

Amendments

Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council on the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)

April 2026

Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council welcomes the proposed European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) as a major instrument to close Europe's innovation and investment gap and to strengthen strategic sectors such as clean technologies, digital leadership, bioeconomy, circular economy, health, and dual-use capabilities.

For Helsinki-Uusimaa, Finland's leading innovation region and a major European hub for research, talent, startups, and deep-tech ecosystems, the ECF represents a concrete opportunity to translate European excellence into European leadership.

To succeed, however, the fund needs to reflect how competitiveness is built in practice: through interconnected, place-based ecosystems where cities, regions, universities, companies, and public authorities jointly enable innovation, investment, and adoption. A model that relies heavily on centralised or large industrial actors risks missing this reality and with it, Europe's ability to scale innovation.

Our key messages and proposed amendments

1. Recognise Regions and Cities as Strategic Partners in Industrial Competitiveness

Europe's competitiveness is built in regional and urban ecosystems where research, skills, infrastructure and markets converge. Regions and cities play a structural role in translating research excellence into globally competitive companies, notably in deep-tech sectors where long development cycles and high capital intensity require sustained public support and coordination.

The Regulation should explicitly recognise regional and local authorities as key actors in innovation ecosystems and industrial competitiveness. This includes their role in facilitating collaboration across stakeholders (Recital 5), their structural contribution to scaling innovation (new Recital 81a), and their participation in governance structures such as the Strategic Stakeholder Board (Article 14).

In addition, the ECF should support the interconnection of innovation ecosystems across Europe, including through value chain development and cooperation between regional ecosystems (Article 16).



2. Strengthen Smart Specialisation as a delivery mechanism for European competitiveness

Europe's industrial and technological capabilities are territorially embedded. Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) provide a tested and scalable framework to align EU priorities with regional strengths and to enable interregional cooperation based on complementarity.

The introduction of a new recital on S3 (Recital 6a) would ensure that the ECF builds on existing place-based capacities and supports the integration of regional ecosystems into European value chains, bridging EU-level priorities with bottom-up innovation dynamics.

3. Establish a clear pathway from research to deployment and scale-up

Europe's long-term competitiveness depends on its ability to move from research to real-world application.

The ECF should create a clear and operational link with Horizon Europe, particularly from collaborative research under Pillar II, enabling projects to progress to demonstration, deployment and market uptake. Cumulative funding should be made workable in practice, allowing successful projects to continue along the innovation chain without disruption. This requires making cumulative funding workable in practice, without double financing (Article 6).

At the same time, governance and programming must remain clearly separated to preserve the autonomy and excellence-based logic of the Framework Programme.

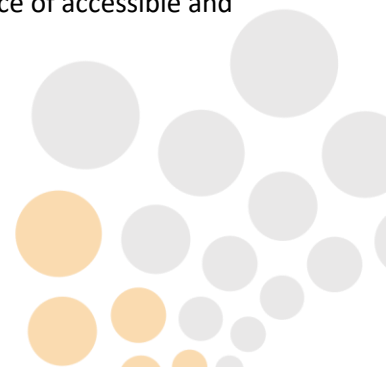
4. Ensure accessible, coherent and competitive implementation

The effectiveness of the ECF will ultimately depend on whether it is usable for high-quality projects across Europe.

Funding should be allocated through open competition, based on clear criteria such as impact, quality and relevance for European competitiveness (Article 15). Complex, fragmented governance and reporting rules risk excluding the best projects and innovation. At the same time, alignment of rules across the ECF, Horizon Europe and NRPPs is essential to reduce fragmentation and administrative burden.

National co-funding will be a determining factor. Experience from the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) shows that insufficient or uneven national co-funding has limited participation from otherwise strong regions, including Helsinki-Uusimaa, despite clear demand and competitive proposals. This weakens both participation and overall European impact.

Access for SMEs, startups and scaleups should build on existing regional structures, such as the Enterprise Europe Network and local innovation hubs. In Finland, SMEs account for approximately 98% of enterprises, many of them located in Helsinki-Uusimaa, underlining the importance of accessible and regionally anchored support.



