

## TRAMI Policy Brief No. 3

### EU missions ahead: looking beyond 2027

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The last two years allowed to gain important experiences with the implementation of the EU missions at the European, national and regional levels, which were collected in the EU Monitoring Report, the EU Mutual Learning Exercises, the TRAMI project or the reports of the different mission implementation platforms. In this policy brief, we try to draw together some of the main findings of these assessments. This knowledge is now very instrumental, as important foundations are already being laid for the programming of the period after 2027. In the following, we will address main challenges and issues with regard to the preparation of FP10.

#### ***The next Framework Programme in the context of the Multi-annual Financial Framework***

The EU's Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) specifies the envelope of EU expenditures over a pre-defined period and essentially comprises all programme lines: cohesion policy (EDRF, ESF, Cohesion Fund), common agricultural policy (CAP, i.e. EAFRD EAGF) as well as new and reinforced priorities (Horizon Europe, instruments for neighbourhood, development and international cooperation, LIFE, Erasmus+, etc.). The financial framework is therefore also the level at which these programmes are monitored on an ongoing basis. The new upcoming MFF period will therefore be decisive for whether a mission-oriented approach will have a proper place not only in EU R&I policy, but in all EU policies.

Already published national position papers outlining their expectations regarding the next EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation from 2028 onwards confirm a sustained focus on societal challenges and transformation as well as the ambitions of EU missions, even if opinions about the right way of implementing EU missions are split. In particular, several voices have raised the need to better embed EU missions in the respective sectoral policies, where they are ultimately expected to make a difference, i.e. well beyond the reach of R&I policy.

Important developments are also upcoming in other policy areas. In March of this year, considerations on the direction of future EU regional policy were communicated in the 9th Cohesion Report. According to this report, a green and climate neutral transition, digitalisation and competitiveness will be key orientations for the next EU financial period. The signals sent with this report underline the importance of pursuing a mission-oriented approach in the programming of the period from 2028 onwards. In a similar vein, the EU's industrial policy increasingly focuses on areas and technologies considered of critical importance to Europe's competitiveness, sovereignty and global leadership, using its various instruments from relaxing state aid rules as in the case of IPCEI (Important Projects of Common European Interest) to targeted support for climate-neutral industries.

So, the momentum is there, but at the same time it is now time to draw on recent experiences, learn the necessary lessons for improving mission governance, and bring the mission-oriented approach into the next generation of programmes. This implies that the EU missions need to be brought closer to the policies and programmes of the various DGs and to further develop interfaces among them. This applies, in particular, to complementary funding and linkages of the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, the Structural and Cohesion Funds and the EU's Industrial Policy.

### ***Three Scenarios to MOVE BEYOND THE STI AND POLICY TRAPS***

Due to their embedding in Horizon Europe, EU missions are largely driven by R&I policy and there is a need to escape the 'STI trap' (i.e. the fact that EU missions are too much centred on R&I policy) and the 'policy trap' (i.e. the fact that EU missions are currently driven primarily from policy and need more buy-in and support from industrial and societal stakeholders) in which the EU missions seems to be mired currently. In many countries, 'sectoral' ministries do not have R&I competences and are difficult to mobilise in the implementation processes of missions. EU missions depend on the commitment and participation of the respective mission communities of sectoral actors, stakeholders and citizens. Local stakeholders and industry have key roles to play. The variety of stakeholders, including citizens, is also a rich source of new ideas, fostering the creation of truly novel social and technological solutions. This underlines the importance "quadruple helix" ecosystems as underpinning missions.

Furthermore, new political objectives have attracted attention in recent years, which are of great importance for the strategic orientation and implementation of mission: a new understanding of how to deal with matters of technological and economic sovereignty, a new European industrial policy and the agendas of sectoral policies (health, agriculture, etc.). It is therefore essential that the implementation of EU missions is linked up with sectoral policies, industrial policies and the mission-oriented communities and ecosystems.

