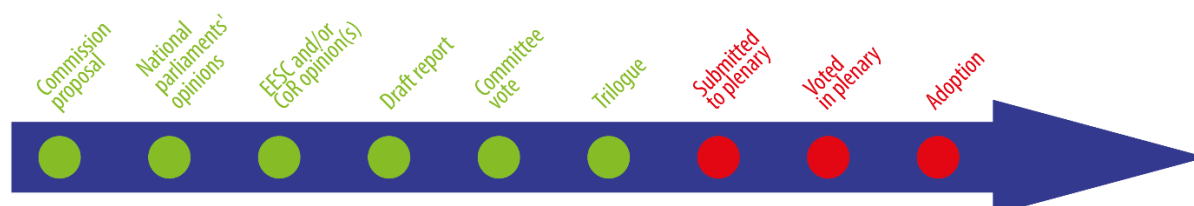


Continuation of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area

OVERVIEW

In 2023, the Commission adopted a proposal for a decision of the Parliament and of the Council amending Decision (EU) 2017/1324, to ensure the EU's continued participation in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) under Horizon Europe. A partnership between the EU and 19 states, including 11 EU Member States, PRIMA seeks to build research and innovation capacities, and to develop knowledge and common innovative solutions for sustainable agro-food systems and integrated water provision and management in the Mediterranean area. PRIMA is funded by the EU (€220 million from Horizon 2020, to be paid by December 2024), and the participating states (the same amount or more, to be paid by 2028). The proposal provides another €105 million of funding to PRIMA from the EU and as much or more from the states. It also aligns PRIMA's funding cycle with Horizon Europe's (2021-2027), yet preserves PRIMA's goals and implementation logic. The Council adopted its negotiating mandate in September 2023. Based on the ITRE committee's report, the co-legislators reached a provisional political agreement on 13 December 2023. The agreed text extends the list of participating states to include an additional EU Member State, Bulgaria.

Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision (EU) 2017/1324 as regards the continuation of the Union's participation in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) under Horizon Europe		
<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Industry Research and Industry (ITRE)	COM(2023) 359 28.6.2023
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Paolo Borchia (ID, Italy)	2023/0207(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Maria da Graça Carvalho (EPP, Portugal) Lina Gálvez Muñoz (S&D, Spain) Valter Flego (Renew, Croatia) Jordi Solé (Greens/EFA, Spain) Ladislav Ilčić (ECR, Croatia) Sandra Pereira (The Left, Portugal)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Final first-reading vote in plenary	



Introduction

On 28 June 2023, the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a decision amending [Decision](#) (EU) 2017/1324 and seeking to ensure the continuation of the EU's participation in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) under Horizon Europe.

PRIMA was established in 2017 on the basis of [Article](#) 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which allows the EU to participate in research and development undertaken by several Member States, while implementing the multiannual framework programme. Horizon Europe's legal basis defines such public-public partnerships as 'institutionalised partnerships'.

PRIMA seeks to build research and innovation capacities and develop knowledge and common innovative solutions for sustainable agro-food systems and for integrated water provision and management in the Mediterranean area, through transnational research and innovation collaborative activities. The objectives are twofold: on the one hand, the initiative is designed to create and disseminate knowledge and innovative solutions to improve water management and the sustainability of agro-food systems across the area. On the other, the initiative seeks to reinforce cooperation among the participating states, especially among those that are not Member States of the European Union.

Existing situation

PRIMA is one of two running institutionalised partnerships¹ launched on the legal basis of Article 185 TFEU mentioned above, the other initiative being the [European Partnership on Metrology](#), adopted under [Decision](#) (EU) 2021/2084 (25 participating states, including 24 Member States).

PRIMA programming is based on a strategic research and innovation [agenda](#), which is then translated into annual work plans. Three kind of activities are organised: i) transnational research and innovation collaborative projects under the rules of participation of Horizon 2020; ii) transnational research and innovation collaborative projects under the rules for participation of the relevant funding agencies of the Participating States; and iii) other relevant activities funded by the participating states. The implementation of the initiative is entrusted to a dedicated implementation structure, pursuant with Article 26(2)b) of [Regulation](#) (EU) 1291/2013 establishing Horizon 2020. In this case, this is a [not-for-profit foundation](#), established under Spanish law.