4. Strengthen skills and talent as a core pillar of competitiveness

Competitiveness ultimately depends on people and the availability of relevant skills.

The ECF should support the development of talent ecosystems that connect education, research, innovation and industry at regional level. This includes strengthening cooperation between universities, vocational education and training providers, applied research organisations, and businesses, as well as supporting talent attraction and mobility in strategic sectors, particularly in sectors central to the Fund's policy windows, including energy, digitalisation, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, transport and infrastructure (Article 30)

5. Strengthen resilience, infrastructure and health as enabling conditions

Competitiveness is increasingly linked to resilience, preparedness and the capacity to manage systemic risks.

Cities and regions are at the forefront of investments in civil protection, cyber resilience, energy systems, logistics and transport connectivity. The ECF should recognise the role of regions and cities in delivering the clean transition and supporting infrastructure deployment, including through dedicated support for demonstration and deployment actions (Article 3(2)(a)). It should also adopt a broader, whole-of-society approach to security and resilience, including the preparedness capacities of public authorities and essential service providers (Article 3(2)(b)(4)).

In addition, strengthening the health dimension of the Fund, including through support for a resilient European Health Union (Article 3(2)(b) new), and integrating environmental and climate objectives across sectors such as bioeconomy and agriculture (Articles 3 and 37), would ensure that competitiveness is built on sustainable and resilient foundations.

6. Ensure continuity and visibility of environmental and climate action

The ECF should preserve and build on the added value of existing instruments supporting environmental and climate objectives.

The integration of a LIFE-type approach within the Fund, including a dedicated allocation and explicit recognition of biodiversity, environmental protection and climate adaptation objectives (Article 3 and new provisions), would ensure continuity, visibility and effectiveness of Union action in these areas.



Proposed amendments to the Regulation on establishing the ECF (2025/0555)

Amendment 1

Proposal for a regulation

Recital 5

Text proposed by the Commission

(5) This also requires that Union funding facilitates the creation and expansion of innovative and industrial ecosystems, where different actors interact in a synergetic way. Successful ecosystems feature intensive and agile interactions and collaboration between small and large companies, universities research institutions, infrastructure providers, investors as well as public authorities.

Without such collaborations within and between individual innovation and industrial ecosystems, innovation potential stays unexploited

Amendment

(5) This also requires that Union funding facilitates the creation and expansion of innovative and industrial ecosystems, where different actors interact in a synergetic way. Successful ecosystems feature intensive and agile interactions and collaboration between small and large companies, universities research institutions, infrastructure providers, investors as well as **national, regional and local** public authorities. Without such collaborations within and between individual innovation and industrial ecosystems **across Europe**, innovation potential stays unexploited. **Following pilot activities under the European Innovation Ecosystems action in Horizon Europe, support will be provided on deployment and scaling up of connections between place-based ecosystems across value chains and common challenges.**

Justification

Regional and local authorities should be explicitly recognised as central facilitators of collaboration within innovation ecosystems, bringing together universities, research organisations, SMEs, investors and citizens. Dedicated support for connecting place-based innovation ecosystems across value chains and common challenges should be introduced following the learnings from the Regional Innovation Valleys.

Amendment 2

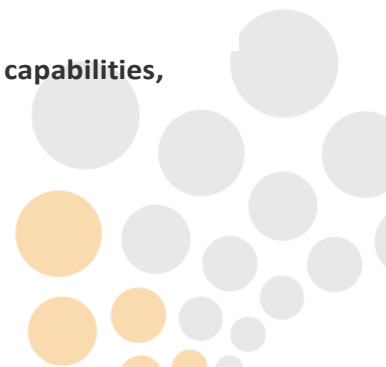
Proposal for a regulation

Recital 6a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

Industrial and technological capabilities,



which are key to Europe's competitiveness, are territorially embedded, and Europe's strength lies in the coordination of its diverse regional specialisations. Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) provide the only EU-wide methodology capable of aligning regional strengths with EU strategic priorities, supporting diversification into related technologies, and enabling structured interregional cooperation based on complementarity rather than duplication. S3 priorities should be systematically recognised and used across EU funding instruments to bridge top-down EU strategic goals with bottom-up regional innovation, integrating local strengths into Europe's industrial value chains.

