

# **Programme Document for the COMET Competence Centre Programme Competence Centres for Excellent Technologies**

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Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology

Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy

Austrian Research Promotion Agency

Duration until 31 December 2020

Vienna, 1 January 2016 (English Translation from German Original<sup>1</sup> )

The present Programme Document serves to substantiate the “Guidelines for the promotion of industrial/technological research, technology development and innovation” (“FTI-Richtlinie” / “Struktur-FTI-RL”), issued by the Federal Minister of Transport, Innovation and Technology and the Federal Minister of Science, Research and Economy in coordination with the Federal Minister of Finance.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is a translated version of the original German version. In cases of unclear formulation the German version is the decisive document.

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## 1. PREAMBLE

Since 1998 the Kplus, K\_ind, and K\_net competence centre programmes have been implemented in 45 centres and networks in Austria in order to build up key research competences through cooperation between science and industry, providing a network of hubs offering high quality research.

Since its start, COMET has regarded itself as an innovative successor to these programmes. The fundamental motivation behind extending COMET beyond 2016 is to develop new expertise and encourage greater internationalisation as a sign of excellent cooperative research. Bundling these competences within a single centre and defining promising/emerging fields of research via science - industry collaboration shall stimulate new research ideas, encourage technology transfer, and strengthen the innovative capacity of companies. This should result in the creation of new product, process and service innovations. Seen in this light, COMET is playing a key role in the task of strengthening Austria as a research and business location.

COMET has been implemented on a federal level. The Austrian Federal provinces provide additional funding for COMET, also in order to strengthen their individual regional objectives regarding technology policy. This cooperation is agreed bilaterally and in writing between the federal government and each province. Where provincial funding is awarded in accordance with the present Programme Document, there are several ways in which the provinces can play a role in selecting the Centres and projects:

- The provinces are involved in the selection procedure.
- The provinces may issue thematic comments and statements.

### 1.1 Development of COMET to date

COMET started in 2006 with a portfolio of 45 competence centres and networks.

As was the intention, quite a few precursor centres have developed into K1 Centres, others have developed new expertise or bundled existing competences, leading to the creation of new K2 Centres as well as new K1 Centres. However, as a result of restructuring processes, several centres and networks have also ceased to receive support from COMET.

To date the COMET programme has been subject to two impact analyses<sup>2</sup>. The results have played a key role in the revision of COMET, as have the results of the Taftie Task Force on Competence Centres headed by the FFG.

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<sup>2</sup> Die Endberichte der Wirkungsanalyse stehen auf der FFG Website zur Verfügung.  
(<https://www.ffg.at/page/comet-downloadcenter>)

The impact analysis showed that COMET Centres make a fundamental contribution to increasing the expertise and innovative output of the companies involved. Equally, COMET has also helped consolidate existing research areas and enhanced the corresponding expertise of the scientific partners. There is also evidence that COMET has had a significant impact both on publication volumes and in the education of doctoral students.

However, in order to counter the tendency for COMET Centres to increasingly act as R&D service providers for companies, rather than driving new strategic research, and as a reaction to the minor differences between the K2 and K1 programme lines, the COMET programme goals have been redefined accordingly and the existing programme lines supplemented with the new “COMET Module” line.

## 2. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The COMET objectives are:

- Developing and focussing competences through long-term research cooperation between science and industry at the highest level.
- Strengthening Austria as a business location: accelerating technology transfer to industry should serve to create new products, processes and services, open up new markets and increase the innovative capacity of companies.
- Strengthening Austria as a research location: excellent cooperative research should trigger new research impulses and establish promising/emerging fields of research<sup>3</sup>.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of science and industry by driving internationalisation as a sign of high quality cooperative research: involving internationally-renowned scientists, organisations and companies, positioning COMET Centres as internationally attractive partners, and ongoing benchmarking with top research institutions are designed to generate an edge in international competition.
- Establishing and developing human resources: increasingly attracting scientists of international renown, creating structured career models for scientists, and actively supporting intersectoral mobility for research personnel in order to intensify the transfer of know-how.

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<sup>3</sup> In German: “zukunftsweisende Forschungsthemen”

### **3. INDICATORS**

The achievement of the COMET objectives and its impact are assessed by quantitative and qualitative indicators at project and programme level. The indicators and target values are directly derived from the programme objectives and are described in detail in the Monitoring and Evaluation Concept (see Annex).

### **4. DIFFERENCES TO EXISTING PROGRAMMES**

The major USPs of COMET are the research programme jointly defined by industry and science and the multi-firm criterion. Purely bilateral research collaborations are not eligible to form a COMET Centre, COMET Module or COMET Project. Bilateral forms of cooperation, which can be more appropriate for particular research undertakings, are referred to other funding programmes such as BRIDGE and CD laboratories.

