European Innovation Council



EIC Board Statement on

THE 2027 EIC WORK PROGRAMME

1. THE BOARD'S POSITIONING AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 2027 Work Programme (WP) marks the final phase for the European Innovation Council under Horizon Europe, bridging the transition to the upcoming Framework Programme, Horizon Europe 2028–2034. From the Board's viewpoint, this year must achieve dual objectives. Firstly, we must maintain stability — the EIC instruments need to remain dependable for innovators who rely on them and cannot afford any disruptions. Secondly, this presents an opportunity to make adjustments, refine, and explore concepts that could influence the program's future direction.

THROUGH THE EIC WP27, THE EIC IS EVOLVING FROM AN INSTRUMENT THAT OVERCOMES THE VALLEY OF DEATH INTO A STRATEGIC INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM THAT BUILDS AND SUSTAINS EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGICAL AUTONOMY.

The Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe 2028–2034 advocates for a standalone innovation pillar centred around the EIC, proposing an increase in its budget by approximately three and a half times. This marks the most significant endorsement the instrument has received since its inception, clearly aligning with the Board's recommendations and the Draghi competitiveness case. Currently, this proposal is under discussion by the co-legislators, and the 2027 WP will serve as crucial evidence to support this initiative.

With a renewed composition that includes twenty innovators led by a full-time President, **the Board endorses the 2027 Work Programme**, which introduces several significant shifts. It transitions three initiatives from last year out of the pilot phase into established structures, incorporates milestone-based funding within a new Challenge model, opens avenues for defence-related and dual-use innovation with a structured investment framework, and recognises the Scaleup Europe Fund as a fully-fledged instrument.

2. KEY NOVELTIES AND THE BOARD'S POSITION

1. Core instruments as a source of stability

The Board appreciates the core instruments as a stable foundation during this transition year, safeguarding innovators and ensuring a steady pipeline into Horizon Europe 2028–2034. At the same time, the Board welcomes the changes that are most needed in light of high demand and the next Framework Programme.

In particular, the Board supports the **two-stage approach in Pathfinder** to manage demand and welcomes the **single-beneficiary Transition model** for the speed, simplification, and accountability it brings, while maintaining an objective, thorough process and reinforcing Transition as a step towards commercialisation rather than collaborative research. The Board welcomes the stronger orientation of Transition towards technology, business, and market readiness. The Board will monitor Transition's implementation in 2027 against demand and pipeline progression, with implications for sizing in the next Framework Programme.

The Board also encourages the **Accelerator** to streamline applications further through shorter submissions, quicker evaluations, and enhanced technical due diligence. The **Board views STEP as a vital bridge for EIC companies entering scale-up financing and therefore advocates preserving the STEP budget.** The Board considers the EIC STEP instrument a critical bridge between the Accelerator and larger-scale growth financing, particularly in addressing the persistent €30–100 million funding gap faced by European companies developing strategic technologies.

Additionally, it celebrates the launch of the **Scaleup Europe Fund** as a clear and durable measure to fill the gap at later stages. The overarching message from the Board is that 2027 should solidify this new instrument, while reiterating that the next Framework Programme should establish a durable recycling mechanism through which proceeds from EIC Fund exits are retained for follow-on and new EIC investments, progressively strengthening the Fund's evergreen capacity.

The Board backs **AI-assisted evaluation** to manage rising application volumes, provided that human accountability, confidentiality, protection of applicants' intellectual property and data, transparency, auditability, and safeguards against bias are maintained.

2. Challenge models and ARPA-like innovation

The Board backs the proposed Challenge set as a whole. The Board reviewed and endorsed the approach for **Pathfinder and Accelerator challenges**. Moreover, this year, the EIC will complete the **first ARPA-like experiment, with milestone-based funding** representing a deliberate risk taken by the EIC to trial a new working method. Once this cycle concludes, the Board will evaluate what was successful and what requires adjustment. More broadly, the focus should be on learning from Advanced Innovation Challenges to better inform future strategies, especially given the high levels of oversubscription and the need to integrate demand more effectively. Looking ahead to Horizon Europe 2028–2034, this is also where the Board can assist in shaping a more agile approach to Challenge definition and implementation, strengthening the role of Programme Managers by giving them the increased autonomy required.

3. Continuation of a clear and durable architecture for defence and dual-Use

Under the defence mini omnibus, the Work Programme 2026 already facilitated dual-use innovation through the **Accelerator, STEP Scale Up, and Scaleup Europe Fund**. Work Programme 2027 continues the dedicated **EIC STEP Defence Scale Up call** (€10–30 million in equity) for critical defence technologies while reserving Pathfinder, Transition, and Advanced Innovation Challenges for civil applications only. The Board strongly endorses this clarity, addressing previous inquiries regarding Horizon Europe 2028–2034, and will monitor the implementation of civil, dual-use, and defence boundaries across instruments, as well as ensuring the EIC Fund is prepared to deploy equity promptly to meet defence needs. The Board welcomes the clarification of the respective roles of the EIC instruments in **supporting civil, dual-use, and defence innovation** and calls for a **clear and durable architecture** beyond 2027. The Board will assess implementation of these principles and advise on the architecture required under the next Framework Programme.

4. Business Acceleration Services (BAS)

The Board Continues to Support the BAS Services. BAS is seen as a unique and important feature of the EIC. The Board welcomes the focus in the 2027 Work Programme on being ecosystem-oriented, stimulating demand through pilot testing with buyers, and on internationalisation. The Board recommends a consolidation of the BAS components in view of the provisioned budget increase in Horizon Europe 2028–2034, to provide a stronger focus on fostering demand support to ensure maximum impact and complementarity with the market, as well as leveraging existing partnerships with a wide variety of European corporates.

5. Gender equality in deep-tech

The Board fully supports the redesign of Women TechEU and the establishment of a dedicated challenge prize in quantum for women. Next year marks the centenary of the Fifth Solvay Conference, an opportune moment to highlight women's contributions to quantum science and to make these contributions more visible. It also serves as a timely reminder of the importance of enhancing women's representation in this field.

6. Broadening Access and Ecosystem Integration

The Board welcomes measures to broaden access to the EIC through the **Pre-Accelerator, Plug-In, Fast Track,** and targeted outreach, particularly for high-potential innovators from underrepresented and less-connected European ecosystems. These routes should strengthen transitions from national and regional support to the EIC and generate measurable progression towards the Accelerator and STEP.

3. LOOKING FORWARD TO NEXT FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

Looking forward, for the next framework programme, as per the European Innovation Council Board Statement on Horizon Europe (2028–34) Negotiations, the Board emphasises the importance of strengthened Programme Manager authority and agility in Challenge definition and implementation, maintaining the integrity and consolidation of the EIC Fund architecture, ring-fenced defence and dual-use support, and commensurate budget and resources for the next framework programme.

4. CLOSING REMARKS

The 2027 Work Programme is a bridge. It consolidates effective strategies and validates new initiatives. The Board is committed to advocating for simplification, accountability, late-stage capital, proportionate economic security, and rigorous end-user focus. The EIC Board will continue to advise the Commission, monitor progress, and help shape the next Framework Programme. Its mission is clear: to ensure the EIC empowers the breakthroughs that will define Europe's competitive and strategic future. The EIC Board will continue to advise the Commission on the implementation of the priorities outlined in this Work Programme statement and in its statement on Horizon Europe (2028–34) negotiations, monitoring progress against the commitments required for a seamless transition.

EIC Board

Brussels, September 2026