Justification

S3 must be treated as a core delivery engine for EU industrial strategy, ensuring place-based innovation remains central to Europe's twin transitions and strategic autonomy. The proposed multi-level approach would bridge top-down EU strategic goals with bottom-up regional innovation, integrating local strengths into Europe's competitiveness.

Amendment 3

Proposal for a regulation Recital 81a (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

(81a) Regions and cities are pivotal actors in Europe's innovation ecosystems and indispensable drivers of industrial competitiveness. They provide the institutional conditions and public services required to turn research excellence into viable companies. This role is particularly critical in the case of deep tech, where long development cycles, high capital intensity and regulatory complexity exceed the remit of university innovation services and private accelerators. By operating across mandates, mobilising local demand and supporting



companies through the “valley of death” towards EU and private funding instruments, regions and cities enable breakthrough technologies to reach market readiness and commercial success at scale. Regions and cities are strategic partners in building Europe’s sustainable industrial competitiveness and resilience.

Justification

This amendment addresses Europe’s core competitiveness gap: not the generation of ideas, but their conversion into globally competitive businesses. Regions and cities fill this gap by providing infrastructure, ecosystem coordination, regulatory support, and pathways to market. Recognising this role within the ECF would enable regions like Uusimaa to support the scaling of research-driven companies, ensuring that European innovations develop into competitive firms rather than remaining at pilot stage.

Amendment 4

Proposal for a regulation
Recital (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

The LIFE Programme has demonstrated significant Union added value by supporting innovative, locally driven solutions for environmental and climate objectives and by facilitating the implementation of Union legislation. Its core characteristics should be preserved within the Fund.

Justification

Provides political and legal justification aligned with Better Regulation logic.

Amendment 5

Proposal for a regulation
Article 3 – Paragraph 1 – Point k



Text proposed by the Commission

(k) ensuring a just transition to a sustainable, decarbonised and digital economy that is fair and supporting workers and communities.”

Amendment

(k) “ensuring a just transition to a sustainable, decarbonised and digital economy that is fair and supporting workers and communities, **including environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and restoration, and climate adaptation, through a dedicated approach building.**”

Justification

Makes environmental and biodiversity objectives explicit and anchors LIFE-type intervention logic in the Fund.

Amendment 6

Proposal for a regulation Article 3 – Paragraph 2 – Point a

Text proposed by the Commission

[...] as well as boosting the sustainable blue economy, the development of innovative nature-based business models and demand side solutions for clean and decarbonised buildings, transport and industry, and production ramp up contributing to Europe’s strategic autonomy.

Amendment

[...] as well as boosting the sustainable blue economy, the development of innovative nature-based business models and demand side solutions for clean and decarbonised buildings, transport and industry, and production ramp up contributing to Europe’s strategic autonomy. **Actions under this point shall include a dedicated component supporting pilot, demonstration and best practice projects with high replicability, particularly in the fields of biodiversity and nature restoration.” This shall include support for the scale-up and deployment of solutions enabling regions and cities to act as testbeds for clean technologies and systematic decarbonisation approaches.**

Justification



While the objectives of the Competitiveness Fund comprehensively cover various aspects of industrial decarbonisation, the proposal does not explicitly recognise the central

role of regions and cities in delivering the clean transition. Regions and cities are where industrial, energy, transport, and building systems intersect and where much of the decarbonization must take place. Ensures LIFE-type actions are embedded in the clean transition window, not lost in industrial focus.

Amendment 7

Proposal for a regulation

Article 3 – Paragraph 2 – Point b (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

To support the development of a resilient European Health Union by fostering innovations that address unmet medical needs, disease prevention and health promotion and improved health system sustainability.