Against this backdrop, three mutually complementary scenarios can be envisaged for the future of missions in European policy:

- *More ambition, scope and momentum of missions well beyond the R&I realm:* If the goals of missions are taken seriously, then it is obvious that they need to grow beyond the confines of R&I policy and become an essential element of sectoral, regional, industrial and education policies. In more operational terms, missions should become a matter of cross-cutting concern within the EC, under the leadership of a Commissioner or a Vice-President to endow them with the legitimacy, visibility and momentum they need in view of the societal significance.
- *Handover to the mission communities:* At the same time, the success of missions should not only depend on government policy. Instead, responsibility for mission should be shared with the actors and stakeholders who make up mission communities. The directionality and intentionality of missions is in fact perfectly compatible with the fundamental principles of subsidiarity.
- *Mainstreaming of mission orientation:* Both within R&I policy, but also within other policy areas, mission orientation could play a much more prominent role than it currently does. It is not just about setting long-term ambitions, giving direction and setting priorities, but it is about a new way of managing change. Through the mainstreaming of mission orientation, more coherence among policies and with other actors' strategies could be achieved, and synergies along concurrent streams of implementation be identified and leveraged.

## ***STRENGTHENING mechanisms to support the formation of ECOSYSTEMS***

- **Strategic frameworks integrating STI and sectoral agendas:**

Missions need to be properly embedded in national and regional/local settings to be fully effective in focussing efforts of all relevant actors and stakeholders in ecosystems. The EU missions provide scope for differentiated mission paths geared towards specific national and regional challenges. While member states and regions try to figure out workarounds to link mission-oriented innovation policies to their respective Smart Specialization Strategies, the governance of next-generation missions at EU level should foresee that missions are jointly run by R&I and sectoral DGs right from the start. This would involve a pooling of resources among the DGs involved towards the goals of the missions.

In fact, responsibility for missions should progressively shift towards sectoral DGs during mission implementation, i.e. when moving from experimental to full-scale solutions. Given the critical role of structural funds and smart specialisation strategies in guiding regional innovation and transformation activities, missions need to be well embedded in these regional strategy processes and policies. This embedding is also important because it defines the conditions for new mission-oriented solution to grow, expand and replicate bearing in mind that the understanding and recognition of regions or municipalities varies across Europe.

- **Interlinked funding and selection mechanisms:**

Co-creative development and implementation of novel solutions requires combining funding instruments and anticipating in evaluation and selection processes the possibility to combine instruments. The mechanisms for evaluating and selecting proposals in the field of R&I in Europe are by and large well developed. However, funding instruments and selection mechanisms usually struggle with the challenge to ensure open collaborations with non-scientific and practice partners who are essential for realising societal solutions and impact. Mission governance builds on coordination work that makes it possible to break through innovation silos. At the same time, the funding instruments and selection mechanisms are either 'trapped' in the STI domain, for addressing primarily applicants from the scientific or industrial environment and for not foreseeing interfaces with funding instruments from other areas.

This all points to the need to establish new selection procedures of missions in the EU context, capitalizing on the experiences and good practices in a number of countries (Austria, Sweden, Norway, Slovakia, ...), This implies foreseeing more bottom-up elements, more interaction with parliaments and a wider range of stakeholder groups. Ultimately, this shift in governance should lead to the establishment of 'mission ecosystems', aligning actors in longer term collaborations and to a stabilisation of those ecosystems with dedicated governance structures, funding and support infrastructures (see e.g. the Austrian approach to EU mission governance).

- **Alignment of EU industrial policy and mission-oriented R&I policy:**

From our work with national governments in the vein of 'green transformations', we have to add another observation: There is a strong need to align mission-oriented policy with industrial policy. In both areas, governance structures – especially on the EU level - are only about to emerge and are for now far from perfect: they remain little articulated to each other, while often addressing similar goals (e.g. in the Green Deal Industrial Plan GDIP). Given the current rise in attention to competitiveness, new ways need to be found to ensure that missions contribute to the strengthening of competitiveness, which also requires re-thinking how competitiveness goals and societal challenges (that EU missions address) can be combined in next-generation missions.

There are several topical areas, which would lend themselves easily for such novel combinations, e.g. in security and defence where a better alignment of funding from the R&I framework programme and the European Defence Fund could be envisaged.

The recent work by the EC Expert group on the economic and societal impact of research and innovation (ESIR) points to new ways of conceiving of competitiveness which could be drawn upon to better reconcile societal and economic goals also in relation to missions. In the same vein, the selection, monitoring and portfolio management of the Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) should also be model to improve the governance of missions, including a more prominent involvement of representatives from DG R&I, COMP and sectoral DGs.

