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**NOTE**

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From:	ERAC Secretariat
To:	ERAC Delegations
Subject:	Final report by the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships on the "Recommendations on rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape and optimising its coherence"

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Delegations will find annexed to this Note the final report by the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships on the "Recommendations on rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape and optimising its coherence", as adopted at the ERAC plenary on 17-18 September 2018.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON RATIONALISING THE EU R&I PARTNERSHIP  
LANDSCAPE AND OPTIMISING ITS COHERENCE**

**Final report by the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships**

## **Rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape and optimising its coherence**

**Conclusions** from the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group for the ERAC plenary on 17 September 2018:

1. European R&I partnerships are making important contributions to strengthening the European Research Area and to achieving related EU policy objectives, in particular those supported by the EU R&I Framework Programmes (FP);
2. The rationalisation of the R&I partnership landscape is needed to ensure that future landscape of R&I partnerships is effectively improving the coherence, functioning and quality of Europe's R&I system and that the individual initiatives are able to fully achieve their potential in creating positive scientific and socio-economic impacts and/or in addressing societal challenges;
3. The successful rationalisation of the R&I partnership landscape is highly interrelated with the effective use of the future criteria framework and the envisaged strategic coordinating process for EU R&I partnerships;
4. To this end, the rationalisation of the landscape, supported through the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, should lead to more strategic, coherent and coordinated R&I partnerships with a clear and complementary position within the given intervention areas/thematic priorities and with significant impacts.
5. Rationalisation of the landscape can be pursued at three levels, notably
  - a. the overall level of Europe's R&I policy framework;
  - b. the level of the partnership approaches; and
  - c. the level of thematic priority/intervention area.
6. On each of the three levels of rationalisation, distinct rationalisation strategies have been identified by the Working Group, which should form the basis of future action;
7. In this respect, the overall number of partnerships supported under the future Framework Programme and the budget allocated to them are crucial to minimise overlaps and ensure manageability of the R&I partnership landscape;
8. The existing R&I partnerships receiving Framework Programme support for research activities can be grouped in three distinct approaches, notably:
  - a. **co-programmed partnerships** based on Memoranda of Understanding or contractual arrangements between the EU, MS/AC and other partners;
  - b. **co-funded partnerships** for integrating EU and national public and/or other R&I funding sources and relevant activities;
  - c. **institutionalised partnerships** established in accordance with Article 185 or 187 of TFEU, or by the European Innovation and Technology Institute (EIT).

In addition, there is a recognised need to cover the costs of coordination without co-funding of research activities from the EU, which would allow for cooperation between funding organizations from MS/ACs, private funding institutions and/or industry associations, including for the emergence of new networks.

9. To inform the process of rationalisation, the redesign of the partnership landscape and the selection of future initiatives, a mapping analysis between the partnerships that will still be operating at the beginning of the next Framework Programme and the priorities of the next FP is considered important;
10. The detailed analysis of the 'health' field revealed important findings that are of particular relevance for rationalisation strategies at the level of thematic priority/intervention area, in particular that:
  - a. Publicly available information does not allow for a robust analysis of the R&I partnerships with respect to their overlaps and complementarity to other Horizon 2020 actions, so additional information needs emerge for the rationalisation at the level of the thematic priority / intervention area;
  - b. While there are theme-specific networks, which are easy to identify, a number of more horizontal partnerships make important contributions to specific thematic areas, which are less easy to identify;
  - c. The scale and scope of the topics differ strongly – from many partners and large budgets to fewer partners and smaller budgets, from very general topics to rather specific topics, presenting a challenge for ensuring the most appropriate level of analysis for rationalisation.