Justification

This amendment emphasizes the need to address unmet medical needs, disease prevention, health promotion and improved health system sustainability in order to achieve a resilient European Health Union and simultaneously strengthen overall resilience and competitiveness.

Amendment 8

Proposal for a regulation

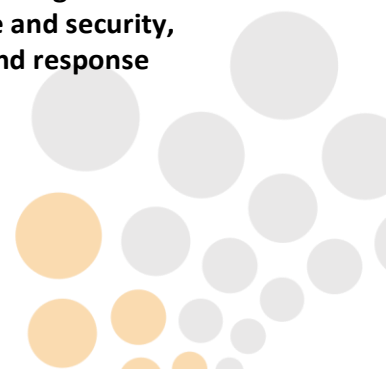
Article 3 – Paragraph 2 – Point (b) (4)

Text proposed by the Commission

Supporting the development and manufacturing of critical technologies and their supply chains in the areas of defence and space, as well as civil industrial security, including the protection of critical infrastructure, border and maritime security, customs security and civil preparedness against security threats.

Amendment

Supporting the development and manufacturing of critical technologies and their supply chains in the areas of defence and space, as well as civil industrial security, including the protection of critical infrastructure, border and maritime security, customs security and civil preparedness against security threats, **and strengthening a whole-of-society approach to resilience and security, including the preparedness and response**



capacities of public authorities, essential service providers and local authorities.

Justification

The amendment strengthens the ECF by recognising that security and resilience cannot be ensured through industrial capacity alone. By introducing a whole-of-society approach, the amendment aligns the ECF with evolving EU security thinking and recent geopolitical developments. It ensures that investments support not only technologies and infrastructure, but also their effective deployment and use across society.

Amendment 9

Proposal for a regulation

Article 3 – Paragraph 1 – Point k (new)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

A specific share of the financial envelope shall be allocated to the LIFE component. This allocation shall ensure continuity, visibility and effectiveness of Union support for environment and climate action.

Justification

Introduces de facto ring-fencing without breaking overall fund flexibility.

Amendment 10

Proposal for a regulation

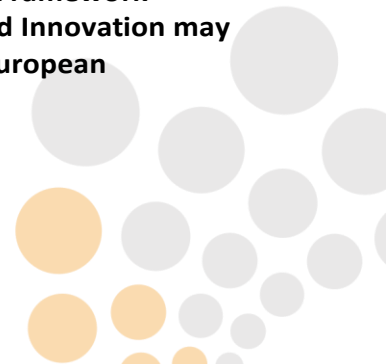
Article 6 – Paragraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

The ECF shall be implemented in synergy with other Union programmes. An action that has received a Union contribution from another programme may also receive another contribution under the ECF. [...]

Amendment

The ECF shall be implemented in synergy with other Union programmes. An action that has received a Union contribution from another programme may also receive another contribution under the ECF. **Actions that have received support under the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation may receive support under the European**



Competitiveness Fund for activities related to demonstration, deployment, scale-up, infrastructure roll-out, skills development and market uptake, including through cumulative funding where appropriate and without double financing. [..]

Justification

This amendment establishes a clear, operational pathway for Horizon Europe results to move from research to implementation at scale. It strengthens EU competitiveness by reducing the “valley of death” between demonstration and market deployment and ensures a seamless innovation journey across EU instruments.

Amendment 11

Proposal for a regulation Article 14 – Paragraph 2

Text proposed by the Commission

The members of the ECF Strategic Stakeholders Board shall be appointed by the Commission, following an open call for nominations or for expressions of interest, or both, whichever the Commission finds more appropriate, and taking into account the need for balance in sector, organisation type, including private investors, and size, expertise, gender, age and geographical distribution. [...]

