NTNU Input Note

on the

European Innovation Act

Input note – European Innovation Act

NTNU welcomes the increased focus on facilitating innovation and the utilization of results from research and education and looks forward to the forthcoming publication of the European Innovation Act. In this regard, NTNU also supports the views expressed in the input note from CESAER1 . In addition, NTNU would like to highlight the following important perspectives:

1. **Clear Guidance and Good Practices to Drive Alignment Across Europe**

Rationale:

To increase innovation capacity, it is important to simplify the regulatory framework and reduce burdens. It is equally important that the regulatory framework is followed up with good guidelines that provide concrete examples of how IP can be managed, supported and exploited in light of procurement rules, state aid, export control and ethical consideration etc. Today, a cautious approach is often taken in contract regulations, so the potential for innovation is not realized. Therefore, there is a need for clear rules/guidelines.

Concrete proposals:

- Develop good and detailed **guidelines** and **examples** to give all innovators and innovation actors a **toolbox** to speed up processes and facilitate innovation. New actors are often startups and SMEs that lack the resources to elaborate on the regulatory framework. Legal unclarity also slows down the innovation processes.
- NTNU would strongly welcome measures that **provide clear IPR arrangements** and **tailored state aid guidance**, supported by EU-wide minimum definitions. Such steps would reduce fragmentation, lower costs and delays, and ensure that universities and their spinouts can fully exploit their innovation potential.

2. **Secure commercialization of research from academia**

Rationale:

Intellectual property (IP) regulations must ensure innovation from research and technologies from all TRL levels to ensure releasing the full potential of radical innovation from fundamental research as well as innovation from collaborative research. Thus, all must recognise that where collaboration builds on university-held IPR, universities may lead IP management.

Concrete proposals:

There is a need for showcasing effective regulations in consortium agreements. A possible regulation in consortium agreements would be: industry in collaborative projects with universities are given the right to negotiate license agreements that provide sufficient commercial rights to exploit and utilise university IP under fair and reasonable conditions but includes an activity obligation to ensure that IP is further developed and effectively used by the industry. **IP generated by the university in such projects remains under university management**, which ensures possibilities and encourages entrepreneurial talents in academia to generate new startups if industries involved in the project do not commercialise IP from the project.

3. **Research and Technology Infrastructures (RTIs)**

Rationale:

RTIs are pivotal in advancing Europe's scientific excellence, technological innovation and entrepreneurship. The European Commission's recent Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures emphasizes the need to strengthen and invest in this unique European ecosystem, ensuring that infrastructures remain globally competitive, more accessible, and better connected to the needs of researchers, innovators, startups and industry. Technical universities, together with RTOs, provide unique environments to test and develop breakthrough technologies under realistic conditions, testing new solutions from startups, SMEs and companies, thus fostering public-private collaboration.

Concrete Proposals:

- Establish a **European network of Innovation Testing Zones** hosted at universities and RTOs, providing adaptive regulatory environments that accelerate experimentation while ensuring safety, sustainability, and societal benefit. For example, NTNU's Norwegian Ocean Technology Center offers world-class platforms, labs and experimental infrastructures that serve as a strategic launchpad for startups, tech commercialization, and support the green transition in ocean-based industries. **Replicating and linking such hubs across Europe would maximize impact and knowledge sharing.**
- Provide funding, recognition, and strategic coordination for testing zones **co-developed with regulators and industry**, leveraging the complementary strengths of universities and RTOs.
- Promote cross-European collaboration and visibility of testing zones to enhance knowledge exchange, replication of best practices, and alignment with EU strategic priorities.

4. **Associated countries included in the implementation**

Rationale:

Associated Countries such as Norway play a relevant role in Europe's research and innovation landscape, with world-leading universities, research centres and industrial partners. Institutions like NTNU actively contribute to Europe's deep-tech and sustainability goals through substantial investments, research and innovation infrastructures and development in critical technologies, competence and talents. However, their participation in EU innovation initiatives needs be supported by a shared long-term vision, full involvement and mutual commitments.

Concrete proposals:

Guarantee full and meaningful inclusion of Associated Countries in the design, governance and access to EU innovation programmes, based on transparent and reciprocal commitments.

5. **Talent approach and skills**

Rationale:

Europe's innovation capacity depends on nurturing talents with both deep insight and interdisciplinary skills, entrepreneurial mindsets, and exposure to cross-sector collaboration. **Universities are key actors in bridging the knowledge triangle** and **embedding innovation pathways in education and training**. However, fragmentation across Member States and limited recognition of innovation skills hinder mobility and valorisation.

