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Contribution of the Leibniz Association to the EU consultation regarding the White Paper on options for enhancing support for research and development involving technologies with dual-use potential, published January 24, 2024¹

The Leibniz Association supports Option 1 as preferred approach due to the reasons outlined below.

Accessibility and attractiveness of research funds

The Leibniz Association endorses Option 1 as the preferable choice for researchers and research organizations due to its clear, continuous, and reliable structure that maintains the appeal of the EU research funding programme. In contrast, Option 2 introduces complexities such as stringent security clearances and additional eligibility criteria, potentially diminishing the programme's accessibility. Option 3, while clear, would necessitate additional governance structures and complex rules, further complicating the funding infrastructure and potentially reducing the EU's attractiveness as a premier research destination. These complexities, highlighted in the white paper itself, could hinder the overall accessibility of the programme and could detract from the attractiveness of the EU as a leading research hub.

International cooperation and openness

In keeping civil and defence research separate, Option 1 ensures the full benefits of international cooperation. In contrast, Option 2, which dilutes the exclusive focus on civil research, may restrict global collaboration and exclude third-country researchers from projects. Along the practical challenges of facilitating cooperation between civil and defence research entities could stifle the openness and collaborative spirit that defines civil research and the very understanding of science in Europe. Such constraints on academic freedom could have a significant negative impact on the EU's global reputation. Consequently, restricting international cooperation could not only diminish the quality and excellence of EU-funded research but also negatively impact the EU's global competitiveness and the attractiveness of the European Research Area (ERA).

Research Careers and Framework Programme Integrity

Under Option 1 the Framework Programme can continue to maximize career opportunities for researchers through international cooperation, mobility and by ensuring that the research conducted leads to scientific publications. Option 2, with its focus on security, could impose publication restrictions, adversely affecting researchers' career prospects and the diminishing of the overall appeal of EU funding for those striving towards an academic career.

Public trust and transparency

Merging civil and defence research can have a substantial negative impact on private and academic actors in terms of public trust. The intertwining of financial sources and higher security demands could lead to transparency issues, affecting the trust and ratings of private actors as well as the public perception of universities. The danger of normalizing military research can equally undermine trust in science and academia.

¹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/ec_rtd_white-paper-dual-use-potential.pdf

Budgetary implications for different destinations

Option 2 further raises concerns about the possibility of funds designated for research to be redirected more easily towards defence (research) purposes, thereby reducing the budget available for civil research related areas. The focus on applied research under Option 2 would also mean less attention to basic research, which is however essential for ground breaking discoveries. This potential shift in funding priorities could undermine the programme's integrity and its commitment to diverse scientific inquiry.

Overall, the focus of Option 2 on security and control could fundamentally change the nature of the future Framework Programme. It risks undermining openness, inclusivity, and the programme's essential role in fostering a collaborative and innovative research environment in Europe by creating substantial loopholes that could divert research funding to other objectives. This must be rigorously avoided to maintain the integrity and objectives of the programme.

In conclusion, while each option presents its own set of challenges and ambiguities, especially concerning the practical implementation of dual-use research, the Leibniz Association strongly supports Option 1 for its clarity and alignment with the EU's values of openness and collaboration.

The Leibniz Association connects 96 independent research institutions that range in focus from natural, engineering and environmental sciences to economics, spatial and social sciences and the humanities. Leibniz Institutes address issues of social, economic and ecological relevance. They conduct basic and applied research, maintain scientific infrastructure, and provide research-based services. It advises and informs policymakers, science, industry and the general public. The Leibniz Institutes employ around 20,500 people, including 11,500 researchers. The financial volume amounts to 2 billion euros.

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