



Building the Next Generation of Institutionalised European Partnerships for Systemic Transitions

CLIC Innovation feedback on the Call for Evidence for the Single Basic Act for Joint Undertakings

1. Introduction

CLIC Innovation is a Finnish open innovation cluster that has facilitated industry-driven research, development and innovation collaboration since 2007. CLIC brings together leading industrial companies, SMEs, universities and research organisations to create new business opportunities in bioeconomy, circular economy and sustainable energy systems.

Through nearly two decades of ecosystem building and active involvement in several European partnership models, including institutionalised, co-programmed and co-funded partnerships, we have gained practical experience of their complementary strengths, governance approaches and implementation challenges. This gives us a cross-partnership perspective rather than the view of any single partnership or stakeholder group.

We welcome the European Commission's initiative to prepare a new Single Basic Act for Joint Undertakings and to further develop the future architecture of European Partnerships under the next Framework Programme. We support the Commission's ambition to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, resilience, sustainability, strategic autonomy and industrial leadership, as well as its emphasis on improving innovation-to-investment pathways, accelerating deployment, increasing synergies between partnerships and simplifying the overall landscape.

In our view, the strategic objectives behind this agenda are closely interconnected and point to the need for a clearer organising principle for future European Partnerships. Rather than being defined by individual sectors or technology domains alone, the future partnership architecture should primarily be organised around strategically important industrial and innovation ecosystems whose shared objectives and implementation agendas are defined by the strategic transitions they are expected to deliver. Future reforms should build upon the governance capabilities, industrial ecosystems and stakeholder communities that today's partnerships have already created.

This does not imply a single model for all partnerships. Europe also needs instruments for frontier research, researcher mobility, research infrastructures, education and knowledge creation, and some partnerships may be justified by other strategic coordination needs, such as standards, metrology, safety, certification or shared data infrastructures. Our focus is primarily on partnerships that are expected to connect research and innovation with industrial implementation, investment and market uptake. For these partnerships, the specific added value of the partnership instrument lies in sustained strategic coordination and governance capacity to support system implementation.



2. The Single Basic Act should enable the next evolution of institutionalised partnerships

The new Single Basic Act should be understood as more than an exercise in legal harmonisation or administrative streamlining. It is an opportunity to define the next evolution of institutionalised European Partnerships.

Europe has built one of the world's strongest research and innovation systems. This remains a major asset. However, in several strategic areas the central challenge is shifting from technology development to system implementation.

Competitiveness, industrial decarbonisation, affordable clean energy, resilience, circularity, strategic autonomy and security of supply cannot be achieved through isolated technological progress alone. They require coordinated implementation across industrial ecosystems, infrastructure, regulation, markets, investment, skills and society.

This does not reduce the importance of research and innovation, nor does it limit R&I to technology development. It changes the context in which R&I must operate. As technologies mature and transition agendas move closer to implementation, the strategic focus increasingly shifts towards system integration, investment readiness, market creation, socio-economic understanding and implementation at scale.

The strongest institutionalised partnerships are already moving in this direction. Their value increasingly lies not only in funding research and innovation, but also in mobilising industrial ecosystems, coordinating long-term collaboration, strengthening value chains, supporting deployment pathways and improving investment confidence. The evolution of the Clean Hydrogen Partnership, including initiatives such as Hydrogen Valleys, illustrates how institutionalised partnerships can connect technology, infrastructure, industry, regions and investment within integrated implementation ecosystems. Similarly, the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking illustrates how institutionalised partnerships can mobilise bio-based value chains, investment and public-private collaboration to help sustainable bio-based solutions progress from research to deployment, including through flagship biorefineries and industrial demonstrators.

The Single Basic Act should consolidate this evolution. Future institutionalised partnerships should build on existing stakeholder communities, governance capabilities and industrial ecosystems, while strengthening the innovation-to-investment pathway and expanding their capacity for transition governance and system implementation.

3. Synchronising the conditions for system implementation

The Commission rightly identifies the need to strengthen innovation-to-investment pathways. We fully support this objective. However, innovation-to-investment should be understood as one part of a broader implementation system. Large-scale transition requires more than a sequence from research to demonstration to deployment. It requires several system conditions to be addressed and aligned at the same time.

These include:

- investment confidence;
- infrastructure development;



- demand creation;
- regulatory alignment;
- market formation;
- public and private risk-sharing;
- value-chain coordination;
- regional and national ecosystem alignment;
- standards, skills and capabilities;
- access to follow-on financing.