Since the adoption of the abovementioned 2017 decision and the launch of the dedicated implementation structure, PRIMA has adopted six annual work plans, each year from 2019 to 2023. Three main thematic areas cut across the funded activities: a) integrated and sustainable management of water for arid and semi-arid Mediterranean areas; b) sustainable farming systems under Mediterranean environmental constraints; and c) sustainable Mediterranean food value chains for regional and local development. Starting from the 2019 annual work plan, an additional thematic priority has been added, the 'water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus', in an attempt to facilitate interdisciplinary activities.

According to the European Commission's interim [evaluation](#) of PRIMA and the accompanying staff working [document](#) that was based on an outsourced study conducted in 2022 but was not published at the time of the adoption of the proposal,² PRIMA funded 168 transnational collaborative projects between 2018 and 2021, 53 of which are funded by the EU contribution, in line with the requirements set by the decision.

Overall, the available data on the implementation of PRIMA activities signal the following trends:

- the success rate of PRIMA calls funded by the EU contribution (reported as 'section 1' in the figure below) are significantly several times lower (in a range of between 2 and 6.5 %) than the average success [rate](#) in Horizon 2020 (11.9 %); this is signalled by

Member States and research and innovation actors as one of the main problems of the programme;

- the average EU contribution to each PRIMA-funded project corresponds to €2.15 million, with an average of 11.25 partners per project, compared with an average of €1.38 million for an average of 5.36 partners per project for Horizon 2020 as a whole. While 29.1 % of the participants are for-profit legal entities, no data are available on the share of small and medium-sized enterprises among this group. A little under 93 % of the projects have been coordinated by a legal entity established in an EU Member State. Unfortunately, no aggregate data are available regarding the technological maturity levels of the programmed activities.

Whereas a low success rate is likely to put partners off taking part, especially those from the EU, the small size of the EU contribution per participant is not conducive to facilitating the investments needed to develop either new knowledge or solutions in line with the sustainable transformation of agro-food and water management.

As for the outcomes of the projects, the interim evaluation of PRIMA notes that no project had been finalised by the time of the evaluation.

Parliament's starting position

In its [resolution](#) of 8 July 2021 on a new European research area for research and innovation, the Parliament identified PRIMA as one of the initiatives that should be harnessed in synergy with other EU funding instruments relevant for research and innovation.

In its [resolution](#) of 6 April 2022 on a global approach to research and innovation, Parliament called on the Commission to assess the opportunity to expand the EU contribution to PRIMA to bolster the development of joint innovative solutions for the Mediterranean, in the scope of PRIMA's objectives.

Preparation of the proposal

The proposal was informed by an [interim evaluation](#) of PRIMA, laid out in an external study on the period from the inception of PRIMA in 2017, until March 2022. It concludes that, so far, PRIMA is on its way to achieving its objectives, as listed below:

- 1 the formulation of a long-term, common, strategic agenda in the area of agro-food systems, to make them sustainable, and in the area of integrated water provision and management;
- 2 the orientation of relevant national research and innovation programmes towards the implementation of the strategic agenda;
- 3 the involvement of all relevant public and private sector actors in implementing the strategic agenda by pooling knowledge and financial resources to achieve the necessary critical mass;
- 4 the strengthening of the research and innovation funding capacities and of the implementation capabilities of all actors involved including SMEs, academia, non-governmental organisations and local research centres.

The achievement of the first objective is substantiated by the adoption of the strategic research and innovation agenda mentioned above. As for the other objectives, the elements provided do not allow the level of achievement to be checked. This is the case for the alignment of the relevant national research and innovation programmes with the strategic agenda. No qualitative element is provided to capture specific changes in the relevant programming by the participating states.

As for the pooling of financial resources, the data provided highlight the positive leverage effect of the EU contribution, which attracted a higher contribution by the participating states. However, the main share of this contribution corresponds to the activities under the national programmes of the participating states, which might include transnational projects, but which are not subject to

Horizon 2020 rules of participation. As for private sector participation, whereas private for-profit legal entities represent under 20 % of beneficiaries, more than 80 % of them qualify as small and medium-sized enterprises.

