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ERRIN contribution to the Call for Evidence on the future Single Basic Act for Joint Undertakings

Input on the future of Joint Undertakings under FP10

The European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN) welcomes the European Commission's initiative to review the framework governing Joint Undertakings (JUs) in preparation for the future Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10). The review presents an important opportunity not only to simplify and streamline the institutionalised European Partnerships but also to strengthen their strategic impact, improve governance and ensure they better support innovation ecosystems across Europe.

JUs should become important instruments for delivering long-term, mission-oriented research and innovation in strategic industrial sectors. In Horizon Europe 2021-2027, they have demonstrated their capacity to support the mobilisation of public and private investment, facilitate the creation European value chains and accelerate technological development. As Europe faces growing geopolitical competition and the need to reinforce its technological sovereignty, the role of JUs will become even more important.

ERRIN believes the future JUs should evolve beyond their current model. They should become more open, more connected to regional innovation ecosystems and more closely integrated with broader EU policy objectives and funding instruments. As highlighted in ERRIN's input paper on European Partnerships under FP10 paper series, Europe will only maximise the impact of its research and innovation investments if regional and local authorities, innovation ecosystems and place-based actors are recognised as strategic partners rather than simply implementers.

ERRIN therefore welcomes the Commission's intention to review the governance, architecture, accessibility and strategic orientation of JUs. Our contribution focuses on four key cross-cutting areas where improvements are needed to maximise the impact of future institutionalised partnerships. In addition, we also propose a number of Partnership-specific recommendations.

1. Cross-cutting recommendations for the future Joint Undertakings

Strengthening policy coherence: connecting Joint Undertakings with Europe's strategic priorities

ERRIN welcomes the Commission's ambition to strengthen the strategic orientation of JUs and better align them with the European Union's priorities. ERRIN believes that future JUs should **contribute to Europe's digital and green transition, competitiveness, industrial resilience and technological leadership while maintaining sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging societal challenges.**

This strategic alignment should extend beyond individual JUs. As recognised in the Call for Evidence, future partnerships should **operate as a coherent portfolio** rather than as isolated initiatives. Greater coordination between JUs – and other European Partnerships – will help avoid duplication, exploit

complementarities and maximise the impact of European investments across strategic industrial ecosystems.

To avoid duplication and maximise impact, a coordinated approach is needed to align Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIAs), roadmaps, work programmes, facilitate knowledge exchange and support joint actions addressing cross-sectoral challenges. Cross-partnership collaboration is essential to align efforts and improve coordination across initiatives. At the same time, stronger links should be established between JUs and relevant Industrial Alliances to ensure continuity between research and innovation, industrial investment and market deployment. Industrial Alliances can play a complementary role by bringing together industrial actors, public authorities and investors to accelerate the uptake and scaling of technologies emerging from JUs. Strengthening these connections would help create a seamless innovation continuum, from research and demonstration to industrial deployment and commercialisation, while reinforcing Europe's strategic value chains and competitiveness.

JUs should systematically connect their Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas (SRIA) with relevant European policy frameworks, including the Clean Industrial Deal, the Competitiveness Compass, the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) as well as Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), and the EU Missions. Policy coherence should also extend vertically across governance levels. Europe will only achieve its strategic objectives if European priorities are translated into concrete action within national and regional innovation ecosystems. Stronger connections between JUs and regional innovation actors are therefore essential to ensure that strategic priorities are effectively implemented across Europe. Building structured cooperation with regional networks and innovation ecosystems can help strengthen these links.

In this context, Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs) as well as other regional thematic alliances and networks, can play an important role in strengthening the territorial dimension of JUs by connecting European priorities with regional innovation capacities and industrial ecosystems. By bringing together regions that share smart specialisation priorities, they can facilitate the identification of complementary strengths, support the development of interregional value chains and help mobilise regional stakeholders around strategic European objectives. Looking ahead, stronger links between JUs and the future National and Regional Partnership Plans would help ensure better alignment between European, national and regional investments, reinforce policy coherence across governance levels and accelerate the uptake and deployment of research and innovation results.