**Recommendations** from the Ad-hoc Working Group for the ERAC plenary on 17 September 2018:

1. ERAC calls on the Commission, Member States and Associated Countries to ensure consistency and coordination of ongoing and new partnership initiatives with overlapping objectives and their complementarity, avoiding all unnecessary duplications;
2. ERAC calls on the Commission to ensure clear intervention logics for partnership initiatives under FP9, on the basis of the three forms of partnerships (co-programmed, co-funded and institutional) and to ensure that all future partnerships under the Framework Programme are based on clear objectives and significant impacts for agreed Union policies;
3. ERAC calls on the Commission to ensure coordination support for partnerships between programmes of Member States / Associated Countries and civil society organisations, such as foundations and/or industry associations on common priorities of their choice, including regular bottom-up and competitive calls for proposals aiming at the continuation of existing and the emergence of new networks across Europe (on the basis of Coordination and Support Actions);
4. ERAC calls on the Commission and Member States to limit the number of labels/instruments<sup>1</sup> for partnerships under the three distinctive forms and the possible variations of the same instrument to the necessary minimum, and in this context explore discontinuing some of the existing ones. Member States and Associated Countries should be consulted before any new partnership label or variation of instrument is introduced during the implementation of the Framework Programme;
5. ERAC calls on the Commission, the Member States and Associated Countries to monitor and report on their respective budget allocation to partnership initiatives and take this into account in the decisions on new or renewed initiatives;
6. ERAC calls on the Commission to elaborate an overall mapping of the partnerships that will still be operating at the beginning of the next FP against the priorities of the future FP, informing any decision of the selection and design of future partnerships;
7. ERAC calls on the Commission and Member States / Associated Countries to jointly apply the identified rationalisation strategies, so that from the beginning of the next Framework Programme onwards, fewer, more coherent and strategic R&I partnerships with significant impacts will be achieved. These strategies include:
  - a. Make a ‘counterfactual’ and ensure that the planned R&I partnership fits to the nature of the EU Framework Programme;
  - b. Ensure that the set-up of partnerships is limited to cases, where the (potential) future benefits clearly outweigh the added complexity of cooperation;
  - c. Ensure that R&I partnerships fit to the intervention logics of the underlying partnership form and identify partnerships that no longer meet their requirements;

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<sup>1</sup> Such as PPPs, P2Ps, cPPPs, ERA-NETs, ERA-NET Cofund, FET-Flagships, EIT/KICs, EJP-Cofund

- d. Avoid many R&I partnerships in one FP intervention area, ensure that there will remain room for a significant portion of traditional collaborative projects in each area, and always use the 'lightest' approach to achieve the objectives.
8. ERAC calls on the Commission, in cooperation with Member States / Associated Countries and ERA-LEARN, to identify relevant information needs concerning existing partnerships allowing for a better analysis of rationalisation potential, without increasing the reporting and administrative burden for partners.

## ERAC ad hoc WG on Partnerships

### Issue Paper

#### Topic: Rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape and optimising its coherence

#### 1. Introduction

The Council Conclusion of 1 December 2017<sup>2</sup> recalls its conclusions of 6 December 2011 on partnering in research and innovation<sup>3</sup> in which the Council emphasised the need to create a transparent and accessible overall landscape of partnership initiatives and instruments<sup>4</sup> for all parties involved and noted the need for rationalisation to avoid unnecessary duplication and overlapping. The R&I partnership landscape is very highly populated. The number of different forms of partnerships has increased over the years – while new ones have been created since the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), old ones were not discontinued. Instruments such as the European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), the Contractual Public-Private Partnerships (cPPPs), the FET Flagships and the European Joint Programme (EJP) Co-Fund were entering the scene, alongside existing partnership forms, such as Article 185, Article 187 initiatives and ERA-NETs. This has resulted in a complex landscape of partnership approaches, many with the same fundamental rationale. Despite some specificities of each partnership form, which are also mentioned in the interim evaluation reports, the question remains whether we need so many of them.