COMET activities differ from other funded research projects by being significantly larger and more long-term, and are based on a joint, ambitious research programme with potential for further development. K2 Centres and COMET Modules are also distinguished by significantly higher risks in research.

COMET Centres are characterised by their special governance structures, their long-term focus and size within the portfolio of funding instruments.

### **5. TARGET GROUPS AND FUNDING APPLICANTS**

#### **5.1 COMET target groups**

The programme addresses both existing competence centres and COMET projects as well as new consortia of science and industry. Existing structures are therefore in competition with each other and with new consortia.

#### **5.2 Funding applicants**

Funding applicants are consortia including a minimum of one research institution and several companies. A key condition is that the consortium fulfils the multi-firm criterion: COMET Centres must involve a minimum of five company partners, COMET Projects and COMET Modules at least three.

It must be ensured that a highly dominant company does not indirectly bypass the multi-firm criterion. Applications must show that the number of companies in the consortium and their

relevant contributions to the specified research programme are sufficient to avoid competitive distortions. The contribution to be made by each individual consortium member should be clearly stated.

The company partners must be named in the application.

Ownership relationships between the companies are acceptable as long as they are in-line with the multi-firm criterion. If there is a control relationship between two or more companies in the consortium, this "group of companies" is treated as a single organisation.

If funding is granted, the COMET Centre must be established as an independent legal entity. Centres should have the legal status of a limited liability company (GmbH), or similar.

To achieve the required visibility and attractiveness of competence centres, research activities have to be concentrated accordingly. A COMET Centre may be based at more than one location as long as it retains its character as a Centre.

## **6. ELIGIBLE PROJECTS, INSTRUMENTS / PROGRAMME LINES**

### **6.1 Eligible projects**

Eligible projects include:

1. projects in the field of industrial research <sup>4</sup>
2. projects in the field of experimental development
3. projects in the field of basic research related to projects mentioned in items 1 and 2
4. training measures related to projects mentioned in items 1 and 2
5. technical feasibility studies

The individual projects are subject to the maximum funding rates specified in the General

Block Exemption Regulation (AGVO 2014; see Section 13, Legal Basis). The maximum funding rate for a COMET Centre or COMET Project is calculated from the mix of the individual projects and applies for the entire duration of the funding agreement. COMET Modules have a fixed funding rate of 80%.

Bilateral research collaborations ("single-firm" projects) must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. No single-firm projects are allowed for COMET Modules.

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<sup>4</sup> The terms "industrial research" and "experimental development" are defined in accordance with AGVO (items 85 and 86).

## 6.2 The programme lines

The COMET Programme is implemented in 3 programme lines (see Fig. 1). The programme lines “COMET Centre” and “COMET Project” have been complemented by a “COMET Module”, which aims to establish new promising/emerging fields of research of particularly high-risk. This 3-line model is designed to meet the central challenges between focussing and renewal and between incremental development and high-risk research.

The 3-line model enables potential partners to

- get access to the COMET Programme via a COMET Project as part of a consortium (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)
- build up competences and human resources in a physical centre (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 5 company partners)
- open up new research areas for a COMET (K1) Centre via a COMET Module (min. 1 scientific partner, min. 3 company partners)

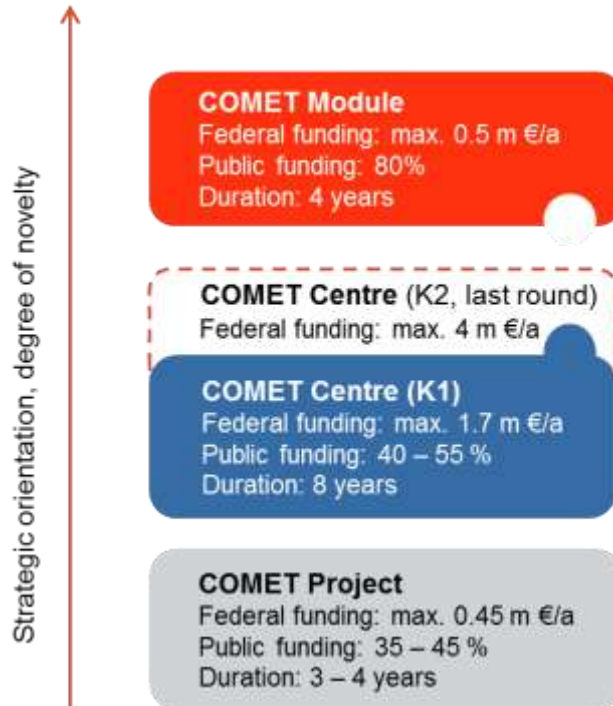
The COMET programme lines are assigned to the FFG Structural Programmes, which serve to establish and improve the structures of research and innovation.