JUs should use agile tools and agile governance structures that allow them to respond quickly to emerging challenges while maintaining a clear focus on the most urgent priorities.

Recommendations:

- **Strengthen the strategic coherence of the European Partnership landscape:** Ensure that JUs operate as part of a coherent portfolio of European Partnerships by systematically aligning SRIAs, roadmaps and work programmes, while promoting joint actions to address cross-sectoral challenges and avoid duplication.
- **Facilitate strategic connections and cooperation** between other European Partnerships and relevant initiatives operating in related thematic areas such as other European Partnerships, regional partnerships, Industrial Alliances and EU Missions to maximise synergies, prevent overlap, and ensure that activities contribute to broader EU research, innovation, and policy objectives
- **Strengthen links between research, industrial policy and deployment:** Better connect JUs with EU policy frameworks, including the Clean Industrial Deal, the Competitiveness Compass,

the SET Plan, S3, to maximise complementarities, avoid duplication and ensure a seamless continuum from research and innovation to industrial deployment and market uptake in support of Europe's strategic objectives.

- **Embed a territorial dimension in JUs:** Strengthen cooperation with regional innovation ecosystems and link the JUs better with the future National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) and with the different existing initiatives focusing on strategic collaboration between regions and their ecosystems, such as Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs), Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) and relevant projects funded under the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument. S3 should also be better integrated into the strategic planning and implementation of JUs. All this would improve policy coherence across governance levels, support interregional value chains and accelerate the deployment of research and innovation results.
- **Ensure partnerships' discussions address regional needs:** Refine the focus of partnerships' discussions to provide more specific and actionable insights that can resonate with both local and regional policymakers.
- **Improve funding synergies across European, national and regional programmes:** Develop simpler and more flexible mechanisms for combining JU funding with Cohesion Policy and national and regional programmes. Future co-funding models should reduce administrative complexity and enable successful regional innovation initiatives to scale up through complementary European support.

A governance model that recognises regions as strategic partners

ERRIN supports the Commission's objective of simplifying and harmonising the governance of JUs under a future Single Basic Act. A common governance framework can improve consistency, transparency and efficiency across institutionalised partnerships. However, simplification should also create an opportunity to modernise governance by recognising the increasingly important role played by regional and local authorities.

In the current JUs (FP9), regional engagement is considered optional, leading to inconsistent levels of participation across European Partnerships. When regional actors are involved, their roles tend to be formal and lack genuine influence over priority setting, decision-making processes or the development of future funding calls for proposals.

Regions are not only simple end-users of innovation policies. They are investors in research and innovation infrastructures, coordinators of regional innovation ecosystems, managers of Cohesion Policy programmes, public procurers of innovative solutions and facilitators of industrial transformation. They also play a decisive role in implementing many European priorities on the ground. Despite this, regional authorities remain largely absent from the strategic governance of most JUs.

In some cases, the largest innovation programmes are coordinated in regions. Wetsus breakthrough innovation programme involves funding from 110 companies (from 19 countries), in kind support from 27 universities (from 9 EU countries), combined with local, regional public funding and three national ministries. It is the world's largest water technology RDI programme, coordinated in a region. For the current 10-year business plan, a total of 200 million euros is committed, and a total of 400 partners (240 SMEs and 100 corporates) are engaged. Scaling these regional initiatives with JU co-funding would boost European competitiveness in a highly efficient manner.

These partnerships are often dominated by larger industry players, making it difficult for less influential entities to access information or participate equally in decision-making. Stronger players frequently

dominate projects, limiting the meaningful contribution of smaller organisations. This dynamic creates an imbalance that hinders the inclusivity and effectiveness of Institutionalised Partnerships.

