

Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes – Minutes

11 December 2024 – 10:30am - 12:00pm GMT in London (and VTC)

1. Introduction and Welcome

The UK co-chair, as host, opened the meeting welcoming colleagues to the fourth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes (SCPUP). The UK noted that one year had passed since the UK had formally associated to Horizon Europe and Copernicus, marking a historic step in the EU-UK relationship. The UK outlined how the wider EU-UK relationship has continued to grow since then, citing recent high-level meetings. The UK noted the SCPUP meeting was an opportunity to reflect on the success of UK association to both programmes so far, and to look ahead to how these relationships can be further strengthened.

The EU thanked the UK for hosting the meeting, denoting the opportunity to take stock following the first year of UK association to Horizon Europe and Copernicus.

The co-chairs agreed the provisional agenda.

2. Update on the United Kingdom's Association to Union Programmes (Horizon Europe & Copernicus)

Horizon Europe – 2024 participation

The UK expressed thanks to the EU for working jointly to implement the engagements made in the Joint Statement of 7 September 2023. The UK noted that UK participation had decreased significantly between 2015 and 2023 but trends in 2024 are improving, highlighting that the UK's association and the joint actions to promote participation in Horizon Europe appear to be paying off. The UK is focussed on making association a success, also now the UK can participate in Programme Committees, European Partnerships and Joint Undertakings. The UK Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology's intends to meet Commissioner Zaharieva in January 2025.

The UK outlined evidence for positive early trends on UK participation and expressed confidence that with ongoing efforts, these will continue to increase. The UK noted there were some outstanding technical issues regarding use of 2023 appropriations, European Innovation Council (EIC) transition grants and Business Acceleration Services, and hopes to resolve these rapidly.

The EU noted that UK participation in Horizon Europe contributes to the EU's research and innovation priorities and outlined that while initial data shows positive trends on boosting UK participation, it is too early to draw conclusions. The EU welcomed successes so far, including the UK joining major European Partnerships such as the Chips Joint Undertaking and EuroHPC, among others. The EU acknowledged there had been issues linked to the UK's start of participation in Horizon Europe but noted that

some are clarified. For issues still under clarification, the EU will continue its efforts to ensure that UK-based researchers and entities can participate as intended, in line with the applicable rules. The EU thanked the UK for their cooperation on these matters.

Horizon Europe – exclusions

The UK expressed its desire to work constructively with the EU to address security restrictions regarding quantum and space calls which have been applied to UK under Article 22(5) of the Horizon Europe Regulation. The UK set out its view that the EU and UK are natural partners as they are both like-minded democracies facing shared security challenges who offer each other complementary capabilities. The UK noted that UK and EU researchers already cooperate on similar technologies through bilateral arrangements with Member States and through NATO and that the Draghi report identified openness towards trusted partners on research and innovation as an opportunity to improve EU competitiveness. The UK expressed hope progress could be made rapidly.

The EU explained that almost all of Horizon Europe is open to associated countries, including the majority of topics where Article 22(5) has been applied in order to safeguard EU interests, autonomy or security. However, in a small number of duly justified cases, some topics could be restricted further due to their particular sensitivity. The EU recalled the assessment process which could enable associated countries to access even these latter topics, which would be launched soon for 2025-2026.

Horizon Europe – possible future collaboration post 2027

The UK referred to its published position paper on the EU's Framework Programme 10 (FP10), which presents ideas on how a future EU Framework Programme could support competitiveness and shared objectives. The UK noted that the development of FP10 is at an early stage but highlighted that the UK is an interested and invested partner. The UK added that EU-UK collaboration is grounded in shared values and that, as an associated third country, it still intends to play a positive role in influencing a framework programme that meets shared objectives. The UK outlined its view of three key strategic priorities for FP10: excellence; openness and the continuation of proven elements of the existing framework programme.

The EU noted that discussions on the shaping of the new EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation are internal within the Commission. The EU welcomed the UK's input and statement of intent regarding the future generation of EU research programmes and highlighted the significance of the UK contribution to the Horizon Europe programme. On process, the EU outlined that the Commission is taking into account the mid-term evaluation of Horizon Europe to feed into the design of the next Framework Programme. After a proposal is put forward, it will be discussed with Member States and the European Parliament. The EU acknowledged the encouraging statement of intent from the UK to continue collaboration but clarified that the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is yet to be decided.

Horizon Europe – UK visa and health surcharge costs

The EU raised a concern regarding increasingly high costs of UK visa and health surcharges and the impact on researchers coming to the UK, including with their family members, raising the point that grants should be spent rather on research than on entry requirements. The EU noted the issue was raised at the Partnership Council in May. The EU explained that analysis of relevant data is ongoing, and raised for the record that this remains an issue of concern that EU may return to in due course.

The UK explained that the UK wants to fully support research communities and noted that visa and immigration rules are a matter of domestic policy. The UK highlighted that the UK offers a number of highly attractive routes like the Global Talent Visa, noting there seems to be increased engagement with this route and that they stand ready to work with the EU on promoting this scheme. The UK noted that visa costs for researchers can be covered by Horizon research grants and expressed the view that they do not appear to be a barrier to projects forming. The UK will keep this under review.

