

Joint Statement

Association: A Strategic Asset for Europe's Research, Innovation and Competitiveness

31 August 2026

Preamble

The European Commission has described association to Horizon Europe as “*the closest form of cooperation with non-EU countries, which allows entities of associated countries to participate in programme actions on equal terms with entities of EU countries.*” Experience across successive EU Framework Programmes has consistently demonstrated the value of this model in strengthening scientific excellence, fostering collaboration and enhancing Europe's research and innovation (R&I) capacity.

As discussions on the next generation of EU research and innovation programmes enter a decisive phase, we, ten like-minded countries associated to Horizon Europe 2021–2027, present our shared perspective on the future of association. With the Council and the European Parliament defining their positions on Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) 2028–2034, we believe association should remain a cornerstone of EU research and innovation policy.

Experience from successive EU Framework Programmes has shown that:

- **Association strengthens Europe's global R&I capacity and competitiveness** by widening access to talent, excellence, knowledge, research infrastructures, innovation ecosystems and markets.
- **Association enhances Europe's resilience and technological leadership** by enabling trusted partners to address shared scientific, societal and geopolitical challenges together.
- **Openness is a strategic strength.** It can be combined with clear, risk-based and proportionate safeguards that protect Europe's interests while preserving excellence and trusted international cooperation.
- **Associated countries make substantial scientific, strategic and financial contributions**, increasing the programme's scale, impact and global reach.

Building on this experience, we call for the next generation of EU R&I programmes to:

- **Keep association at the heart of EU R&I policy**, recognising it not merely as a participation mechanism, but as a strategic instrument that strengthens Europe's excellence, competitiveness and capacity to address shared societal challenges, thereby reinforcing its global leadership.
- **Remain open by default**, with restrictions applied only where justified through clear, transparent, risk-based and proportionate criteria.
- **Provide a predictable and stable framework for association**, enabling researchers, innovators, companies and public authorities to plan, invest and collaborate with confidence throughout the programme cycle.
- **Enable speedy association from the start of the programme**, including early and transparent pathways for negotiations, so that like-minded partners can contribute from the very beginning.
- **Ensure meaningful, structured and predictable governance arrangements**, enabling associated countries to contribute to strategic orientations and programme implementation in a way that reflects their scientific, strategic and financial contributions to the programme.
- **Provide clear, transparent and consistent participation rules across the full programme landscape, including the ECF**, ensuring certainty wherever successor instruments to Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe Programme are implemented.

The Way Forward

We reaffirm our commitment to Europe's research and innovation ecosystem and to continued cooperation in areas of shared strategic interest. Association remains an essential framework for international R&I collaboration, enabling Europe and its like-minded partners to compete, innovate and lead together for mutual benefit.

To fully realise this potential, the next generation of EU R&I programmes must preserve association as an open, predictable and strategically integrated framework from the outset. A strong association framework will strengthen Europe's excellence, competitiveness and technological leadership by bringing together the best talent, ideas and innovation capacities across Europe and beyond.

We, the signatories, therefore call on the European institutions to ensure that the future legislative framework provides the conditions for timely, stable and meaningful association of like-minded partner countries. In doing so, we believe Europe will preserve one of its strongest instruments for excellence, competitiveness and trusted international cooperation.



*Ambassador Angus Campbell
Australian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the EU and NATO*



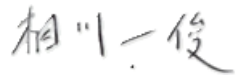
*Ambassador Nicholas Brousseau
Chargé d'affaires a.i. for the Mission of Canada to the EU*



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*Ambassador Stefán Haukur Jóhannesson
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*Ambassador Simon Draper
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*Ambassador Anders Eide
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*Ambassador Lee Byeongdo
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