A positive example of a governance structure that the future JUs could follow is the one implemented by the Clean Hydrogen Joint Undertaking (JU). The **Clean Hydrogen JU** has integrated regional perspectives by including regional representatives in its Stakeholders Group, specifically the coordinators of the **European Hydrogen Valleys S3 Partnership,** which brings together more than 60 European regions, **and ERRIN**. However, existing participation mechanisms are often limited to stakeholder consultations with little influence on strategic programming, content of the work programmes or future priorities.

Also, some positive examples can be adopted from the **co-programmed CCAM Partnership**, which successfully created a multi-stakeholder governance model in which academia, research institutions, industrial companies, SME, public authorities and civil society are represented through dedicated categories within the governance framework. This structure ensures that the different perspectives and expertise of each actor are reflected in the strategic direction of the Partnership, while fostering cross-sector collaboration and linking with Member States' activities through the State Representatives Group (SRG). This model has allowed regions to provide valuable insights on future research priorities and explore funding synergies. However, stakeholders' role does not grant regions full membership or a meaningful role in the core decision-making processes of the Partnerships.

ERRIN therefore recommends that the future Single Basic Act establishes common governance principles applicable across all JUs. These principles should ensure meaningful involvement of regional and local authorities throughout the strategic cycle rather than relying on ad hoc arrangements developed independently by individual partnerships.

At a minimum, future governance should include structured dialogue with regional innovation ecosystems, systematic consultation during the preparation of SRIA, regional participation in stakeholder bodies with clearly defined responsibilities and transparent mechanisms allowing regional perspectives to inform annual work programmes and future calls. Future JUs should build upon these good experiences (e.g. Clean Hydrogen Partnership) to establish more systematic regional participation across the entire partnership portfolio.

Recommendations:

- **Strengthen regional influence in decision-making:** allow regional representatives not only to be part of formal structures but to have a real influence on partnerships' decisions, including input on future calls and strategic priorities.
- **Make participation more inclusive and transparent:** simplify the participation model and ensure transparency in information-sharing processes, enabling less influential entities from regional ecosystems to engage more effectively. JUs should promote collaboration models that prioritise their inclusion, ensuring these actors can access information and contribute to projects on equal footing with larger industry players, thereby reducing the dominance of big corporations.
- Increase **transparency in partnership planning**: ensure that partnerships' Work Plans, SRIAs and other draft documents are shared openly with all partnership members, including regional representatives, to facilitate balanced participation.
- **Create multi-stakeholder governance model** bringing together industry, academia, research organisations, SMEs, public authorities and civil society, encouraging openness and attracting new members.

Improving accessibility and openness of Joint Undertakings

Accessibility remains one of the key challenges facing the JUs. While JUs have successfully mobilised large industrial actors and established research organisations, participation remains difficult for many regional stakeholders, local authorities, SMEs and first-time applicants. Addressing accessibility is therefore essential not only to **widen participation** but also to **maximise the impact of European research and innovation investments**.

Participation in JUs requires significant time, expertise and administrative capacity. Active engagement in governance structures, strategic discussions and project consortia demands resources that many local and regional authorities, SMEs and smaller organisations simply do not have. Maintaining active participation across several JUs is particularly challenging due to complex governance structures, different participation rules and significant networking efforts. These challenges are compounded by the current funding level that often do not adequately cover the costs associated with long-term engagement in European partnerships.

Accessibility should also be understood beyond the simplification of proposal preparation. It equally requires **greater openness in governance, improved transparency in strategic planning and better communication with potential participants**. Regional innovation ecosystems, local authorities and intermediary organisations (e.g. innovation agencies) often play a crucial role in mobilising SMEs, research organisations and public actors that would otherwise remain outside European partnerships. Strengthening cooperation with these actors would significantly broaden participation and reinforce the **territorial impact of JUs**.

ERRIN therefore welcomes the Commission's objective of making future JUs more accessible and open. This ambition should be reflected not only in simplified administrative procedures but also in governance arrangements that facilitate the participation of newcomers, strengthen communication with regional ecosystems and improve transparency throughout the programming cycle.

