left to right: Danielle Raspoet (director) and council members Dirk Van Dyck (vice-chair, UAntwerpen), Reinhilde Veugelers (KU Leuven) (until July 2024), Koen Vanhalst (De Clercq & Partners), Lieven Danneels (chair, Televic Group), Wim Haegeman (UGent), Katrin Geyskens (Capricorn Partners) and Vanessa Vankerckhoven (Novosanis). Not in the picture are council members Johan Martens (KU Leuven) and Marc Van Sande (Umicore) (until July 2024)

Towards an ambitious European industrial policy (Advisory report 34; Januari 2024)

VARIO received a request for advice from Flemish Minister of Economy and Innovation Jo Brouns regarding the concept note ‘Towards an ambitious European Industrial policy’ that sets out strategic guidelines for a forward-looking and proactive European industrial policy. VARIO largely agrees with this concept note, which is very much in line with previous VARIO recommendations. To reinforce it, VARIO added some messages that are relevant for discussions in the context of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of European Ministers and policy debates on future European industrial policy.

Transformative Innovation Policy: A governance framework for Flanders (Advisory report 35; April 2024)

Transformative Innovation Policy is a new generation of innovation policy that plays a crucial role in system change or system transitions that might help the world overcome the urgent and interconnected societal challenges requiring fundamental change. It addresses so-called transition failures. These occur when structural resistance – such as restrictive legislation, taxation or market power of established players – prevent a fundamental change of direction. Based on a country review in collaboration with VARIO's Dutch counterpart, AWTI, and a separate background report, VARIO developed a participatory governance framework for Transformative Innovation Policy for the Flemish Government, together with 8 recommendations.

The future of Flemish cluster policy – Green Paper (Advisory report 36; May 2024)

VARIO was also asked for advice by minister Brouns regarding the green paper 'The future of Flemish cluster policy'. According to VARIO, spearhead clusters have an obvious place and role in contemporary innovation policy in Flanders. As for the future, VARIO prefers a cluster policy with a continued focus on economic valorisation, but in addition also a role in tackling the societal challenges with a strong link to Transformative Innovation Policy. In answer to a specific question of the minister, VARIO suggested setting up an open call for new strategic themes with rigorous selection but avoiding ad hoc initiatives.

Towards higher productivity growth (Advisory report 37; November 2024)

Productivity growth has been declining in Flanders for two decades, more than in comparable economies. Higher productivity growth allows more financial resources to be generated, making new investments permanently possible, especially in innovation and infrastructure, to realize sustainable transitions. VARIO made an international overview of policy advice on productivity. VARIO wants to help shape Flanders' productivity agenda and therefore calls for a better study of Flanders' productivity performance, for a sharpening of R&D&I policy and for other policy domains to be involved in transverse innovation policy.

Opportunities and needs for the Flemish defence industry and -

innovation (Advisory report 38; November 2024)

“The geopolitical reality has changed drastically in the recent years. Partly because of that we saw an increase in the number of initiatives at federal, European and international level related to the security and defense industry and innovation. These developments are also important for Flanders, given the interfaces and overlap of all this with Flemish (economic) interests and strengths”, Flemish Minister for Innovation Brouns argued, asking VARIO for advice in April 2024. In the meantime, the new legislature has commenced. For the first time, the Flemish Coalition Agreement 2024-2029 includes defence as a strategic sector. VARIO believes that the commitment in the Flemish Coalition Agreement must now quickly lead to a clear, consistent, and stimulating policy framework for the defence industry and innovation. Several barriers need to be removed and certain elements facilitated.

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