

Dear mr. Bell,  
Dear mr. Longo,  
Dear delegates of the Programme Committee

With this letter we inform you about the outcomes of PLATFORM World Café workshop ‘Think Back, Act Forward’ on collaboration between Member States, held March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at Schiphol Airport in The Netherlands. In this workshop with nineteen participants, managers of ERA-NETs and JPIs participated from: France, Germany, Belgium, Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Denmark, the UK, and The Netherlands.

PLATFORM brings together ERA-NETs in the area of the Bioeconomy with the following objectives: to increase collaboration among actors, to foster inclusiveness, to increase capacities for efficient and effective ERA-NETs, and to inform research policy making. PLATFORM will further strengthen mutual learning, maximise synergies and increase coordination.

The first workshop of PLATFORM-2 focused on sustainable and alternative models for cooperation between public research programmes. Topics of debate were the new instruments the Commission proposes to introduce in the 2016-2017 work programme of Societal Challenge 2, the main challenges, and improved schemes for collaboration between Member States. We would like to offer you the main conclusions of the workshop as input for the EC workshop on April 27<sup>th</sup> about the new instruments. The participants of the workshop all expressed their keen interest to work together with the Commission in further developing the new instruments. Based on the presentation of the Commission the participants raised some concerns concerning the implementation of the FPA and the EJP.

We also include a list of questions based on the conclusions of the workshop, as agreed with the Commission.

### **General concerns**

#### **1) Scattered resources of funding agencies**

In the Bioeconomy there many different initiatives fostering the ERA: over 20 ERA-NETs , 9 ETPs with mirror groups, 3 JPIs, 1 JTI, etc. Most of these initiatives ask for a contribution from National funding agencies, either in financial- and/or human resources. Platform would like to stress that the introduction of FPA and EJP needs to have a positive impact on the deployment of resources. The new instruments should offer solutions for a scattered resources of funding agencies. The consequences have to be evaluated carefully.

#### **2) Development and decisions on topics**

By having the ERA-NETs in the Work Programme, the development and decisions on topics follows the same procedures as for collaborative research projects. For the ERA-NETs in the



#### **PLATFORM Project Office**

Wageningen UR  
Wageningen International  
P.O. Box 9101  
6700 HB Wageningen  
The Netherlands

Droevendaalsesteeg 4  
NL-6708 PB Wageningen  
Tel.: +31 317 480100  
E-mail: [office.platform@wur.nl](mailto:office.platform@wur.nl)  
[www.era-platform.eu](http://www.era-platform.eu)



Bioeconomy this means that Member States are engaged in the process both through the PC and through SCAR. Consultation may be sought from various expert groups, existing ERA-NET Actions and joint programming initiatives, the platform of Bioeconomy ERA-NETs, and other stakeholders, in particular those that develop or implement strategic research agendas. Changing the embedding of ERA-NETs means that the preparation and decision processes will have to be rethought as well.

### **3) Lack of funding for implementation of calls**

Member States see great opportunities in pooling research funding in ERA-initiatives like ERA-NET Cofunds and JPIs. Between 2004 and 2013, covering the period of FP6 and FP7, 153 ERA-NETs and 23 ERA-NET Plus actions were created. The networks have organised some 325 joint calls with a total of estimated € 2.4 billion public funding in the Bioeconomy area alone. A main bottleneck for effective implementation of these initiatives is the lack of a proper instrument to fund implementation of calls through international “call secretariats”. Based on the Commission presentation, neither FPA nor EJP will fund call implementation, therefore this problem seems to remain unresolved. The FPA/EJPs needs to provide a possibility for funding of the call administration.

### **4) Lack of instrument for networking and additional activities**

The context against which calls are developed is dynamic and changes over time. Therefore, there is a need for exploring new areas for ERA collaboration, for scoping activities, for networking and for building bridges between disciplines and sectors. The ERA-NET managers call for instruments that take into account the need for networking and various other additional activities to build longer lasting collaborations and means for creating more impact from a joint call.