Copernicus – 2024 participation

The EU stated that association is going smoothly and welcomed positive collaboration. The EU explained that as of 2024 the UK can access all of Copernicus data including land monitoring as well as marine, atmosphere and climate data. The EU noted the security domain of UK participation will depend on cooperation agreed in relevant areas between the EU and UK. On access to tenders, the EU noted that UK entities can bid for contracts on the same basis as EU entities except in areas of security-related sensitivity. However, since January 2024, no such case has yet arisen.

The UK echoed the EU's positive reflections and noted positive examples of collaboration, including Commission attendance at UK Copernicus information days, also highlighting collaboration on the Sentinel 2C launch. The UK was pleased to report that the UK is now a participating state in the National Collaboration Programmes for the Copernicus Marine Service and that progress was being made to appoint national contact points to National Collaboration Programmes for other Copernicus services.

The UK raised a concern that the requirement for contract bidders from associated countries to submit a mitigation plan in the case of non-association in the next MFF could present commercial difficulties for UK companies. The UK also noted that further discussions on access to contract data would be welcome.

The EU explained that to mitigate certain risks the European Space Agency (ESA) may ask for contingency plans or alternative suppliers. The EU agreed to discuss with ESA how to ensure neutrality with a view to address non-discrimination towards third country contract bidders. The EU explained that in principle the UK was entitled to the same access to contract data as Member States.

The UK thanked the EU and both parties agreed to continue technical discussions.

3. Implementation of Financial Provisions

The EU noted the efficient collaboration between the EU and UK on the 2024 calls for funds, which had been paid successfully. The EU noted the EU and UK are in touch at technical level to clarify the amounts of the EIC fund equity exclusion. The EU noted discussions at technical level on a procedural note to address potential errors in future calls for funds. The EU explained Member States would be consulted on this, and hoped a consensus could be reached soon.

The UK referred to the Withdrawal Agreement's positive technical level working relationship and expressed the importance of having an effective technical working relationship under the TCA. The UK noted that in 2024 it had made two equal payments totalling approximately €2.48 bn, covering operational contributions to Horizon Europe and Copernicus plus a participation fee of 2%. The UK thanked the EU for working closely on this. The UK noted this exchange of information is important to ensure the UK can conduct payments in compliance with its internal financial reporting procedures.

The UK thanked colleagues in DG Eurostat for their collaboration with the UK Statistics Authority to sign in October 2024 the Memorandum of Understanding on GDP data exchanges as foreseen by Article 730 of the TCA. The UK also noted that technical conversations have been held on the deduction of the equity element of the EIC Fund.

The UK highlighted two of its key upcoming priorities. First, to aim for a full mutual understanding at technical level on adjustments under TCA Article 714(8). The UK welcomed technical engagement with DG Budget on this ahead of the first 2025 call for funds. Second, to agree on a procedural note on addressing potential invoicing errors.

The EU agreed on the importance of effective and efficient working processes, adding that opportunities to have a joint understanding in advance should be taken.

4. AOB

The EU noted that in 2020 a package of five programmes for UK association was under negotiation, which ultimately ended in 2023 with UK deciding to associate to two programmes, Horizon Europe and Copernicus. The EU noted the changed UK political context and the UK's recent plans to reset the relationship with the EU, and that the EU does not know what shape this will take yet. The EU invited reflections from the UK on whether it intended to reconsider its decision of not associating to the Erasmus+ and Euratom programmes, including ITER/F4E, and generally whether the UK had interests to collaborate in these fields.

The UK recalled that in 2020 Erasmus+ was not included among the Union programmes listed in the TCA's Joint Declaration and noted the EU's disappointment in 2023 that the UK did not associate to ITER/F4E and Euratom Research and Training Programmes. The UK confirmed there are no plans to revisit these decisions, but noted the EU's interest in enquiring about these decisions, and would review any EU proposal in these fields. The UK recalled the UK Prime Minister and the President of the European

Commission's Joint Statement of 2 October, setting out their desire more widely to deepen collaboration in a range of areas. On fusion R&D in particular, although the UK's position on ITER/F4E and Euratom Research and Training Programmes had not changed, the UK had also previously set out openness to collaboration with the EU and other international partners.

5. Closing Remarks

The EU thanked the UK for their contributions and stated that the meeting provided a good basis to carry on further cooperation and enhance existing technical work being undertaken. The EU stated they look forward to hosting the UK in Brussels for the next SCPUP meeting and look forward to continuing these meetings in friendship and partnership. There may be bumps in the road, but the EU affirmed that it sees UK participation in these programmes as a partnership and wants these programmes to be a success in generating the best possible scientific outcomes.

The UK closed the meeting thanking attendees for the constructive discussion and affirming the UK also looks forward to working with Commission colleagues over the course of the following year to progress the actions discussed and develop a strong working relationship. The UK looks forward to meeting next year to take stock of the relationship and to look ahead to future opportunities. The UK noted the Commission will publish its proposals for the next MFF in the near future and highlighted the opportunity to take forward the conversation on future collaboration when possible.

EU Delegation (34)

- EU co-chair of the SCPUP
- European Commission Officials (BUDG, SG, LS, RTD, CNECT, DEFIS)
- European External Action Service
- Delegation of the EU to the UK
- Representatives of EU Member States

UK Delegation (23)

- UK co-chair of the SCPUP
- UK Government Officials (HMT, DSIT, Cabinet Office)
- UK Mission to the European Union Officials
- Scottish Government Officials
- Northern Ireland Executive Officials
- Welsh Government Officials