With the proliferation of forms of partnerships, the number and the corresponding global budget of initiatives funded through these has increased as well. The current policy has resulted in a non-transparent set of partnership initiatives with different rationales, funding rules, and geometries and a rather large number of partly overlapping initiatives addressing similar topics that are insufficiently coordinated, both thematically and across technology readiness levels (TRL). In addition, the current dispersed selection and implementation procedures entail evident risks with respect to openness and transparency, leading to ‘closed club’ and undermining their potential to achieve their policy objectives. However, the Council Conclusions underline also the continued relevance and added value of R&I partnerships for EU and national R&I policies.

The rationalisation process proposed here entails three levels:

- a. the overall EU R&I policy framework;
- b. the level of partnership approaches; and
- c. the level of thematic priority/intervention area.

The following section 2 gives an overview of the key issues that make the current partnership landscape overly complex. Section 3 will address the different levels for rationalisation, while section 4 will propose a number of rationalisation strategies at the proposed three levels.

#### 2. Overview of key issues regarding the current partnership landscape

The fragmented and complex partnership landscape should be revised and rationalised in order to allow for R&I partnerships to have a clear position in the overall European R&I landscape and to achieve the desired significant impacts in an efficient and effective manner. Obviously, the complex partnership landscape leads to potential inefficiencies, unnecessary administrative burden for the partners and the end beneficiaries, and large transaction costs. For example, the management and

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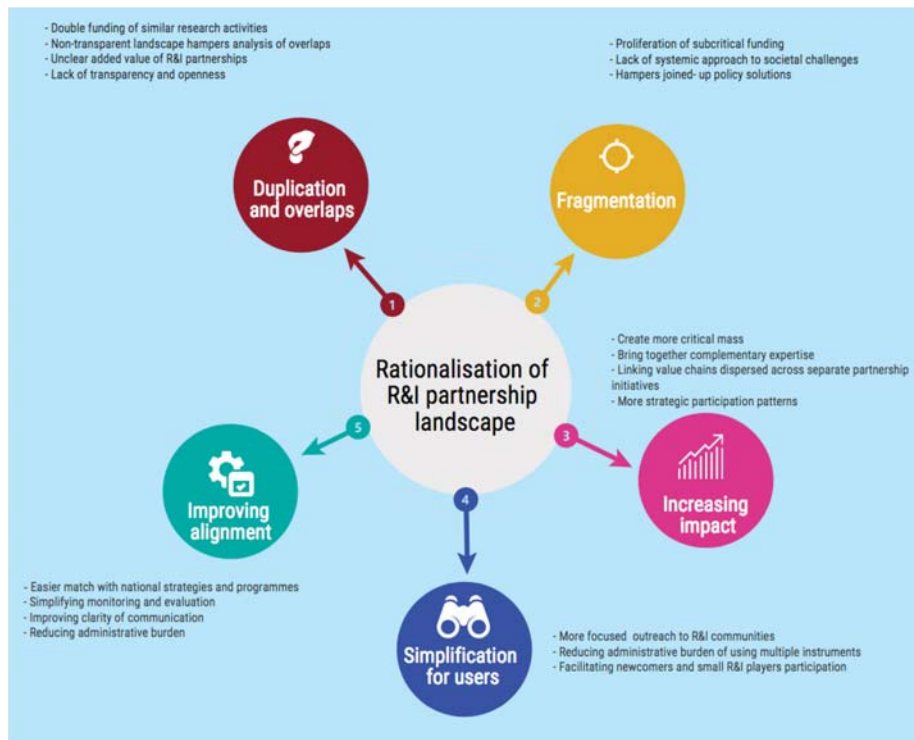
<sup>2</sup> Doc. 15320/17

<sup>3</sup> Doc. 18349/11

<sup>4</sup> For the remainder of the document, the terms ‘partnership approaches’ and ‘forms of partnerships’ instead of ‘instruments’ will be used in order to avoid misunderstandings.

governance of the complex landscape of partnership approaches and initiatives creates a high burden on the EU and national research and innovation authorities, particularly for small countries. Also, it undermines the desired coherence and complementarity between national and EU level R&I policies and actions. In addition, a complex landscape is a major barrier for a more effective communication on R&I achievements towards national policy-makers, stakeholders and citizens. This overall view on the partnership landscape does not contradict the positive impacts of the individual initiatives and their achievements of objectives. Figure 1 summarises these negative side effects pinpointing to a number of issues.

