

Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes – Minutes

15 December 2025 – 11:00 - 12:30 CET in Brussels (and VTC)

1. Introduction and Welcome

The EU co-chair, as host, opened the meeting welcoming all attendees to the fifth meeting of the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes (SCPUP), noting that this was also the second SCPUP meeting since the UK had associated to Horizon Europe and the Copernicus component of the Space programme.

The UK co-chair thanked the EU for hosting the meeting, denoting the opportunity to take stock following the second year of association, and calling for continued efforts on both sides to strengthen cooperation and to encourage UK researchers' participation in the programmes. The UK emphasised the shared benefits of association and its importance in view of continued UK participation in future multiannual financial frameworks (MFFs).

The co-chairs agreed to adopt the provisional agenda.

2. Update on the UK Association to Horizon Europe & Copernicus

Horizon Europe – 2025 participation

The EU noted that the UK is one of its most important partners on research and innovation, The EU noted an encouraging increase in UK applications over the last year, while acknowledging there is room for improvement on Pillars II and III. Overall participation levels appear to be similar to the last years of Horizon 2020, but they have not yet reached UK average performance levels over the 2014-2020 MFF. The UK continues to perform very strongly in Pillar I, i.e., ranking 2nd in the total number of ERC participations and 1st in MSCA participations for 2024. Under Pillar II, there remain significant gaps, but stronger participation is expected across clusters in the future. For Pillar III, the EU noted that the non-association of the UK to the EIC Equity part of the Accelerator's scheme may be a factor affecting overall participation of UK innovators.

The EU emphasised that committed collaboration and open dialogue are key to ensure smooth implementation and to secure strong UK participation: a win-win for both sides. The EU outlined certain factors that contribute to the UK's phasing-in period upon association, welcomed the active cooperation with DSIT on actions to address certain bottlenecks, and confirmed its readiness to further engage in the coming months to promote UK participation, including via targeted outreach and communication actions.

The UK reaffirmed that the EU remains a critical and strategic partner for the UK in science and technology and noted that, two years after association, a strong foundation for cooperation has been established, with shared ambition to deepen collaboration

further, particularly in critical and strategic technologies. The UK stated that maximising participation in the short term is a top priority. While UK participation appears to be improving, particularly in Pillar I, engagement is uneven across the programme, with comparatively lower participation in Pillars II and III. This partly reflects the political uncertainty surrounding the period of non-association (2021-2023), and continued efforts are needed to rebuild confidence and collaboration across research communities, especially for multi-beneficiary grants. Key priorities include reducing uncertainty around access to critical technologies, ensuring a smooth transition towards the next FP10 Programme, and pursuing targeted engagement to support stronger and more balanced UK participation across the programme.

Horizon Europe – access to Horizon Europe calls

The UK underlined the importance of ensuring strong collaboration in critical technologies. In this light, they welcomed the positive assessment of the UK's reassurances on specific safeguards, which enables UK entities to participate in Horizon Europe restricted topics. The UK referred to the Security and Defence Partnership, as well as ongoing space collaboration, as arguments in favour of participation in topics to strengthen the EU and UK critical technologies base. In general, the UK mentioned that the Article 22(5) assessment process by default provides late certainty to UK and EU entities regarding eligibility, potentially undermining confidence in collaboration in these areas.

The UK also flagged emerging barriers to UK access in select areas, including certain Joint Undertakings, notably where Horizon Europe participation is tied to participation in other Union programmes, such as InvestEU. The UK mentioned its concerns over increased barriers in future interlinkages between FP10 and the ECF (European Competitiveness Fund). Overall, the UK welcomed the progress made in these areas and expressed appreciation for the ongoing fruitful dialogue between relevant services.

The EU underlined that the UK's access to Article 22(5) restricted topics under the 2025 and 2026/2027 Work Programmes shows that the UK is a trusted partner, including in sensitive calls. The EU explained that it follows closely the possible impact of linkages between Horizon Europe and other Union programmes.

Horizon Europe –future collaboration for the next 2028-2034 MFF

The UK highlighted the need for continued trust and predictability as prerequisites to confidently work together, including with a view to FP10 (2028-2034).

The EU explained that UK input on FP10 has been carefully considered, and that some of UK's suggestions are in line with the simplification measures already put forward by the Commission. While discussions on the future MFF are ongoing and their outcome cannot be prejudged, the Commission FP10 proposal foresees a stand-alone programme allowing for the participation of associated countries, with links to the ECF. The EU expressed openness to have informal exchanges with the UK to support a smooth

transition between Framework Programmes, while noting that formal association negotiations can only take place once the legal basis for the FP10 programme is agreed by the co-legislators.

