

TRAMI Policy Brief No. 1

February 2023

First observations on the current state of mission implementation

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With the launch of the five EU missions in 2021, the European Commission and the EU member states have started a large-scale and real-world experiment with a new policy instrument, which is inspired by the large-scale technological missions of the 20th century, but re-interpreted and re-designed to address major challenges our societies are facing: beating cancer, adapting to climate change, restoring oceans and waters, establishing healthy soils, and building climate-neutral and smart cities.

In its first year of operation, the TRAMI project [[TRAMI \(trami5missions.eu\)](https://trami5missions.eu)] has implemented a range of activities on which the subsequent observations and tentative lessons for the implementation of the EU missions build: (i) a survey on mission implementation in member states, (ii) the mapping of mission-oriented policy Initiatives and actors in member states and accession countries, (iii) several ‘Mutual Learning Events’ on critical topics of mission governance, (iii) the first European Mission Forum EMiF from January 2023, (iv) the meetings of the European Mission Network EMiN, a community of practice established by the TRAMI project.

1. The **process and stage of implementation of the EU missions is still very uneven in the Member States**. While a few countries (and regions) have already established more elaborate governance structures, many are only in the early stages of doing so. A considerable number are still grappling with how to go about this task. However, these activities seem to have gained speed though, and activities in this vein are becoming broader and more elaborate. Apparently, the implementation of (transformative) missions needs long time horizons and cannot be expected to change policy approaches within the short-term.
2. The implementation of missions is **very dependent on the “trajectory” of the respective political system** (e.g. with respect to the weight of regional and central policy actors): National (and regional) framework conditions are important to address missions. It is essential to know and understand the specificities of the framework conditions and take them firmly into account in the design and implementation of mission governance.
3. Currently, the **implementation of the EU missions seems to be largely driven by (STI) policy makers and research actors**. One could say that the current stage of mission implementation can still be considered to be in the **“STI Trap”**. Missions continue to be dominated and driven by STI policies, with limited involvement of sectoral policies (and their decision making and stakeholder management processes and structures). More holistic (‘whole-of-governance’) approaches must be pursued; respecting existing policies (see also point 6). However, this may also be strongly influenced by the existing governance structures (as mentioned in the previous point).
4. There also seems to be a kind of **“Policy Trap”**: **Business community and societal actors are present, but in most countries these actors have only limited roles and weight in the process**. In the case of the business community, the business opportunities were not yet made sufficiently clear, and the involvement of societal actors is only partially taking off (e.g. in cities missions). The involvement of these actors should be given higher priority in the next stages

of mission implementation - when moving from strategy to implementation. Substantial amounts of finance are needed, with private finance ultimately having to contribute a larger share than public finance. Better and more targeted communication and promotion of missions is essential to attract new (private) investors putting a focus on potential business opportunities.

5. It is at the regional level, where ultimately many of the strategies and actions relevant to missions come together. There are several **promising examples of ambitious and proactive regional governments engaging in missions**. At the same time, regions often lack the necessary resources, capabilities and political competencies to determine mission implementation and make a smart use of the funds available. This includes harmonisation of mission strategies with smart specialisation strategies and their respective implementation.
6. We also observe an “alignment” issue: **the five EU missions did address policy areas which were not ‘blank slates’, but needed to be aligned with pre-existing strategies, initiatives, and even missions on the national and regional level**. Synchronizing targets, funding streams and time horizons is a challenging task for many policy areas. Quite often, the EU mission poses the (complex) task for national and regional actors to re-arrange existing instruments and patterns of institutional cooperation. **An alignment will need lengthy processes of “policy convergence” in the areas of EU missions** – which of course does not rule out the existence of ‘national missions’ in parallel.
7. We also can observe that **pre-existing national missions may ease a successful uptake of the EU missions**. The more successful examples of EU mission governance implementation indeed tend to draw on a preceding history of corresponding national programmes that have prepared the ground for more ambitious EU missions. This has to be taken into account when designing future missions.
8. Due to the complexity of most (transformative) missions, the strategies to address them need to rely on a good **balance between orientating targets and open-ended learning processes for implementation** to move from (political) coordination to (broad-based) transformative action.
9. What is to be seen in all countries is that in the age of ‘poly-crises’ (pandemic, war, climate ...) the five EU missions risk losing out in the competition for policy attention. Quite often, current policy priorities are elsewhere and the **mission topics with their longer-term orientation do not receive the attention (and the funding) they need**.
10. Against the background of these observations we propose:
 - To invest **“patient” public and private capital** into the missions and give them time to develop and mature;
 - To broaden the scope of missions from an STI focus towards a **“whole-of-government”** approach;
 - To endow the actors with appropriate resources and capabilities to engage in **institutional capacity-building** with a long-term view;
 - That the **missions to be selected in the future should reflect the sense of urgency** needed for their timely and successful implementation.