### 6.2.1 Overview of programme lines

All programme lines (COMET Project, COMET Centre, COMET Module) are characterised by high research expertise and links to science as well as by high relevance of implementation in industry.

All lines are open with regard to research fields and topics, but each individual project must focus on a clearly defined theme. The research programme is defined jointly by science and industry and does not simply constitute a conglomeration of individual projects, but creates substantial added value as a result of cooperation and joint strategic orientation.

The degree of novelty of the research and thus also the strategic orientation, is increasing from COMET Project to COMET Centre to COMET Module. While research programmes of COMET Projects and COMET Centres consist of a relevant mix of strategic and multi-firm projects, the COMET Module, which requires a high degree of novelty, exclusively focuses on strategic research, as also reflected by the high funding rate (80%).



**Fig. 1:** Overview of the 3 programme lines

Bilateral research collaborations (single-firm projects) in COMET Projects and COMET Centres must be limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs. No single-firm projects are allowed for COMET Modules.

COMET Projects and COMET Centres may include projects focusing rather on basic oriented research with higher funding and more application-oriented projects with lower funding. The COMET Programme thus does not specify funding rates for the individual lines, but rather sets funding rate ranges depending on the type of research (basic research, industrial research, experimental development). In contrast, a fixed funding rate of 80% was specified for COMET Modules due to their high degree of novelty.

COMET addresses enterprises of all sectors and sizes. The Programme is open to both small and medium-sized enterprises as well as large enterprises. The rates defined for financial contributions by the company partners apply at project level and need not be met by each individual company partner.

This gives the Centre the opportunity to differentiate the individual contributions and tie in with regional objectives and relevant innovation programmes.



## 6.2.2 The programme lines in detail

### COMET Project

COMET Projects aim to carry out high-quality research in science - industry collaboration. They are characterised by a medium-term perspective and clearly defined topics having the potential for further development. COMET Projects contribute to initiating product, process and service innovations.

COMET Projects are collaborations between science and industry. They must meet the multi-firm criterion by involving at least 3 company partners. The projects get a strategic orientation by developing lasting profiles in the medium term. Resubmission is possible.

COMET Projects open access to the COMET Programme for new consortia and topics. They may also develop into COMET Centres over the long term.

Duration:	3 – 4 years
Public funding:	35 – 45 % <sup>5</sup>
Max. federal funding:	max. EUR 0.45 million per year
Number:	approx. 20

The balance must be covered:

Contribution by scientific partners:	min.	5 %
Contribution by company partners:	min.	45 %

### COMET Centre

A total of about 20 COMET Centres is planned.

#### K1 Centre:

K1 Centres aim to develop and focus competences through excellent cooperative research with a medium to long term perspective. They conduct research at top international level and stimulate new research ideas in their fields. Continuous international benchmarking must be ensured. They contribute to initiating product, process and service innovations with a view to future relevant markets.

K1 Centres define multi-year research programmes aligned to the strategic interests of science and industry. They include at least 5 company partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Specific funding rates at partner level may be specified in the funding contract based on the approved total funding rate. These rates are then applied throughout the project duration.

K1 Centres consolidate their competences by establishing relevant human resources being further developed via structured career models.

Resubmission in competition with new initiatives is possible.

Duration:	8 years (4+4 years)
Public funding:	40 – 55 %
Max. federal funding:	max. EUR 1.7 million per year
Number:	approx. 15

The balance must be covered:

Contribution by scientific partners:	min. 5 %
Contribution by company partners:	min. 40 %

#### K2 Centre:

K2 Centres aim to focus existing competences and develop new competences by collaborating with international researchers of renown, scientific partners and companies in a joint strategically oriented research programme at the highest level.

K2 Centres are characterised by extremely ambitious research programmes. They define new promising/emerging fields of research and differ from K1 Centres by carrying out research of particularly high risk. They drive internationalisation as a characteristic of excellent research. Benchmarking with the best must be ensured on a continuous basis.

K2 Centres encourage collaboration with top international scientists and companies. Structured career models offer high-potential researchers from Austria and abroad optimal development and career prospects.

The K2 Centre programme line in its present form is being phased out<sup>6</sup>. There is competition between existing Centres and new initiatives.