Additionally, monitoring is essential to assess whether JUs are achieving their objectives on inclusiveness, regional engagement and territorial impact. The Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE-JU) provides a positive example through its interactive KPI dashboard, which enhances transparency and demonstrates how monitoring can support continuous improvement. Building on this experience, future JUs should include indicators on the participation of SMEs, regional and local authorities, widening countries and first-time applicants, as well as on synergies with regional and national funding programmes.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure that regional entities have meaningful opportunities to contribute and are equitably involved in JUs' strategic decision-making and project implementation**, for example by establishing minimum requirements for regional participation in JUs.
- **Reduce administrative burden and increase flexibility:** Adopt flexible, adaptive approaches to enhance inclusiveness and participation. Agile governance and tools should be implemented to ensure swift responses to emerging challenges while maintaining focus on key priorities.
- **Strengthen outreach to regional innovation ecosystems**: Improve communication and support for regional authorities, innovation agencies, clusters and SMEs, recognising their role in mobilising participants and facilitating technology deployment.
- **Increase transparency throughout the programming cycle**: Improve access to SRIAs, work programmes and future priorities to allow a broader range of stakeholders to contribute before calls are launched.
- **Monitor inclusiveness**: Introduce common indicators to assess participation by SMEs, regional and local authorities, widening countries and first-time applicants across all JUs.

Building stronger links between Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund, and other programmes

ERRIN welcomes the European Commission's intention to strengthen the connection between Horizon Europe and the future European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) overall and in the framework of the future JUs. Establishing a seamless innovation-to-investment journey is essential as Europe is to address its innovation gap, accelerate industrial deployment and reinforce its global competitiveness. The future JUs have an important role to play in this process by connecting excellent research with industrial uptake and market deployment.

The Call for Evidence rightly identifies that current JUs have only limited links with other deployment programmes and that, in some sectors, their activities remain largely concentrated at lower technology readiness levels (TRLs). As a result, many promising technologies struggle to progress beyond demonstration towards commercialisation, reducing the overall impact of European research and innovation investments. At the same time, the Commission proposes that future JUs should contribute directly to the policy windows of both Horizon Europe and the ECF, particularly in areas such as the clean transition and industrial decarbonisation, resilience and security, digital leadership, and health, biotechnology, agriculture and the circular bioeconomy.

ERRIN strongly supports this strategic direction. However, the future architecture should not be conceived as a simple interface between Horizon Europe and the ECF. Instead, it should reflect the full European innovation ecosystem, recognising the complementary role of the future Cohesion Policy / National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs), as well as national and regional investment programmes in bringing innovations to scale.

For many strategic technologies (e.g. renewable hydrogen, batteries), the transition from successful research to widespread deployment does not occur at European level alone. It is regional innovation ecosystems that provide the testing environments, demonstration facilities, industrial clusters, living laboratories, public procurement opportunities and infrastructure investments that enable innovative technologies to mature and reach the market. Regional and local authorities therefore play a central role in transforming research outputs into economic development, industrial competitiveness and societal benefits.

In this context, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), regional innovation programmes and other place-based investment instruments should be recognised as integral components of the innovation-to-investment journey. These instruments frequently finance pilot facilities, demonstration plants, technology infrastructures, innovation hubs and business support services that complement investments made through Horizon Europe. Yet, despite their complementary objectives, the operational links between JUs and Cohesion Policy remain weak, fragmented and largely dependent on individual regional initiatives rather than systematic European coordination.

Future JUs should therefore operate within an integrated European investment framework where research, demonstration, industrial scale-up and regional deployment are treated as different stages of a continuous innovation pathway rather than separate funding domains. This requires **stronger strategic alignment between Horizon Europe, the ECF and relevant national and regional investment priorities (including the future NRPPs) from the earliest stages.** This would help creating more coherent innovation pathways and facilitate the uptake and deployment of research and innovation results.