The added value of future partnerships lies in their ability to bring these system conditions into a shared strategic frame, identify their interdependencies and support alignment between industrial actors, research organisations, public authorities, funders and innovation ecosystems. This is particularly important where progress towards deployment and investment depends not only on technology performance, but on the synchronisation of several investments, infrastructures, policy decisions and market commitments. Hydrogen infrastructure, circular material flows, bio-based value chains and integrated industrial and energy systems all illustrate this shift from technology development to system implementation.

4. Transition ecosystems as the organising logic for partnership design

In this context, the central design question is no longer only which technologies should be supported, but which transition ecosystems require sustained coordination and governance capacity. This does not mean that technologies become less important. Technologies remain essential building blocks of Europe's competitiveness, sustainability and resilience. However, technologies are means to achieve strategic transitions, not objectives in themselves.

The strategic mandate and identity of future partnerships should therefore derive primarily from the transition they are expected to enable. A partnership should be sufficiently broad to mobilise a complete industrial and innovation ecosystem, while remaining sufficiently focused to provide strategic direction, accountability and implementation capacity.

This approach helps avoid two risks.

The first risk is excessive fragmentation into narrow technology domains that cannot mobilise the full system needed for deployment and market uptake.

The second risk is excessive aggregation into broad structures that lose strategic focus and weaken existing industrial ecosystems.

For partnerships supporting strategic transitions, streamlining should be guided by transition logic and governance capability. It should preserve strategically important ecosystem capabilities while allowing current sectoral and technological boundaries to evolve where this strengthens implementation.

5. SRIAs should evolve from technology roadmaps towards transition roadmaps

Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas are central instruments for defining the direction of European Partnerships. Their role should evolve alongside the partnerships themselves.



Future SRIAs should increasingly be organised around system-level transition challenges rather than individual technology domains. Changing partnership architectures also requires changing the questions that guide strategic agenda-setting.

A technology roadmap asks: What technologies should be developed?

A transition roadmap asks: What is needed for this strategic transition to succeed?

The second question is broader and more useful for Europe's current challenges. It still includes research and technology development, but it also brings into view demonstration, infrastructure, regulation, investment, demand creation, skills, market formation and system integration.

For example, a technology-oriented agenda may focus separately on hydrogen production, distribution infrastructure, storage or mobility applications. A transition-oriented agenda would instead ask how hydrogen and hydrogen-derived solutions contribute to wider clean energy and industrial transformation, including system flexibility, industrial decarbonisation, security of supply and competitiveness.

The same logic applies beyond hydrogen. Europe's wider industrial transformation increasingly integrates energy, circularity, bioeconomy and digital dimensions. Future roadmaps should therefore connect technologies with value chains, infrastructure, investment, regulation and market uptake.

The Single Basic Act should support this shift from technology-driven agendas towards transition-driven roadmaps.

6. Creating stronger interfaces and avoiding new silos

Partnerships should not be redesigned as if existing ecosystems did not matter. Successful partnerships have created trust, industrial value-chain engagement, deployment pathways and long-term collaboration platforms. These capabilities should be carried forward, but the boundaries around them should not be treated as fixed. As future industrial systems become increasingly integrated with energy, circular and digital systems, partnership boundaries may also need to evolve.

Different partnership models have developed complementary governance strengths. Institutionalised partnerships are strong in industrial ecosystem mobilisation, deployment pathways, market shaping and long-term industry engagement. Co-funded partnerships support the alignment of national R&I priorities, link national funding programmes and connect national and regional ecosystems. Co-programmed partnerships contribute strategic stakeholder alignment and industrial agenda-setting.

The design challenge is therefore not to choose between current partnership models, but to combine their strengths more deliberately where this supports system implementation. This does not necessarily require integrating all governance arrangements or centralising all funding streams. It requires a coherent architecture in which governance capabilities, actors and funding channels are better connected around shared transition objectives.



The key issue is the quality of interfaces between these capabilities. Clean energy and industrial transformation, circular bioeconomy and materials systems, digital transformation and the pursuit of strategic autonomy are deeply interconnected. Future partnership architectures should therefore create stronger interfaces between relevant ecosystems and avoid new silos at the level of transition pathways.

7. Partnership design should reduce complexity for applicants and implementers

Regardless of the institutional model adopted, governance and financial arrangements should simplify participation, reduce administrative burden and provide a coherent applicant experience. This is not only an administrative issue. Applicants and project implementers are the actors expected to generate the knowledge, technologies, solutions and investments needed for Europe's transitions. If the system is difficult to navigate, Europe weakens its own implementation capacity.

