The European Commission proposal for a regulation establishing the Union’s ninth research and innovation (R&I) framework programme Horizon Europe, suggests to include “industrial competitiveness” in the objectives and name of the future 2nd pillar “global challenges”. This would be a serious mistake.

Public investments must generate public returns. Publically funded R&I should thus balance its focus between scientific excellence, economic and societal impact. Industry is a key partner also in delivering societal impact, but merging and blurring profit-oriented objectives with societal impact-oriented objectives risks limiting the already-scarce funding available for addressing societal challenges, endangers a needs-based R&I agenda, threatens the traceability of public funding needed to monitor public return on public investments and risks further excluding citizens and civil society from R&I.

As Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) we therefore urge Member States and the European Parliament to secure an Independent pillar for global challenges

- Whose objectives and priority setting focus solely on addressing societal challenges, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement, acknowledging that excellent R&I in this area will create quality jobs and has a significant economic return, in and of itself, and without adding “industrial competitiveness” to the programme pillar;

- That is co-programmed with citizens and civil society, acknowledging them as key stakeholders in identifying and addressing societal challenges and ensuring a needs-based R&I priority setting. In particular, a roadmap is urgently needed on how Horizon Europe will overcome barriers to CSO and citizens engagement.

- Assesses project proposals based primarily on their potential to deliver on societal challenges; and measures performance based on adequate societal impact indicators that focus on the progress towards the realisation of the SDGs;

- Focusses on delivering sustainable alternatives to our current high growth, high consumption models and safe, effective, affordable and accessible R&I solutions to improve people’s lives and well-being.

To ensure public return on investment and accountability, all future pillars and programme parts of Horizon Europe - including European Partnerships - need to include adequate safeguards, that mainstream sustainable development, define and monitor societal impact, apply strict ethical standards, guarantee open access to research results, promote open access to research data (with strict criteria for derogations), make the programme as transparent and participatory as possible, and report on the participation of CSOs in not just the implementation but also the programming and monitoring of programme activities.