Figure 1: The need for rationalisation of landscape of R&I partnerships



### 3 Rationalisation approaches

The identified objectives of the required rationalisation imply that different approaches for rationalisation are needed in order to address the dimensions described in figure 1. These different approaches need, to a certain extent, to follow the hierarchical criteria levels developed in the 'criteria' issue paper, as both parts are closely related.

The following three levels of rationalisation approaches can be identified:

- a. Rationalisation at the level of the overall European R&I policy framework;
- b. Rationalisation at the level of the partnership approaches;
- c. Rationalisation at the level of the thematic priority / intervention area.

The landscape of R&I partnerships at the beginning of the next FP will include both new and renewed partnerships. All partnerships funded under the next Framework Programme need to be adapted to the revised policy approach, notably being objective- and impact-driven and not instrument-driven. As a consequence, a comprehensive **mapping analysis** of the partnerships that will still be operating at the beginning of the next FP is required, against the clusters and intervention areas of the future FP, and against the three partnership approaches presented in chapter 3.2. This is considered as one important starting point for discussing rationalisation of the R&I partnership landscape at the three levels described above. The results and conclusions of the mapping analysis should also feed the strategic coordinating process.



The following sections will expand on the different levels before presenting some corresponding rationalisation strategies in the following chapter.

### 3.1 Rationalisation at the overall level of the European R&I policy framework

The rationalisation of the overall partnership landscape needs also to ensure coordination and coherence among initiatives and regular FP calls, and between initiatives and EU/national and regional priorities. This will result in a better complementarity between national and EU R&I policies. While the diversity between MS and ACs with respect to R&I policy governance, history and legal framework is well suited for the particular national socio-economic context, it becomes a substantial challenge when these diverse systems have to work together and achieve a higher degree of alignment/integration, as in the case of R&I partnerships. Consequently, the set-up of R&I partnerships should be limited to cases, where the (potential) future benefits clearly outweigh the added complexity of cooperation. The starting point at both levels, national/regional and EU, should always be the strategic policy objectives.

In addition, an overall 'umbrella' brand for R&I partnerships should be established and communicated in order to increase visibility of the partnership landscape and contribute to a better 'Corporate Identity' between the partnerships in Europe and thus increase the visibility of the ERA in policy debates.

### 3.2 Rationalising at the level of partnership approaches

The second level of rationalisation addresses the level of the partnership approaches. Figure 2 shows the current variety of forms of partnership and labels used in Horizon 2020.

Figure 2: The current landscape of R&I partnerships approaches and initiatives

Partnership approaches	Public-public partnerships (P2P)	Public-private partnerships (PPP)	EIT-KICs*	FET Flagships**
Implementation modes	ERA-NET-Cofund, EJP Cofund, Article 185, Joint Programming Initiative (JPI)	Contractual Arrangement (cPPP) Article 187	H2020 Grant agreements for different types of actions Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA)	
Currently active R&I Partnerships (Horizon 2020)	a) ERA-NETs: ~70 b) EJP Cofund: 5 c) Article 185: 6 d) JPIs***: 10	a) JUs: 7 (+HPC) b) cPPPs: 10	a) KICs: 6 (+ 2 until 2020)	a) FET-Flagships: 2 (+Quantum)
Financial contribution from H2020, estimated)	<b>2.500 M€</b> (3,1% of H2020 budget)	<b>13.450 M€</b> (17,5% of H2020 budget)	<b>2.400 M€</b> (3,1% of H2020 budget)	<b>1.000 M€</b> (1,3% of H2020 budget)

