Editorial - Horizon 2020 represents a significant step forward

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by Carlos Moedas and Robert-Jan Smits

The European Commission is responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the EU, including drafting legislation and implementing research initiatives. Image Credit: European Union

To celebrate three decades of the European Commission, Commissioner Carlos Moedas and Director-General Robert-Jan Smits discuss its achievements and current focus, Horizon 2020.

The very first Europe-wide Framework Programme for research was launched 30 years ago to bring together expertise from across the European Community, as it was then known, and make Europe more competitive in key technologies.

Since then, the Framework Programmes have become a major part of research cooperation in Europe, growing progressively in size, scope and ambition. Their objective has also evolved from supporting cross-border collaboration in research and technology to now encouraging a truly European coordination of activities and policies. The reason for this is simple: research, technology and innovation are at the core of Europe’s economy and are vital for a successful society.

Today, Horizon 2020, the eighth Framework Programme, is the biggest and most ambitious with a budget of EUR 77 billion.

It represents a significant step forward because it brings all EU support for research and innovation together within a single programme. With Horizon 2020, research and innovation will play a vital role in European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker’s agenda to strengthen Europe’s competitiveness and boost jobs and growth, and will help us find the answers to major societal challenges such as health, climate change and energy security.
This special issue of Horizon magazine celebrates 30 years of the Framework Programmes. Through articles and interviews with key players, it tells the story of their conception and evolution, highlighting some of their major achievements through the years.

But this special issue is not an exhaustive review of the Framework Programmes – you would need far more than 44 pages to describe all the major achievements of these programmes, and do justice to the thousands of people who have contributed to their success. Nonetheless, we hope it will give you a flavour of this flagship European endeavour, which has gone from strength to strength over the last 30 years.

We would like to pay tribute to the many people who helped to make this possible, including Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who has been instrumental in shaping Horizon 2020.

And finally, we wish to acknowledge the thousands of people whose talents have turned Framework Programme funding into excellent research and new technologies and products that improve our lives. They deserve our greatest thanks.