Last but not least, the interim evaluation does not refer specifically to the impact of PRIMA on the strengthening of research and innovation funding capacities. Furthermore, the Commission reports that the interim evaluation took place before the finalisation of the first projects funded. Given the publication of the first annual plan in 2018, and the time to grant of 9 months, it is surprising that the early projects implemented were not completed by March 2022, suggesting these projects' duration was over 36 months.

The interim evaluation stresses the positive role of PRIMA in scientific diplomacy in the Mediterranean area. However, it does not provide any evidence of such an effect. In 2019, the fourth ministerial conference of the [5+5 Dialogue](#) (a regional forum composed of 10 western Mediterranean participating states: five EU Member States (Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal), together with Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia) issued a [statement](#) on strengthening cooperation in research, innovation and higher education to promote sustainable economic growth, social inclusion and create new opportunities for young people in the western Mediterranean region. The statement supports PRIMA, and outlines cooperation initiatives among the members of the dialogue to reinforce their participation.

The changes the proposal would bring

The [proposal](#) amends the above-mentioned [Decision \(EU\) 2017/1324](#) establishing PRIMA. It is composed of three articles, with Article 1 containing all the amendments.

Essentially, the proposed amendments update certain provisions of the 2017 decision on the Horizon Europe legal framework, while leaving unchanged the main features of the rules for participation, namely the geographical balance in the consortia. Partnerships should be constituted of at least three legal entities established in three different participating states, including one EU Member State, and one other participating state (from the southern shore of the Mediterranean).

Article 1(3) amends Article 3(1) to include a new indent b), which provides for the Union contribution to PRIMA of an additional amount of €105 million from Horizon Europe. This amendment also specifies that the additional amount might be increased by contributions from associated third countries, provided that such an increase would be matched by contributions from the participating states.

Article 1(12) would include a new article 11a) on access to results and information on proposals in the Decision to reinforce the reporting obligations of the PRIMA foundation towards the Commission. This new article would make it mandatory for the PRIMA foundation to provide to the Commission with 'all information related to the indirect actions it funds...', including the information included in the submitted proposals'.

Article 1(14) provides for PRIMA monitoring to be included, in accordance with the Horizon Europe legal basis, in particular regarding the monitoring of the European partnerships.

Last but not least, the proposal does not comply with several specific requirements on European institutionalised partnerships laid out in the legal basis for Horizon Europe. [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/695](#) (the Horizon Europe Regulation) sets a minimum of two requirements for the adoption of such partnerships:

- Article 10(1) of the Horizon Europe Regulation states that 'institutionalised European Partnerships shall be implemented only where other parts of the Programme, including other forms of European Partnerships, would not achieve the objectives or would not generate the necessary expected impacts'. The interim evaluation presented above offers no such counterfactual assessment;

- Article 10(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation states that partnerships funded under Horizon Europe must 'have a clear life-cycle approach, be limited in time and include conditions for phasing-out the Programme funding'. Such considerations were not included in the PRIMA interim evaluation.

Advisory committees

On 20 September 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an [opinion](#) on the continuation of the Union's participation in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) under Horizon Europe, supporting the initiative and its continuation, without adding any specific comments.

National parliaments

The deadline for the national parliaments' [submission](#) of reasoned opinions on the grounds of subsidiarity was 13 October 2023. No reasoned opinions were submitted.

Stakeholder views³

The Commission conducted a call for [evidence](#) between September 2022 and October 2022. Only [10 contributions](#) were submitted in writing, from Finland, France and Spain. Among them, the French research agency praised PRIMA's objectives, while two French researchers insisted on the administrative complexities faced by participants. Spanish respondents, including a research organisation and a business, supported the initiative as a good opportunity for multidisciplinary projects in the Mediterranean.

Legislative process

In the Parliament, the file was referred to the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). Paolo Borchia (ID, Italy) was appointed rapporteur. He published his [draft report](#) on 20 September 2023. While supportive of the initiative and of the proposal, he suggested a small number of targeted amendments. One of them would specify that the evaluation of PRIMA would be based on the legal bases of Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe respectively, to mirror the existence of the two programmes in the Union contribution. Another amendment would seek to ensure that Parliament is provided with the same information as the Commission concerning reporting by the PRIMA foundation. This amendment is interesting in the sense that it might constitute a precedent to facilitate Parliament's access to data relating to the implementation of the EU framework programme for research and innovation.