The UK welcomed the Commission proposal for FP10, including the provisions for association of third countries. The UK reiterated its enthusiasm to pursue discussions on participation if the programme provides equal and fair access and participation throughout the programme, including from the outset, and if the UK continues to identify strong value for its research community and taxpayers. The UK identified areas of alignment, in particular the role of research and innovation in driving economic growth, support for bottom-up research, coverage of the full research pipeline, and the proposed priorities. The UK also suggested reviewing the categorisation of associated countries to better reflect security alignment and reiterated concerns about potential access restrictions due to combined funding under different future Union programmes, as well as the negative impact of any significant gap between successive Framework Programmes.

Copernicus – 2025 participation and future collaboration

The EU reported positively on the UK's participation in 2025, noting that implementation is proceeding smoothly and that UK access to Copernicus products and services was extended across land monitoring, marine, atmosphere and climate change services. The EU noted that the UK now benefits from full access to the emergency management service, including rapid mapping, early warnings and post-disaster monitoring, and participates as an observer in Copernicus governance structures. UK entities are eligible to participate in procurement procedures, which are based on competitive tendering. The EU highlighted ongoing support measures to encourage participation and user uptake, including national collaboration programmes, training activities and industry outreach activities.

The UK welcomed the progress achieved and the value derived from Copernicus services, while underlining the importance of further strengthening industrial participation and long-term integration, which remains limited compared to UK ambitions in the level of participation, notably with longer-term collaboration in mind. The UK highlighted challenges related to access in certain areas, and the need for improved transparency and availability of data on industrial participation. Looking ahead, the UK requested for greater clarity on future space infrastructure plans and for further engagement on the evolution of services, procurement visibility under the current MFF, as well as affordability considerations for the next MFF.

The EU recalled that it takes time to phase in the UK's participation into a programme with long-term large-scale investments. The EU confirmed its readiness to further engage and explore solutions within the existing legal framework, including in the context of future participation.

3. Implementation of Financial Provisions

The EU noted the efficient collaboration between the EU and UK on the 2025 calls for funds, which have been paid on time, also applying a slightly revised GDP key for 2025 via the arrangement on statistical cooperation. The EU added that the prior notification on the estimated 2026 contribution was shared in August 2025, without specifying the amount of the EIC deduction. A workshop was hosted by the EU in March 2025 on certain aspects of TCA Article 714(8) to clarify the principles and mechanics of the adjustments and how they are interrelated. The EU also clarified how the EIC fund deduction would be adjusted in year N+1, namely by taking into account amounts actually transferred to the EIB but only including fund sources relevant to the basis for establishing the UK financial contribution. Both sides also took stock of attempts to agree at technical level on a procedural note to address potential errors in future calls for funds. Pending its finalisation, the Commission is ready to address any potential errors, if verified, in an open and constructive manner to correct any such inaccuracies. The EU added its openness to host another workshop at the beginning of 2026 on the relevant TCA mechanisms to be applied in 2026.

The UK responded that collaboration on these processes has become a fundamental and well-established platform for the budgetary relationship. Payments remain large in scale and technically quite complex and the strong technical working relationship has enabled both sides to implement their obligations in full compliance with both the UK and EU internal procedures, which is a huge accomplishment. The UK recognises the significant effort on both sides to maintain and improve this financial relationship. A lot of continued investment and resources will allow to continue this work.

The UK acknowledged that the TCA obligations had been implemented and expressed its appreciation for the workshop, as well as resolving the issue on appropriate treatment in relation to the elements of the EIC equity issue. The UK is keen to continue discussions on the year N+2 TCA mechanisms and expects that the financial impact of their application will be significant, highlighting the importance of achieving a mutual understanding, adding that it is in our shared interests to codify the framework for addressing possible corrections in writing as it was done successfully in the context of the Withdrawal Agreement.

4. AOB

The UK recalled that, following the EU-UK Summit in May, a common understanding was reached covering several policy areas, including the potential association to the Erasmus+ programme. The UK noted that negotiations between the EU and the UK are ongoing and clarified that, if successful, the process of association would fall within the scope of the SCPUP. The EU acknowledged that negotiations were ongoing and that both sides remain hopeful of a positive conclusion.

5. Closing Remarks

The UK thanked the EU for their contributions, noting that the meeting provided a good basis to carry on further cooperation and enhance existing technical work being undertaken.

The EU closed the meeting thanking attendees for the constructive discussion and affirming the EU also looks forward to working with UK over the course of the following year to progress the actions discussed and to continue developing a strong working relationship.

EU Delegation (28)

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

UK Delegation (19)

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