## **Specific concerns regarding the implementation of FPA**

### **5) Complexity of legal contracts**

The past years we have seen great improvements in simplification and diminishing the administrative burden of participating in European projects. However, the administration concerning contract signing and contract amendments remains an extremely complex, meticulous and time consuming task. An FPA will be a single contract with an estimated 100 partners. Each Cofund partner will need to sign at least three legal contracts: the FPA, the consortium agreement to the FPA, and the Specific Agreement to each of the Cofund actions to which they allocate research budget. Moreover, many funding agencies, like national science councils or national enterprise agencies, finance research in various areas, and so the number of contracts will multiply accordingly. We fear that the administrative burden of management of FPA's will increase the overhead of implementation of ERA-NET Co-funds.

### **6) Bioeconomy is by definition not limited to a single societal challenge**

Research in the Bioeconomy is not limited to a single societal challenge. This is reflected by bioeconomy related projects and ERA-initiatives in H2020 under health, agriculture & food, marine research, ICT, biotechnology and environment. Initiatives are more and more working together to foster multidisciplinary research. However, each individual FPA will cover only one specific societal challenge. We fear the FPA will, in this way, raise a new barrier to fund multidisciplinary research in ERA-NET Cofunds.



#### **7) Extra barriers for international collaboration**

Cooperation between the European Research Area Networks and organisations in global research can benefit the bioeconomy. Global cooperation can increase the outreach and impact of ERA-NET activities through having access to the best available knowledge and avoiding duplication of efforts and can address research areas with a clear global dimension. It is unclear if funding agencies or initiatives from outside Europe will benefit from the FPA; however they will need to accede to the FPA contract in order to participate in ERA-NET Cofunds. Consequences for international collaboration in terms of FPA raising additional barriers have to be evaluated carefully.

### **Specific concerns regarding the implementation of EJP-Cofund**

#### **8) Long term financial commitment vs short term work programme**

The EJP-Cofund demands that member states, more specifically funding agencies, give a commitment for a programme of 60 months. However the work programme of a specific EJP will be for 12 months, to be submitted 90 days before the end of a reporting period and to be evaluated by the European Commission. This way the European Commission will gain control over national funding without any obligation to consult Member States about the work programme of the EJP.

#### **9) Cascading funds**

The EJP-Cofund offers the opportunity, like an ERA-NET Cofund to fund research through competitive calls (so-called Cascading funds). However, unlike in ERA-NETs the funding rules cannot be adapted to national funding rules; the rules and reimbursement rates of the EJP always apply. Furthermore, projects under the EJP-Cofund scheme cannot run beyond the 60 months of the EJP. This means that, even though the EJP claims critical mass in funding, integration and maturity of the research, projects will typically run for a duration between 2 and 4 years. We fail to see the benefit of this instrument - with these conditions- for funding agencies.

#### **10) Type of Activities**

The European Joint Programme ('EJP') under Horizon 2020 is a co-fund action designed to support coordinated national research and innovation programmes. The EJP aims at attracting and pooling a critical mass of national resources on objectives and challenges of Horizon 2020 and at achieving significant economies of scales by adding related Horizon 2020 resources to a joint effort. The EJP-Cofund can fund a wide range of activities, ranging from research to coordination and networking activities, including training activities, demonstration and dissemination activities, support to third parties etc.

This "look and feel" of the EJP-Cofund scheme is reminiscent of the failed instrument of Network of Excellence (NoE). The NoE was an instrument under FP6 and FP7 aiming at attracting and pooling a critical mass by funding coordination and networking activities, including a joint research programme, training activities, demonstration and dissemination activities. The NoE was abolished as an instrument after very critical reviews in the midterm and *ex-post* evaluations on FP6



The ERA-managers in PLATFORM2 have years of combined experience in the practical implementation of ERA-instruments in the Bioeconomy. We offer you to take advantage of that experience. Therefore, we invite the Commission to further develop new instruments for the implementation of the ERA together with the Member States and national funding agencies and to give time for careful consideration.

PLATFORM of bioeconomy ERA-NET Actions  
April 2015