Different stages of innovation are naturally driven by different actors. Early-stage research is often led by universities and research organisations, while demonstrations, industrial scale-up and market implementation are increasingly industry-led. The same applicant does not travel through the whole pathway, but from the perspective of the innovation ecosystem these activities form one connected implementation journey.

Applicants and consortia often face different rules, eligibility conditions, funding intensities, reporting requirements, evaluation logics, impact frameworks and participation conditions across instruments. Some differences are justified but taken together they increase transaction costs and reduce accessibility, especially for SMEs, growth companies and new entrants.

Efforts to reduce complexity should therefore be assessed from the perspective of applicants and implementers, not only from the perspective of programme design and administration.

8. Funding interfaces should better support shared transition objectives

Member States already contribute to European research and innovation through several channels, including the EU budget and national programmes. The question is how these forms of public commitment can be better connected and made more coherent in support of shared transition objectives.

Co-funded partnerships have shown the value of connecting national R&I funding programmes and aligning Member State activities around shared priorities. However, when national participation choices, budget limitations or administrative procedures determine access to otherwise excellent projects, the system can become difficult for applicants and less effective for implementation.

Future partnership architectures should therefore improve the interfaces between EU-level transition agendas, relevant EU, national and regional funding channels, and regional innovation ecosystems. Strategic influence, commitment and responsibility should evolve together: where actors participate in shaping priorities, corresponding forms of long-term commitment and resource mobilisation should also be considered.



The objective is to ensure that public resources work together more coherently to support Europe's strategic transitions.

9. Mobilising private investment requires market confidence and aligned incentives

The Commission rightly emphasises the need to strengthen private commitment and leverage more private investment. This objective is essential, but private commitment should not be assessed through narrow financial contribution metrics alone.

Private capital follows credible market opportunities. Companies invest when there is sufficient confidence in demand, regulation, infrastructure, technology maturity, value-chain readiness and future markets. Future partnerships should therefore keep industry closely involved in shaping transition agendas and implementation priorities, as companies make many of the investment decisions needed for implementation.

Industrial companies already contribute through co-funding requirements, internal R&D, pilot facilities, demonstration infrastructure, manufacturing capabilities, deployment investments and commercial risk-taking. These contributions are financed through company revenues and private capital and often represent substantial financial exposure.

Expectations for increased industrial financial contributions to collaborative research and partnership activities must take account of intellectual property frameworks and exploitation incentives. Where such expectations involve financing research activities carried out by other partners, companies need a clear rationale and corresponding rights or strategic benefits related to the use of results. This does not imply disproportionate control over publicly supported results; it means that funding models, access rights and exploitation incentives should be designed as an integrated system.

10. Design principles for the Single Basic Act

If the Single Basic Act is to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, resilience, sustainability, strategic autonomy and industrial leadership, the future partnership architecture and the institutionalised partnerships within it should be guided by the following principles:

1. Organise the future partnership architecture around strategic transitions rather than isolated sectors or technology domains.
2. Mobilise strategically important industrial and innovation ecosystems capable of delivering system-level change.
3. Develop SRIAs as transition roadmaps connecting technology development with infrastructure, investment, regulation, demand creation, skills and market uptake.
4. Guide streamlining by transition logic and governance capability.
5. Preserve successful ecosystem and governance capabilities, while allowing current sectoral and technological boundaries to evolve where this strengthens implementation.
6. Draw on complementary governance capabilities, including industrial ecosystem mobilisation, Member State coordination, national and regional ecosystem alignment and strategic stakeholder engagement.



7. Design governance and financial arrangements to reduce complexity for applicants and implementers.
8. Strengthen interfaces between EU-level transition agendas, relevant EU, national and regional funding channels, and regional innovation ecosystems.
9. Recognise industrial commitment across the full implementation pathway, including co-funding, expertise, internal R&D, pilot and demonstration assets, manufacturing capabilities, deployment investments and commercial risk-taking.

Conclusions

Europe has built world-class research and innovation partnerships. The next step is to evolve them into partnerships capable of supporting transition governance, system implementation and industrial investment at scale.

The Single Basic Act offers an important opportunity to enable this evolution. Future institutionalised partnerships should continue to strengthen the innovation-to-investment pathway while expanding their role in supporting the coordination required for Europe's strategic transitions.

This requires a clear organising principle: the future partnership architecture should be built around strategically important industrial and innovation ecosystems whose shared objectives and implementation agendas are defined by the transitions they are expected to deliver. This evolution should build on existing partnership ecosystems and governance capabilities, not start from a blank slate.

By aligning today's partnership strengths more effectively with Europe's system-level challenges, the next generation of institutionalised partnerships can become a key governance mechanism for competitiveness, resilience, sustainability and strategic autonomy.