In practical terms, SRIAs developed by JUs should identify not only research priorities but also the **conditions required for successful deployment**. This includes considering regional investment needs, infrastructure requirements, skills development, regulatory challenges and opportunities for complementary financing through other EU programmes and national or regional programmes. Such an approach would facilitate the translation of European R&I into tangible territorial impact while supporting the competitiveness objectives of the future European Competitiveness Fund.

ERRIN also encourages the Commission to establish clearer operational mechanisms that facilitate complementarities between funding instruments. These could include harmonised guidance on combining Horizon Europe and future Cohesion Policy resources, including through better coordination of priorities, programming cycles and implementation mechanisms, and greater interoperability of funding rules. Seal of Excellence-type approaches may provide an additional pathway for supporting high-quality projects where appropriate, but they should complement, not substitute for, a more systemic and coordinated approach to aligning European, national and regional investments.

Strengthening these links would also contribute to reducing the fragmentation currently observed across the European innovation landscape. Better coordination between research funding, industrial investment and regional development policies would enable Europe to mobilise its innovation ecosystems more effectively around common strategic priorities while avoiding duplication of efforts and creating stronger synergies between European, national and regional investments.

2. Partnership-specific recommendations

Clean Hydrogen Partnership: a strategic Joint Undertaking connecting research, innovation and regional deployment

ERRIN and the S3 Hydrogen Valleys Partnership consider the Clean Hydrogen Partnership (CHP) to be one of the most successful examples of the JU model under the current Horizon Europe.

As highlighted in the recent document published by the Clean Hydrogen Partnership, hydrogen has become a strategic technology for achieving the European Union's objectives on decarbonisation, industrial competitiveness, energy security and technological sovereignty. As recognised in the Competitiveness Compass, the Clean Industrial Deal and REPowerEU, hydrogen will play a critical role in decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors, strengthening European manufacturing and reducing strategic dependencies. In an increasingly competitive global landscape, maintaining Europe's technological leadership requires long-term, coordinated investment across the entire hydrogen value chain. The CHP has demonstrated that the Joint Undertaking model is suited to deliver this ambition.

Since its establishment, the CHP has evolved in parallel with **European policy priorities** while also actively contributing to their development. Its research and innovation activities have informed the European Hydrogen Strategy, supported the implementation of REPowerEU, contributed to the Net-Zero Industry Act and increasingly aligned with the objectives of the Clean Industrial Deal and the Competitiveness Compass. Through this continuous interaction between research, innovation and policy, the Partnership has become a strategic instrument supporting both Europe's climate objectives and industrial competitiveness.

Hydrogen Valleys: demonstrating the innovation-to-deployment pathway

ERRIN members believe that one of the most significant achievements of the Clean Hydrogen Partnership has been the development of Hydrogen Valleys as integrated regional innovation ecosystems. By combining hydrogen production, distribution, storage and end-use applications within

a defined territory, Hydrogen Valleys demonstrate how research and innovation can be translated into large-scale deployment through coordinated action between industry, research organisations, public authorities and investors. Today, the CHP manages a portfolio of 27 Hydrogen Valleys across Europe (23 countries) involving over 600 partners (including 135 SMEs) and mobilising substantial additional public and private investment. The total cost of Hydrogen Valleys projects amounts to € 1.6 billion with a total JU funding of €328 million. This represents a leverage factor of close to four (including both private co-financing as well as the co-funding provided by national and regional support schemes in synergies with the JU funds).

From the perspective of ERRIN and the S3 Hydrogen Valleys Partnership, these projects illustrate that Europe's competitiveness depends not only on technological excellence but also on the **strength of regional innovation ecosystems**. Regional authorities play a central role in creating the enabling conditions for deployment through infrastructure planning, permitting, skills development, industrial clustering, public procurement and the mobilisation of complementary investments from Cohesion Policy and national/regional programmes. Hydrogen Valleys therefore represent much more than demonstration projects. They are territorial innovation ecosystems capable of accelerating the industrial uptake of clean hydrogen technologies while supporting regional economic development.

