

European Partnership Stakeholder Forum 2025

Re-Imagining partnerships: the road to
FP10

Key Takeaways

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Overarching political and strategic framing

- Partnerships were presented as a central instrument for Europe to tackle “very fundamental impacts and shocks,” from climate change to geopolitical crises, which no single country can address alone. They are explicitly framed as bridges between EU-level priorities and concrete research and innovation activity on the ground.
- Speakers and panellists underlined that Europe must “pool our resources and work together more efficiently” and that partnerships are a keyway to do this, but only if they are focused, coherent and genuinely strategic rather than simply a collection of legacy initiatives.
- There was a strong call to be honest about what works and what does not. Participants stressed that the partnership landscape has become too complex and fragmented, and that an important part of FP10 will be to streamline and sharpen the portfolio so that it delivers visible benefits for citizens, companies and regions.

Need for a more selective, strategic portfolio of partnerships

- A core takeaway is that the EU cannot simply keep adding or rolling over partnerships. One of the opening statements captured this clearly: “*Not every idea can become a partnership. Not every existing partnership should continue.*” Choices will have to be made about where partnerships truly add value that other instruments cannot deliver.
- The Commission signalled a move away from a long “shopping list” of loosely connected partnerships towards a smaller, more deliberate portfolio aligned with a limited set of strategic directions under FP10.
- Participants broadly supported this more disciplined approach, but they also insisted that criteria and processes for selection, continuation and phasing out must be transparent, predictable and co-created with Member States and stakeholders, not imposed top-down.

FP10 proposal: a simpler, more harmonised implementation model

- The Commission explained that the current five (in practice) implementation models (institutionalised: Art. 185 and 187, co-funded, co-programmed and EIT KICs) have led to overlaps in themes and inconsistent rules. The FP10 proposal therefore introduces a refined “core” partnership instrument, with a more limited “toolbox” of additional forms around it.
- The aim is to respond to Member States’ calls for a more simplified framework for implementing partnerships in tripartite mode, while still leaving enough flexibility to tailor arrangements to sectoral needs.
- Harmonisation is a major driver. The proposal seeks to ensure that all partnerships are underpinned by harmonised rules and consistent implementation modalities, making it easier for national agencies, industry and research organisations to participate across multiple partnerships without re-learning different systems each time.
- Principles of transparency, openness and flexibility are explicitly named. These are meant to govern both how partnerships are selected and how they operate in practice, including access for newcomers, widening countries and associated partners.

Portfolio and directional initiatives in FP10

- Partnerships will be part of a wider toolbox in FP10 that also considers other EU instruments and funding sources (Competitiveness Fund, IPCEIs, etc.).
- The Commission emphasised a portfolio logic: partnerships will not be designed in isolation, but as part of “directional initiatives” around shared objectives. Partnerships should be one piece of a broader policy mix rather than standalone ecosystems competing for attention and funding.
- This also implies a stronger expectation that partnerships align with key EU policy priorities (for example, the Green Deal, digital transition, security and resilience) and that they coordinate with deployment instruments, regulatory initiatives and other funding streams.

Member States’ and stakeholders’ perspective on the current system

- Many participants said they “are happy with the change” in principle and welcome the intention to move away from the current fragmented landscape. They see simplification and harmonisation as overdue.
- At the same time, they voiced concerns of uncertainty. Some describe the present as a “black box” where they don’t know exactly what the rules behind future changes are and feel they lack visibility on how decisions will be made about which partnerships survive, merge or end.

- There was a strong consensus that Member States be involved early and consistently, both in strategic planning and in detailed implementation decisions. Partnerships are seen as tripartite instruments; if national authorities are to mobilise funding and political support, they expect a real say in priorities and design.
- Stakeholders stressed that stability and predictability matter almost as much as simplification. Industry in particular warns that companies plan investments on long time horizons; sudden shifts in partnership architecture or funding continuity could undermine trust and participation.