On 28 November 2023, the ITRE committee adopted the final [report](#) with 51 votes in favour, 2 against, and 2 abstentions. The report supports the Commission proposal by providing a clarification both regarding the role of the Commission in assessing the participating states' financial contributions and regarding the framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the initiative. The report proposes amending Article 4 (on the conditions for the Union financial contribution to PRIMA) to specify that following the assessment of the participating states' compliance with their commitments, the Commission should involve both them and the PRIMA implementing structure, as necessary, before resorting to the measures provided for in Article 9 (on the termination, reduction or suspension of the Union financial contribution). This is expected to strike a balance between protecting the EU's financial interests and ensuring the continuity of the initiative. The report also amends Article 14 on monitoring and evaluation, by extending its scope to the continuous monitoring of the initiative, including through the evaluation of the success rates of the initiative. An amendment also provides for an interim evaluation of PRIMA by 31 December 2025 and a final evaluation by 31 December 2031, in line with the timetable of the interim and final evaluations of Horizon Europe in accordance with Article 52 of [Regulation](#) (EU) 2021/695. The report also includes recitals to specify that PRIMA should optimise its programming by ensuring

complementarities with other initiatives funded by Horizon Europe, and by enhancing synergies with other EU funding programmes.

In the Council, the file was referred to the Working Party on Research. On 30 September 2023, Coreper agreed on the Council's negotiating [mandate](#). The latter reflects the agreement among Member States to ensure PRIMA continuity until 2027, Horizon Europe's last year of operation. It also highlights the Member States' commitment to scientific diplomacy in the Mediterranean area around common challenges such as climate change and food sustainability. It also extends the list of the participating states to an additional EU Member State, Bulgaria.

On 13 December 2023, the co-legislators reached a provisional [agreement](#) during their first trilogue meeting. The agreed text features the inclusion of Bulgaria as a participating state and some of the amendments included in the Parliament report. More specifically, these are i) the requirement for the Commission to assess the fulfilment of the participating States' commitments and then to take appropriate measures, involving the participating states and the PRIMA implementation structure as necessary; and ii) the requirement for the alignment of the timetable for PRIMA's interim and final evaluations with the timetable for Horizon Europe's interim and final evaluations. A new Article 11 point (a) in the agreed text would allow the relevant participating states' authorities to access the data on the indirect actions funded by PRIMA, as well as the data on the contributions and results of the beneficiaries of such actions, on a non-commercial and non-competitive basis. A new Recital 4a) also invites PRIMA to harness a future revision of its strategic agenda in order to consider a potential broadening of the scope of its objectives to research and innovation in the areas of energy and climate, without prejudice to Article 10(2) point (c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695.

The agreed text now needs to be endorsed by the Council and then the ITRE committee, before it then passes to final adoption, first in Parliament's plenary session and then in the Council.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Evroux C., [Upcoming interim evaluation of Horizon Europe](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2023.

Evroux C., [The EU's global approach to research and innovation](#), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2023.

OTHER SOURCES

European Parliament, [Partnership for research and innovation in the Mediterranean area \(PRIMA\): continuation of the Union's participation](#), Legislative Observatory (OEIL).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Article 10(1)c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/695 provides the following definition of institutionalised European partnerships: 'participation in and financial contribution to R&I programmes undertaken by several Member States in accordance with Article 185 TFEU or by bodies established pursuant to Article 187 TFEU, such as Joint Undertakings or by the EIT's KICs in accordance with the EIT Regulation (Institutionalised European Partnerships)'.
- ² Evaluation [study](#) on the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation for addressing Global Challenges and Industrial Competitiveness – Focus on activities related to the green transition – RTD/2021/SC/023 - Interim Evaluation of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), prepared by independent experts from a consortium including Technopolis, the Austrian Institute for Technology, Kerlen, Fraunhofer, Science Metrix and ZSI Center for Social Innovation.
- ³ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'European Parliament supporting analysis'.

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