Their success also demonstrates that the future Joint Undertaking should continue to support integrated hydrogen ecosystems rather than isolated technology projects. Strengthening collaboration between Hydrogen Valleys and facilitating exchanges between regional ecosystems across Europe would accelerate knowledge transfer, reduce duplication of efforts and support the emergence of a truly European hydrogen market.

Towards a more inclusive governance model

ERRIN and the S3 Hydrogen Valleys Partnership recognise that the Clean Hydrogen Partnership has already taken important steps towards improving **stakeholder engagement**. The Stakeholder Group, the cooperation with Member States through the States Representatives Group, and the structured collaboration with national and regional Managing Authorities (through Memorandum of Understanding) all demonstrate the Partnership's commitment to building collaboration across the hydrogen ecosystem.

Building on these achievements, FP10 provides an opportunity to further modernise the governance of the Partnership. As hydrogen technologies move from research towards industrial deployment, **greater involvement of actors responsible for implementation** will become increasingly important. Regional and local authorities, in particular, have become strategic partners through their responsibility for industrial policy, infrastructure investment, permitting, skills development, Smart Specialisation Strategies and Cohesion Policy programmes.

Rather than creating entirely new governance structures, the future Partnership should build upon the existing Stakeholder Group and related advisory mechanisms by strengthening the role of regional innovation ecosystems within **strategic discussions.** This would improve knowledge exchange, reinforce synergies with regional deployment initiatives and ensure that SRIA better reflect the realities of implementation across Europe's territories.

A **more inclusive governance model** would also strengthen the openness of the Partnership, encouraging wider participation by new regional actors, SMEs, public authorities and innovation ecosystems while preserving the efficiency and strategic focus that characterise the current Joint Undertaking model.

Creating synergies across European programmes and initiatives

The Clean Hydrogen Partnership provides a strong example of how JUs can create synergies across the European programmes and initiatives. Considering such a broad synergies matrix, the CHP developed **a dedicated Synergies Strategy** which was endorsed by the CHP Governing Board and complemented by an annual action plan. The JU's synergies strategy foresees establishing a synergy coordination framework ("who, what, how"), which facilitates the implementation and monitoring of synergies. The CHP has thus established structured cooperation with other European Partnerships and JUs, including Clean Aviation, Europe's Rail, 2Zero and the Zero Emission Waterborne Partnership, while also building complementarities with funding instruments such as the Connecting Europe Facility (Transport and Energy), the Innovation Fund, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

ERRIN considers this **integrated approach** particularly important for the future architecture of European Partnerships. Future JUs should continue to act as coordination platforms capable of connecting research, industrial deployment and territorial implementation. In strategic sectors such as energy, existing coordination frameworks such as the SET Plan can already provide an important mechanism for aligning European Partnerships, Industrial Alliances and broader EU industrial policy, helping to bridge the gap between research and deployment. Building on this model, stronger operational links among the future Horizon Europe, the European Competitiveness Fund and the future Cohesion Policy (e.g. NRPPs) would further strengthen the innovation-to-investment pathway and facilitate the engagement and replication of successful demonstration projects across European regions.

The Partnership's experience with Hydrogen Valleys also demonstrates the value of combining European research funding with national and regional investments. Continued efforts to strengthen the strategic alignment between the priorities of the CHP and the national and regional investment needs and priorities would help create stronger complementarities, mobilise additional investment and accelerate the deployment of hydrogen technologies across Europe. Complementary mechanisms, such as the STEP Seal for Hydrogen Valleys, could further support high-quality projects, but should not replace a more strategic alignment of priorities across funding instruments.

Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking

ERRIN recognises the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU) as a strategic partnership for advancing Europe's circular bioeconomy and strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of European bio-based industries. The Partnership plays an important role in supporting the development, demonstration and scale-up of innovative bio-based solutions, contributing to the objectives of the European Green Deal, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy and Europe's industrial transformation agenda. With around 80% of its budget allocated to Innovation Actions, CBE JU has a strong focus on higher TRL projects (TRL 6-8), supporting the scale-up and market uptake of bio-based innovations and thereby contributing to Europe's competitiveness. In this context, regional innovation ecosystems are essential actors, as they provide the conditions for deploying bio- based innovations, through strategic prioritisation, support to investment, industrial collaboration and skills development.

ERRIN welcomes the ongoing and increasingly constructive cooperation with CBE JU, including through the recent Memorandum of Understanding with ERRIN and other regional networks under the CBE JU Synergies Strategy, which explicitly recognises the importance of engaging with regional and local authorities.

However, looking ahead, ERRIN considers that this cooperation should evolve further to ensure that regional and local authorities are more systematically integrated into the governance of the Partnership. While current engagement with regional actors is highly valuable, regions should be

recognised not only as stakeholders in implementation, but as strategic partners contributing to the shaping of priorities, including the preparation of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), work programmes and long-term strategic directions. Strengthening this link between European-level priorities and regional innovation ecosystems would help ensure that the Partnership better reflects territorial strengths and deployment realities, while also improving the uptake and scalability of bio-based innovations across Europe.

Innovative Health Initiative

ERRIN values the importance of the Innovative Health Initiative as a core pathway towards strengthening the healthcare, biomedical and pharmaceutical sectors within the European Union. Beyond its existing competence within industry, we believe that a deeper connection to the regional and place-based dimension via both patient-interfacing systems such as hospitals and healthcare centres as well as territorial life science clusters would further embed present and future health partnerships into the existing landscape, unlock added-value and spearhead transformative innovation through the integration of comparative advantages, a further streamlined deployment of innovative medicines and a greater uptake of said products and services towards being able to scale appropriately.

Healthcare is dependent both on the appropriate enabling conditions for the development of new solutions, through an advanced and innovative life sciences sector, as well as through the broader European landscape's capacity to absorb, adapt and evolve. Simultaneously, healthcare is also a deeply heterogenous sector with governance models, system structures, procurement procedures and other key aspects differing significantly across the EU's member-states. Hence, the ability to cater to this fundamental diversity needs to be reflected within the design of the partnerships, calls and implementation pathways. Regional and local authorities, especially health authorities, have an inherently nuanced understanding of their territorial ecosystem, stakeholders and activities. Hence, regions should not be seen solely as passive locations but rather as significant potential co-design and implementation partners, including from the earliest stage of innovation or ecosystem consolidation.

On the concept of "unmet needs", which is foundational to the IHI's approach in ensuring value-addition and transformative impact, we believe that the term should be further expanded beyond solely targeting technological gaps but to include other significant impact pathways such as healthcare skills gaps, service delivery, procurement burdens, health system resilience amongst others.

Finally, a more strategic connection with other territorially oriented instruments and initiatives such as I3, ERDF, Regional Innovation Valleys and Smart Specialisation Strategies will be critical towards ensuring an enduring and systematic strengthening of the EU's life sciences landscape. Several of these, such as PRECISEU and UNITE, serve as excellent case studies regarding the alignment of regional development, enterprise scaling and domain-related R&I. Regional networks such as ERRIN and EURGHA also have a key part to play in this process by serving as vital bridges between the Partnerships and the regional dimension in both the provision of health services and R&I.

Future Automotive Partnership

ERRIN welcomes the European Commission's initiative to strengthen cooperation between the existing automotive-related European Partnerships through the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the 2Zero, CCAM and BATT4EU Partnerships in September 2025. The proposed development of a common vision and a coordinated Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) represents an important step towards a more integrated European research and innovation ecosystem supporting the objectives of the Industrial Action Plan for the European Automotive Sector.