\*EIT-KICs: Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT)

\*\*FET-Flagships: Flagships of the Future and Emerging Technologies programme (FET)

\*\*\* JPIs: Joint Programming Initiatives are no EU level instruments but included here as they receive EU support via ERA-NETs and/or CSAs

An overall analysis of the existing partnership landscape allows identifying three distinct forms of partnerships:

- Co-programmed partnerships between the EU, Member States/ Associated Countries, and/or other stakeholders, based on Memoranda of Understanding or contractual arrangements with partners (current cPPP model);
- Co-funded partnerships with a blending (more or less centralised) of EU and national public and/or other R&I funding sources [current ERA-NETs, JPIs (via ERA-NETs and CSAs) EJP, FET Flagships model];
- Institutional partnerships (based on Art. 185 or 187 TFEU, and EIT regulation for KICs).

All currently active R&I partnerships can be grouped within these three forms of partnerships and thus a significant rationalisation with respect to the funding approaches can be achieved.

### **3.3 Rationalisation at the level of thematic priority/intervention area**

As agreed at the second meeting of the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group, the 'health' topic was analysed in more detail by ERA-LEARN, in order to identify potential rationalisation options. The analysis included the following dimensions (for more details please see Annex 1).

- Identification of all 'health' related R&I partnerships since FP6, including P2Ps, PPPs, EIT/KICs and FET Flagships;
- Analysis of joint actions undertaken by the R&I partnerships;
- Analysis of the stakeholder composition of the R&I partnerships;
- Analysis of 'rationalisation' in the 'health topic'.

The analysis of the Health challenge allows for a number of more general findings, which are the following:

1. Publicly available information does not, in many cases, allow for a robust analysis and comparison between the existing partnerships, notably because there has never been the intention and the requirements towards the partnerships to do so;
2. The scale and scope of the existing partnerships differ substantially, between 5 and 1638 Million € Union contribution and between 15 and 150 partners;
3. A large number of partnership initiatives is very focussed on the Health challenge, there are however a substantial number of other 'horizontal' partnerships that also fund projects related to the health challenge (e.g. EMPIR, Eurostars).
4. The timing of the existing partnerships is not synchronised, notably because there has never been the intention or requirement for a better synchronisation;
5. The granularity of the topics differs wildly – from very general topics, e.g. KIC health, to rather specific topics such as Human Biomonitoring or cardiovascular diseases;
6. The core activity of the classical PPPs (IMI) and P2Ps (EDCTP, AAL, ERA-NETs) continues to be joint calls for proposals resulting in transnational R&I projects. However, additional and often complementary activities begin to appear that can be seen as inspiration;
7. The ERA-NET 'population' of R&I partnerships underwent some changes. Only very few networks have been constantly active since FP6. The overall number of active networks in the health area has been rather stable from FP6 to H2020, but some networks have been discontinued while other networks started on different thematic topics (however with, in general the same population of research funders and stakeholders in calls and projects, as well as similar TRLs). For other partnerships the population is too small to draw findings;
8. Joint activities between R&I partnerships remains very limited, with some notable exceptions, such as common joint calls between different partnerships and/or organisation of joint events.

These findings will support the development of rationalisation strategies also beyond the specific features of the 'health' field.

#### 4. Strategies for rationalisation of the partnership landscape

The analysis presented earlier distinguished between rationalisation approaches at three distinct levels. This allows for the deduction of a number of rationalisation strategies at a more refined level. These strategies will need to be built on a robust mapping exercise according to the distinct levels of forms of partnerships identified earlier (co-programmed, co-funded, institutional) and typical R&I intervention models matching different policy objectives. As a result of the mapping exercise, all operational partnerships during the starting phase of the next FP, both new and renewed ones, should be assigned to one of the three forms of partnerships.