- **Connecting with basic research:**

Scientific freedom in basic research and the impact-orientation of applied research and innovation are mistakenly seen as difficult to reconcile. Missions represent focal nodes that need to draw on applied as well as basic research. Given their long-term and systemic nature, applied research and innovation regularly need to recur to basic research to resolve fundamental problems and questions that emerge on the mission pathway. And once new solutions are available, educational efforts are needed to ensure they can be operated at full scale. While both transformative missions and basic research share their long(er)-term time horizon, both must be dedicated to sometimes pressing and urgent societal and economic needs.

To arrive at such articulation, constant exchange and mutual adaptation is needed as well as a per ante structures for reflexive policy making (e.g. foresight, flexible roadmapping, frequent stakeholder dialogues, ...). In the longer term, incentive mechanisms for research-performing organisations need to be institutionalised (e.g. through performance agreements, career paths) to mirror the rules and practices established at programme or project level. Therefore, the permeability for repeated or ongoing socially relevant engagement and scientific careers must also be increased by speeding up urgently needed reforms in research assessment (e.g. CoARA).

## KEEPING AND TRANSMITTING MOMENTUM

- **Perseverance, learning and the need for state capacity:**

Missions take quite a long time to be accomplished, and it requires patience and perseverance from the actors involved until new structures and institutions needed for the accomplishment of missions are built. The requirements of the missions call for rethinking the sectoral distribution of competencies, establishing solid coordination mechanisms (in terms of budgeting, regulation, procurement etc.) among the various policy fields and domains influencing missions as well as strengthening of the involvement of stakeholders.

Learning and adaptation and the parallel consideration of alternative scenarios and development paths is needed, implying that concrete as well as overarching targets may need to be adjusted to new insights and conditions. As consequence, 'patient' funding is needed – both public and private – to enable scaling over longer periods of time. 'Patience' therefore also means resilience and perseverance in justifying and legitimising missions, and willingness to embark on unconventional implementation practices. It also means openness to entrepreneurial influence on the realisation of missions, be it from private or third sector entrepreneurs.

Missions need to be seen as collective endeavours for which the question should not be what an individual actors or stakeholder can get out of them, but rather what he or she can contribute to them; without neglecting their organisational interests.

While some countries have already started to devote increasing resources to the governance and management of missions, in almost all member states there is a pressing need to develop sufficient state capacity to deal with this new policy approach. This change would also involve a more widespread use of 'whole of government' - or even 'whole of society' - approaches as the respective Mutual Learning Exercises have amply demonstrated. The task here would be to 'nest' missions into existing structures and stages of development of the respective STI and sectoral policy systems but at the same time, develop new governance structures and new state capacities (in terms of human resources, funding, and competences).

These institutional adjustments, institution building and portfolio management of funding channels and topics at both national and regional levels should be supported from the EU level, e.g. via (i) the establishment of 'permanent MLEs' based on the existing mission network infrastructures, such as the European Mission Network EMIN, the NCP4Missions platform, ERRIN etc., (ii) EU support / funding for national and regional institution building (following the Swedish approach taken in 'Impact Innovation' , or the Austrian system of mission governance)

- **Clarification and simplification:**

Transformative missions aiming at changes at systems level necessarily need to mobilize a wide range of actors. This mobilization must happen at all stages of policy development and implementation, from the identification of MOIP topics/priorities to the involvement in implementation (even in the form of devolving implementing capacities to the stakeholders). The current EU missions have struggled uphill to involve broader swathes of stakeholders.

At the same time, mission implementation needs to become simpler, while recognising their complexity and uncertainty. There is also a risk of an inflationary use of the mission label without founded commitment, which must be avoided. This requires sound selection processes and criteria to give political choices the necessary credibility. Mission contribution plans, where actors and stakeholder specify their roles and contributions with regard to missions could be a way forward to turn missions into truly collective efforts. Neither should we shy away from stopping once selected missions if they turn out not to be viable.

#### About

TRAMI, the TRAnsnational cooperation on the MIssions approach, is an EU-funded project focussed on Making Missions Work by creating Communities of Practice, exchanging knowledge and offering mutual learning.

For further information: <https://www.trami5missions.eu/>