The automotive sector is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, driven simultaneously by electrification, digitalisation, software-defined vehicles, artificial intelligence, automation, circularity and increasingly complex global supply chains. Maintaining Europe's industrial leadership therefore requires an integrated approach that moves beyond individual technology domains and supports the **development of resilient European automotive value chains**. ERRIN supports the Commission's ambition to better coordinate R&I investments in these strategic areas, while ensuring strong alignment with the Competitiveness Compass, the Clean Industrial Deal and the broader objectives of European technological sovereignty.

The Memorandum of Understanding rightly recognises that future cooperation should build on the strengths of the existing partnerships. ERRIN supports the creation of the future Automotive Partnership, which should act as an overarching coordination platform, bringing together expertise across batteries, zero-emission mobility, connected and automated mobility, digital technologies, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence.

At the same time, closer integration should not come at the expense of the specific strengths, priorities and stakeholder communities that have been built within the existing partnerships. Combining 2Zero, CCAM and BATT4EU under a single structure could create **a risk** that the future agenda becomes predominantly driven by automotive priorities. This would be particularly problematic for batteries, which represent a strategic European value chain extending well beyond the automotive sector, including stationary energy storage, grid resilience, renewable energy integration, industrial decarbonisation and other clean energy applications. The future Partnerships' architecture should therefore ensure that battery research and innovation is maintained in its strategic priorities.

It is also important to recognise that the regions and stakeholders involved in the existing partnerships may not automatically retain the same level of access within a future common structure. The design of the new Automotive JU should therefore avoid weakening established participation channels and should provide transparent and inclusive mechanisms enabling regional authorities to remain engaged.

From ERRIN's perspective, the future Partnership should strengthen the deployment dimension and better support territorial implementation. To maximise Europe's competitiveness, this requires moving beyond technological development towards large-scale real-world deployment in collaboration with regional and local authorities. Regions provide the environments where connected, cooperative and automated mobility, zero-emission vehicles and digital mobility services can be tested, validated and integrated into real public transport systems, urban mobility strategies and regional innovation ecosystems.

Building on the successful multi-stakeholder approach developed under the CCAM Partnership, as well as cross-border testbeds and initiatives such as ECAVA, the future Automotive Partnership should ensure the systematic involvement of regional and local authorities as strategic partners in strategic programming, demonstration activities, the co-design of deployment roadmaps, the definition of research agendas and regulatory feedback. This will accelerate market uptake, improve regulatory learning and ensure that innovation responds to territorial needs while strengthening Europe's industrial leadership in connected and autonomous mobility.

Finally, the future Automotive Partnership should continue to promote an open and collaborative governance model, ensuring that research organisations, industry, SMEs, start-ups, regional and local authorities all contribute to shaping Europe's future mobility ecosystem. Such a governance model will be essential for ensuring that Europe's automotive transition remains competitive, inclusive and firmly rooted in regional innovation capacities.

ERRIN (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) is a Brussels-based platform that gathers around 130 regional organisations in more than 25 European countries. ERRIN aims to strengthen the regional and local dimension of EU Research and Innovation policy and programmes. ERRIN supports members to enhance their regional and local research and innovation capacities and further develop their research and innovation ecosystems.

Through its member-driven working groups, ERRIN aims to strengthen EU policy developments by promoting the place-based perspective and the regional innovation ecosystems approach. The unique value of ERRIN's policy work lies in its close collaboration with and between local and regional stakeholders, continuous dialogue with European institutions and the ability to provide concrete input based on diverse experience and expertise developed through over 20 years of activity in Brussels.

For more information on the input, please contact:

Pirita Lindholm, ERRIN Director, pirita.lindholm@errin.eu
Silvia Ghiretti, Policy and Project Manager, silvia.ghiretti@errin.eu
Joanna Komperda, Policy and Project Manager, joanna.komperda@errin.eu
Ewa Chomicz, Policy and Engagement Manager, ewa.chomicz@errin.eu