Concrete proposals:

- Promote **industry-linked doctoral programs, innovation-focused fellowships, and hands-on entrepreneurial training** as integral components of university curricula. Moreover, ensure students gain practical experience alongside academic learning as well as support in the development of next generation business entrepreneurs of Europe, starting from the deep-tech areas.
- **Create EU-level frameworks to formally recognize transversal and innovation-related skills**, allowing competencies to be transferable across countries, sectors, and professional contexts.
- **Support "entrepreneur-in-residence" initiatives within universities**, pairing experienced innovators with students and researchers to provide mentorship, while actively fostering diversity and inclusion in emerging innovation careers.
- **Skills and Talent in Critical Technologies and Deep Tech** – Strengthening Europe's innovation power requires a strong emphasis on skills and talent development in emerging and critical technologies, including deep tech. Ensuring that students, researchers, and professionals acquire the necessary competences will be crucial to support Europe's long-term competitiveness and innovation capacity.

6. **Knowledge Triangle – bridging excellence and innovation**

Rationale:

Besides the European Innovation Council (EIC) – that has already made significant strides in fostering deep-tech entrepreneurship – the recent European Commission's proposal for FP10 also highlights the importance of the **Knowledge Triangle** as a central pillar of Europe's future competitiveness. In this context, NTNU considers it essential to continue promoting initiatives that strengthen **entrepreneurial and innovation mindsets**, as well as the **technology transfer capabilities** of new talent, including students, PhD candidates, early-career researchers, and innovators.

Concrete Proposals:

- **A clear definition of the roles of existing instruments** focusing on education, innovation, and entrepreneurship—such as the EIT and University Alliances—is critical to optimize their focus, reduce overlaps, and ensure complementarity. The upcoming **FP10** negotiation provides a unique opportunity in this direction.
- **EIT – revise and update the structure of the initiative**, looking forward to a rationalisation proposal from the European Commission in 2026 to ensure a more efficient, coherent, predictable and sustainable framework that encourage long-term engagement of universities. This revision should protect the substantial investments already made within the Knowledge Triangle and safeguard the initiative's long-term impact; at the same time, it should also address and seek solutions meeting todays unsecure and unpredictable business models and excessive administrative burden.
- **University Alliances** – NTNU **welcomes the strengthening and continuation** of University Alliances, particularly those aimed at mobility across Europe through reinforcing entrepreneurial and innovation mindsets among students, PhD candidates, and early-career researchers. At the same time, we call for **careful planning** of the broader sector of education-to-innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives across Europe, adopting a holistic approach and **fine-tuning existing instruments.**

- We suggest a new innovative instrument in European R&I, namely a ***European Centre of Excellence for Research-Based Innovation***, bridging academia and industries in joint research and innovation centres in areas of significant importance for European competitiveness. The aim of the centres is **bringing new knowledge to industry** – building on long-term mutual commitments. The centres will be hotbeds for research talents and Ph.D. education and facilitate mobility and transfer of people, skills, knowledge and technology to speed up the innovation processes, facilitating a more competitive and innovative Europe.

7. **Dual-use**

Rationale:

A strategic approach to dual-use technologies is one of the core initiatives of the ongoing European Commission mandate to ensure European sovereignty. To unlock Europe's full innovation potential, it is essential to have clear and effective regulations governing how research and innovation projects with both civil and defence applications (dual-use) are handled **across and within funding instruments** such as those proposed for the future R&I Framework Programme **(FP10)** and the **Competitiveness Fund (ECF)**, particularly for areas currently covered by the **European Defence Fund (EDF)**. Such regulations are crucial to ensure strategic autonomy, avoid duplication, and facilitate smooth transitions ("spin-in" and "spin-out") between programmes without legal or administrative barriers.

Concrete Proposals:

- Define **transparent criteria and processes** for dual-use R&I projects to fast-track **transition between instruments** depending on their trajectory, ensuring **continuity** and avoiding dead ends and time-consuming bureaucracy.
- Introduce **"dual-use challenge paths"** within **FP10** and **ECF**, where projects with potential civil and defence applications can be **flagged early** and receive **tailored support** to fulfil the innovation potential for either civil or defence applications or both.
- **Harmonise compliance frameworks** – including export control, classification, and **intellectual property rules** – across funding programmes so that dual-use innovations are not hindered by conflicting regulatory requirements.
- Establish a **governance mechanism** (e.g. a **dual-use board or committee**) involving representatives from civil R&I, defence agencies, universities and industry across Member States and Associated Countries, to **review and monitor** dual-use transitions and synergies across **FP10, ECF and related funds**.
- Carefully **assess complementarities** and potential **interactions** with existing R&I and technology entrepreneurship programmes managed by **NATO**, to ensure **coherence and avoid duplication.**

Regards,

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