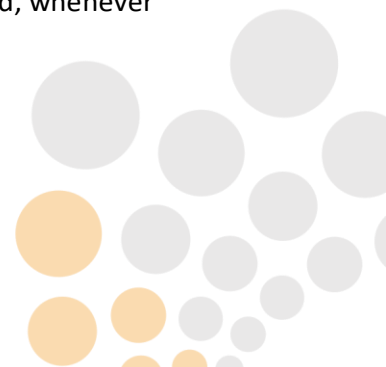
Amendment

The members of the ECF Strategic Stakeholders Board shall be appointed by the Commission, following an open call for nominations or for expressions of interest, or both, whichever the Commission finds more appropriate, and taking into account the need for balance in sector, organisation type, including private investors, **regional and local public authorities and innovation ecosystem actors**, and size, expertise, gender, age and geographical distribution. [...]

Justification

Regions and cities should be represented on the Strategy Board of the European Competitiveness Fund. As key actors and hubs where jobs, companies and investments concentrate, regions and cities possess first-hand knowledge of investment needs, market gaps, and policy priorities, and play a crucial role in creating attractive conditions for businesses and investors, on top of being public buyers, thereby strengthening the overall competitiveness of the economy.

In addition to the Strategic Advisory Board, regional and local authorities should, whenever possible, be included in the various official governance structures developed.



Amendment 12

Proposal for a regulation

Article 15 – Paragraph 1 – new point (ca)

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendment

(ca) The ECF funding shall be based on open competition. The main award criteria should be defined based on impact, quality as well as high relevance for European competitiveness.

Justification

Funding awarded by the Competitiveness Fund should be based on competitive calls, and the award criteria should be clearly defined and based on impact and quality.

Amendment 13

Proposal for a regulation

Article 16 – Paragraph 2

Text proposed by the Commission

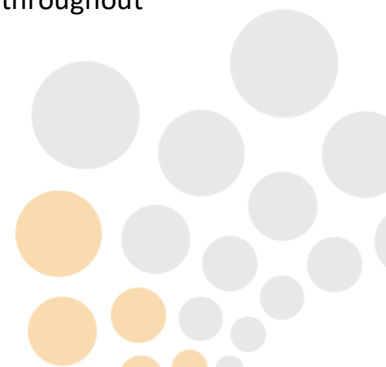
In order to foster resilient Union value chains, the work programmes may include dedicated value- chains scale up calls which shall support both project preparation and crowding in of additional public and private capital to integrate suppliers, manufacturers, and innovators from different Member States and diversify sources of supply.

Amendment

In order to foster resilient Union value chains, the work programmes may include dedicated value- chains scale up calls which shall support both project preparation, **connection between innovation ecosystems**, and crowding in of additional public and private capital **with the objective** to integrate suppliers, manufacturers, and innovators from different Member States' **regional and national ecosystems**, and diversify sources of supply.

Justification

An ecosystem approach is crucial to integrate all relevant stakeholders. Interconnections between ecosystems should be fostered to build stronger and more resilient value chains throughout Europe.



Amendment 14

Proposal for a regulation Article 30 – Paragraph 1

Text proposed by the Commission

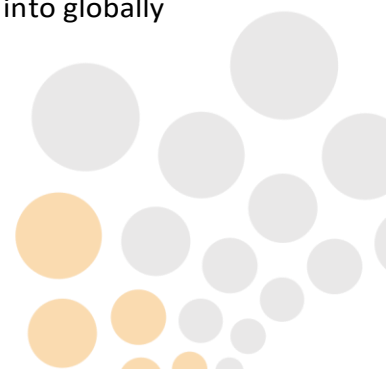
The ECF shall finance activities in support of skills development, in particular in the strategic sectors, building strong links between higher education, vocational education and training providers, applied research and businesses for an agile, innovative and competitive economy. This shall include support for a European Skills Guarantee to support value chain transitions in favour of strategic growth sectors or occupations across the labour market through upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and Vocational Education and Training (VET) partnerships to strengthen cooperation between VET providers and businesses, especially SMEs and connecting them with regional industrial ecosystems.