In line with the rationalisation approaches described in chapter 3, the following sections present some possible, more concrete, strategies on how the rationalisation approach can be addressed. The rationalisation strategies aim at substantially improving coherence, coordination and thus complementarity within the R&I partnership landscape and between the partnerships and other parts of the European R&I policy landscape, with distinct objectives:

- Rationalisation of the overall European R&I partnership landscape: ensure optimal coherence and coordination among the R&I partnerships and between R&I partnerships and the EU R&I policy framework, notably the FP, as well as national policies and priorities;
- Rationalisation of partnership approaches: ensure a simplified system of distinct forms of partnerships, with clear intervention logics, supporting the set-up and implementation of partnerships on the basis of the guiding principles defined in the ‘criteria’ paper;
- Rationalisation at the level of the thematic priority/intervention area: ensure a sufficient scale and scope of partnerships initiatives and limit the number and budget of partnership initiatives per intervention area (and identify potential for partnerships spanning across intervention areas and/or clusters), while ensure flexibility and complementarity between the R&I partnerships and the other FP actions in the respective field.

##### 4.1 Rationalisation strategy on the level of the overall policy landscape

R&I partnerships represent only a part of the overall EU R&I policy framework and their ‘function’ differs from other elements such as indirect Research and Innovation Actions (RIA), European Innovation Council (EIC) or European Research Council (ERC) actions. Due to their direct link to other R&I stakeholders outside a narrowly framed science (and sometimes science/industry) community, notably national governments and industry associations, they have a different contribution to the ERA than other elements of the R&I policy framework. Moreover, R&I partnerships are not and will not be suited to all R&I related challenges and policy priorities. So rationalisation should also entail a continuous effort to ensure that R&I partnerships should be strictly limited to cases where other forms of public intervention for R&I (i.e. regular FP calls) would not be able to achieve similar results. Rationalisation should also entail ensuring relevant cooperation of existing partnerships with other connected initiatives beyond the classical partnerships, namely Research Infrastructures.

**Consequently, the main rationalisation strategy at the level of the overall policy landscape is to ensure that R&I partnerships are really necessary as part of the intervention of the Framework Programme, and that other policy instruments with less additional complexity would not be able to achieve similar results. In other words, in case a partnership is considered, the additional complexity needs to be justified by the added benefits and impact.**

In more concrete terms the strategy would be:

- Make a ‘counterfactual’ by assuming that the topic would be solely addressed via other FP action, notably classical calls for proposals under the Work programme or solely be handled at MS level (via e.g. EUREKA) and identify pros and cons;
- Demonstrate that the topic fits the nature of the FP – partnerships are not supposed to implement legal obligations nor become ‘permanent’ programmes, but instead need to ensure

high-risk R&I<sup>5</sup> and relevance during a specific, limited timeframe (otherwise they should rather be funded through other EU programmes);

- Ensure in the design and implementation of future partnerships coherence, coordination and complementarity with related initiatives and the Framework Programme, with clear interfaces between R&I partnerships, as well as between the partnerships and other FP actions within the cluster/intervention area, including Research Infrastructures. This should be done partly within the R&I partnerships, partly through additional coordination structures, which might need to be put in place, in particular to encompass the existing initiatives as well.

The most important moment in time is the launch of the new FP at the beginning of the next MFF, as many R&I partnerships will have a duration which equals more or less the MFF. This is the time when the launch of new partnerships will be most intensive due to new emerging topics. The major phasing-out will most likely start only towards the end of the next FP. **Proposals for new partnerships after the launch of each FP, must always take into account the whole package of ongoing partnerships and cannot focus only on the new individual proposals.**

#### 4.2 Rationalisation strategy at the level of partnership approaches

The main strategy for rationalisation at the level of the partnership approaches is the elaboration of clear intervention logics for future forms of partnerships and thus new and renewed partnerships, with a limited toolbox supporting their implementation. This aims to:

- Identify those partnerships that do not fit or only fit to a minor degree to the intervention logics of the form of partnerships and that should not be pursued as R&I partnership;
- Identify those partnerships that fit better to another form of partnerships (re-positioning);
- Achieve a more homogenous group of R&I partnerships within each form of partnerships.