Industry and business expectations

- Business representatives underlined that partnerships need to be attractive and usable for companies, not just for research organisations. This means faster procedures, clear rules, manageable reporting and credible prospects for scale-up and market deployment.
- They welcomed efforts to centralise and simplify but insist that any new model must deliver more efficient funding flows and less administrative burden.
- Industry participants also linked partnerships strongly to Europe's competitive positioning against the US and China. They warn that if Europe does not provide stable, sizeable and rapid support for strategic technologies, companies may scale or relocate elsewhere, regardless of strong research.

Widening and associated countries: inclusion and capacity concerns

- Representatives from widening countries and associated partners (such as Norway) underlined that partnerships have been critical integration tools, helping them to build networks, learn EU procedures and connect their ecosystems to European value chains.
- They are therefore particularly sensitive to any shift that might inadvertently marginalise them, for example by raising thresholds for participation, making co-funding requirements more demanding or concentrating on a small number of high-capacity actors.
- These countries called for explicit consideration of their needs in the design of the portfolio, including capacity-building, simpler entry points, and better alignment with cohesion policy and regional instruments.

Regional and territorial dimension

- Regional actors stressed that partnerships should not be purely Brussels-centred clubs. To create real impact on the ground, they must connect coherently with regional innovation strategies, smart specialisation agendas and local ecosystems.
- They argued that partnerships can be powerful vehicles for “bringing regions into the game,” but only if regional authorities and innovation agencies are treated as genuine partners rather than distant implementers.
- Better coordination between partnerships and cohesion policy funds is repeatedly requested, so that regional investments in infrastructure, skills and clusters reinforce rather than duplicate partnership activities.

Synergies and risk of overlap with other EU instruments

- Participants raised questions about how the new partnership model will interact with other EU tools, notably the proposed European Competitiveness Fund, IPCEIs and sector-specific instruments.
- There is concern that without clear guidance, Member States may struggle to navigate between multiple overlapping mechanisms, leading either to duplication or to under-use of some instruments.
- The Commission responded by emphasising that FP10 and its partnerships are part of a broader policy architecture. The aim is not to create competition between instruments but to ensure they are deployed in a complementary way under shared strategic priorities.

Implementation challenges and expectations

- Many interventions stressed that changing legal bases and implementation forms is not enough; what matters is whether partnerships become “leaner, faster and more impactful” in practice. This hinges on day-to-day management, governance and resourcing. Several speakers cautioned that without adequate internal capabilities, even good legal design may not translate into better user experience.
- Governance is a recurrent theme. Stakeholders asked how boards will be composed, what role industry and Member States will play, and how performance and exit decisions will be taken.

Impact and additionality expectations

- Across the Forum, there was a shared view that partnerships must demonstrate added value beyond ordinary collaborative projects. They should catalyse change in ecosystems, behaviours and investments that would not have occurred otherwise.
- This includes classical impacts - scientific excellence, technological breakthroughs, industrial uptake - but also behavioural additionality, such as new patterns of cooperation between sectors, long-term strategic planning by companies, or changes in national funding practices.
- Participants stressed that success stories and failures alike must be captured, analysed and shared across the portfolio. Learning processes are seen as essential to avoid repeating mistakes and to refine the selection and design of future partnerships.

Messages to take forward into FP10 negotiations

- The Forum closed with a sense that the community broadly supports the direction of travel—fewer, more strategic and better coordinated partnerships under FP10—but without neglecting stronger involvement in shaping the details.
- Key messages include: learn from what works in the current system; simplify rules and models; ensure transparency about portfolio choices; involve Member States, regions and stakeholders early; design instruments that are attractive for industry and inclusive for widening and associated countries; and equip the Commission to actually manage a portfolio approach.
- Overall, the main takeaway is that European partnerships remain a powerful and necessary instrument for tackling shared challenges, but they must evolve. As one contribution implicitly summarises, the task now is not to abandon partnerships but to “re-imagine” them so that they are genuinely strategic, user-friendly and capable of delivering real impact in a crowded and competitive global landscape.

