

EASN Position on the Future of Treaty-based European Partnerships

For the European aviation research community, European Partnerships, including Joint Undertakings, had and have an important role in bringing together industry, universities, RTOs, SMEs and Member States around long-term technological roadmaps.

1. Preserve the full aviation innovation chain

Aviation research runs from low-TRL scientific exploration and maturation, to demonstration, certification and implementation. Europe must bridge the gap between research and deployment and reduce market lead times.

Higher TRL support must not come at the expense of early-stage research: deployment often depends on low TRL enablers, and exploratory work and long-term technology developments are essential for Europe's competitiveness, resilience and sovereignty. Europe's aviation leadership depends on the full innovation chain, not only on near-market activities.

2. Include scientific associations in the governance

Even if Partnerships have a strong industrial commitment, scientific associations must be included in central governance to consolidate the academic perspective. They complement Partnership-appointed scientific advisory boards. This safeguards low TRL research, scientific excellence and the long-term knowledge base needed for future aviation technologies.

3. Improve openness and accessibility

Partnerships should be more accessible to new members, universities, smaller RTOs, SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups. This requires simpler procedures, and more transparent participation rules, while preserving quality and strategic focus.

The different roles, obligations and rights of members and non-members need fine-tuning, so participation is possible without creating unnecessary barriers.

4. Maintain long-term sector-specific roadmaps and stable budgets

Sector-specific structures have a clear rationale. Aviation's lead times and strict safety/certification requirements demand stable technological roadmaps, predictable funding and long-term commitment. Without predictable budgets, even the best-designed Partnership structure cannot deliver on Europe's aviation ambitions. Aviation R&I cannot depend on budget fluctuations driven by short-term political priorities.

The strength of an Aviation Partnership lies in the involvement of its community understanding of the sector's technological, scientific, industrial and regulatory realities. Roadmaps harmonisation must not undermine the ability of each Partnership to define its own priorities, implementation pathways and sector-specific research agenda.

5. Keep “in-kind contributions” as a reasonable means of the private contributions

Private co-funding in-cash can be important. However, in-kind contributions should not be underestimated, especially in aviation, where facilities, expertise, test environments, demonstrators and industrial know-how can be as important as cash.

Excessive cash requirements will reduce the participation by smaller economic actors and research-based organisations that cannot afford substantial financial commitments but own technology and innovation. This would weaken Partnership's openness, diversity, efficiency and impact.

6. Clarify the relationship between FP10 and the ECF

The ECF's role and governance remain unclear. Specific recommendations on its link with future European Partnerships are premature. Before structural changes are proposed, the roles of FP10, ECF and the Partnerships need clarification, especially regarding budget responsibility, strategic priority-setting and protection of long-term research agendas.

Finally, links between aviation Partnerships, other JUs and wider EU programmes should be improved through targeted cooperation, joint calls where appropriate, shared learning and better dissemination, rather than top-down restructuring. Synergies are useful when they add value, but should not weaken the communities carrying the long-term responsibility for their sectors.