As presented in chapter 3.2, an overall analysis revealed three distinct forms of partnerships, notably 'co-programmed', 'co-funded' and 'institutional'. A corresponding toolbox entails consequently the following instruments:

**a) An approach for Co-programmed R&I partnerships** that would be based on MoUs and/or contractual arrangements specifying the partners' commitment to invest in the area and coordinate programmes and activities. The partners implement their programmes, activities and investments under their responsibility while the Commission implements its part in the Work Programme with calls for proposals, based on indicative commitments for ring-fenced budgets.

**b) An instrument for Co-funded R&I partnerships**, in cases where the implementation of the programme is better realised at the level of the R&I partnership with integration of all activities into a single programme. The co-fund instrument must be simple and flexible in order to allow catering the diverse needs and interest from R&I partnerships, from direct research activities, activities of networking, and of coordination between participating programmes. If required to achieve the objectives of the partnerships, it can include calls for proposals to provide financial support to third parties in the form of grants, prizes, as well as investments or loan guarantees;

**c) Institutional R&I Partnerships**, based on Article 185 and 187 of the TFEU, are the most complex in preparation and will be implemented in cases where a political validation outside the comitology is necessary via a Decision by Council (and the European Parliament for Art.185), and where other forms of R&I partnerships would not fulfil the objectives or would not generate the necessary impacts (due to e.g. long-term perspective, international visibility).

**d)** In addition, it is important to provide a **coordination support instrument for R&I partnership without co-funding** of research activities (CSA type), that would allow for a better coordination between funding organizations from MS/ACs, private funding institutions and/or industry associations. The objectives of such approach is to allow for:

- the emergence of new cooperation networks in Europe and beyond;

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<sup>5</sup> R&I related risks refer here to the justification of a public intervention.

- the survival of existing cooperation networks that do not reach sufficient size in order to be implemented as Co-funded R&I partnership, but that may continue to contribute to the ERA;
- strengthening joint actions and joint programme development and implementation between MS/ACs, private funding organizations and/or industry in a more flexible and tailor-made way than possible under the EU's legal framework;

#### **4.3 Rationalisation strategies at the level of intervention area/thematic priority**

Rationalisation strategies at this level include a number of opportunities, which are mirrored against the main findings of the analysis of the 'health' field and other examples that have been discussed in the Working Group, based on the landscape of initiatives against their lifetime already provided by ERA-LEARN for all areas. Some of the presented rationalisation strategies can be applied already during the implementation of the existing partnership, while other strategies can only be applied to new and/or to partnerships to be renewed. Consequently, the rationalisation effect might not occur immediately but over time.

In more concrete terms, the following strategies should be applied:

- 'Think Big': avoid many partnerships in one single FP intervention area to avoid the scattering of resources and thus ensure an appropriate reduced level of granularity for R&I partnerships in one intervention area/thematic priority and explore options to merge previous partnerships that may need to be renewed, but would result in a higher degree of granularity if all were to be continued by themselves (critical issue: trade-off between coherence and community building);
- Use always the easiest form of partnerships able to achieve the desired policy objectives. Easiest can be defined as lowest possible level of administrative burden for EU, countries, as well as beneficiaries and least possible weight in governance arrangements to manage the funding approach;
- Ensure that the next generation of R&I partnerships are well complementary to other FP actions with respect to target groups, participation patterns of low R&I intensive MS/ACs, envisaged socio-economic impacts and joint actions supported by EU funding.
- Finally, partnerships have the potential to play crucial role in implementing future Missions, which are meant to mobilise large resources in Europe and abroad with a view to fulfil their ambitious objectives.

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