Amendment

The ECF shall finance activities in support of skills development, in particular in the strategic sectors, building strong links between higher education, vocational education and training providers, applied research and businesses for an agile, innovative and competitive economy. **It shall also support excellence in higher education and research (including social sciences and humanities as a lever for innovation), promote cooperation between universities, industry, regions and cities, and facilitate the attraction and mobility of highly skilled professionals from EU and third countries in strategic sectors. Particular attention shall be given to talent ecosystems that connect education, innovation, and entrepreneurship at regional and local level.** This shall include support for a European Skills Guarantee to support value chain transitions in favour of strategic growth sectors or occupations across the labour market through upskilling, **and** reskilling **and integration** of the workforce and Vocational Education and Training (VET) partnerships to strengthen cooperation between VET providers and businesses, especially SMEs and connecting them with regional industrial ecosystems.

Justification

Europe's ability to build world-class industrial champions depends on access to globally competitive skills and talent. The Draghi Report and the Competitiveness Compass both highlight that Europe does not lack ideas – it lacks the capacity to turn them into globally scaling firms.



Frontier innovation in deep tech, AI, semiconductors and clean industries requires doctoral-level expertise, interdisciplinary research capacity and specialised engineering talent that cannot be generated fast enough solely within national labour markets. [Empirical evidence](#) from Finland confirms this: the more innovative and rapidly growing a company is, the higher the share of foreign-born employees in its workforce.

Amendment 15

Proposal for a regulation Article 37 – Paragraph 1 – Point c

Text proposed by the Commission

Fostering the development, production capacity, manufacturing and industrial deployment of health and bioeconomy technologies, to increase the competitiveness of the sector, and ensure availability of Union medicinal products, medical devices, digital solutions and medical countermeasures relevant for preparedness and response to cross-border threats to health, as well as the competitiveness and resilience of the sectors by ensuring that such products are innovative, safe, accessible, available, and affordable, thereby promoting equitable access across the Union.

Amendment

Fostering the development, production capacity, manufacturing and industrial deployment of health and bioeconomy technologies, to increase the competitiveness of the sector, and ensure availability of Union medicinal products, medical devices, digital solutions and medical countermeasures relevant for preparedness and response to cross-border threats to health **and environment**, as well as the competitiveness and resilience of the sectors by ensuring that such products are innovative, safe, accessible, available, and affordable, thereby promoting equitable access across the Union.

Justification

Ensure environment aspect is considered.

Amendment 16

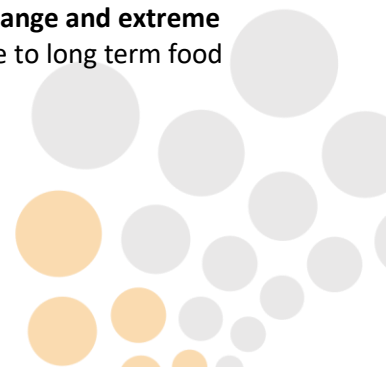
Proposal for a regulation Article 37 – Paragraph 1 – Point c

Text proposed by the Commission

Fostering the competitiveness, the sustainability, the resilience and fairness of agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry sectors and rural and coastal areas, and contribute to long term food security in the Union.

Amendment

Fostering the competitiveness, the sustainability, the resilience and fairness of agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry sectors and **urban and rural** and coastal areas, **including their capacity to adapt to climate change and extreme weather events**, and contribute to long term food



security in the Union, **while promoting climate-smart practices and enhancing ecosystem services to support adaptation and mitigation efforts.**

Justification

The proposed additions explicitly integrate climate change adaptation into the objectives of the agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and forestry sectors. Highlighting climate-smart practices and ecosystem-based approaches ensures that resilience measures are not only reactive but also proactive, supporting both long-term food security and the sustainability of urban and rural and coastal areas. This alignment strengthens the EU's commitment to a climate-resilient bioeconomy, ensuring that competitiveness and fairness are achieved in tandem with environmental stewardship.