Duration:	8 years (4+4 years)
Public funding:	40 – 55 %
Max. federal funding:	max. EUR 4 million per year
Number:	max. 5

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<sup>6</sup> Two last calls are planned based on the terms of the existing K2 Centres. The last K2 Centres approved will thus run from 2018 to 2025 respectively from 2020 to 2027.

The balance must be covered:

Contribution by scientific partners: min. 5 %

Contribution by company partners: min. 40 %

### **COMET Module**

The new programme line COMET Modul aims to establish promising/emerging fields of research and thus new fields of expertise to strengthen Austria's position as a research location, preparing for future challenges. COMET Modules are characterised by research of especially high-risk.

COMET Modules are thematically defined research areas which carry out excellent top-level research to open up new topics being way beyond the state-of-the-art. This is to enable research with particularly high-risk. Incremental research is not the aim of COMET Modules.

COMET Modules enable COMET Centres to collaborate with the best researchers and research institutions at national and international levels. They should thus achieve an international top position to be secured through continuous benchmarking with the best.

While K2 Centres are already required to implement the contents of the COMET Modules as part of their research programmes, K1 Centres may apply for COMET Modules in the future.

COMET Modules have a total volume of approx. EUR 4 million for a duration of 4 years. The funding rate is 80%. The minimum consortium consists of one scientific and three company partners.

Duration:	4 years
Public funding:	80 %
Max. federal funding:	max. EUR 0.5 million per year
Number:	approx. 20

The balance must be covered:

Contribution by scientific partners: min. 5 %

Contribution by company partners: min. 15 %.

## 7. TYPE AND LEVEL OF FUNDING / ELIGIBLE COSTS

### 7.1 Type of funding

Funding is granted in the form of non-repayable subsidies.

### 7.2 Level of funding

The level of funding depends on the eligibility and funding requirement of the projects based on the maximum funding rates defined for the individual programme lines in Section 6.2.1. Funding is subject to the guidelines of the Austrian Federal Government and thus the aid intensities stipulated in the 'Community Framework for state aid for research and development and innovation'. The total rate of public funding must not exceed 45% for COMET Projects, 55% for COMET Centres and 80% for COMET Modules. The public funding consists of federal and provincial funding.

Funding rates for COMET Projects and COMET Centres are calculated based on the mix or proportion of the types of research (basic research, industrial research, experimental development). The funding rate for COMET Modules is fixed at 80%.

The contributions of the scientific partners must be at least 5% of total eligible costs. The contributions of company partners must account for the following percentages of total eligible costs:

- COMET Projects: min. 45%
- COMET Centres: min: 40%
- COMET Modules: min. 15%

The company partners in COMET Centres must provide at least 50% of these contributions in cash.

### 7.3 Eligible costs

Costs eligible for funding are exclusively limited to costs incurred directly in the context of the establishment and operations of COMET Centres or required for the implementation of COMET Projects and COMET Modules.

Eligible costs comprise all expenditure allocable to the project or expenses arising directly, actually and additionally (to the usual operating expenses) for the duration of the funded research activity.

- Personnel costs (researchers, technicians, and other staff employed in the research project).
- Costs for instruments and equipment (including research facilities and laboratories) are eligible for funding insofar and for as long as they are used in the project. If this instruments and equipment are not used in the research project for their entire lifecycle, only the portion of the depreciation determined in accordance with proper accounting principles for the duration of the research project is eligible for funding.
- Costs for contract research, technical expertise and patents purchased at market price from third parties either directly or on licence, provided that the transaction was carried out under normal business conditions and there are no other agreements, as well as the costs of counselling services and other equivalent services utilised exclusively for research activities.
- Additional overheads incurred directly in the context of the research activity.
- Other costs of operation (such as materials, supplies, etc.) incurred directly in the context of the research activity.

Non-eligible costs:

- Costs for the purchase of real estate and immovable property
- Building investments, investment into manufacturing and production facilities
- Costs which are not directly related to the funded project
- Costs which have been incurred before the full application for funding was submitted
- Costs which are not eligible for funding as defined by EU regulations

Special regulations for the individual cost categories can be found in the FFG Cost Guidelines as amended: <https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/kostenleitfaden>

For additional terms and conditions see the Call Guidelines:

[https://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadCentre#Anker\\_7\\_Antragsleitfaden](https://www.ffg.at/content/comet-downloadCentre#Anker_7_Antragsleitfaden)

## 7.4 Phasing-Out

Existing COMET Centres which have reached the end of a funding period and were not successful in reapplying in the COMET Programme, failed the mid-term evaluation or do not wish to pursue continued COMET funding may apply for a phasing-out period. The phasing-out period for K1 Centres is a maximum of 1 year and for K2 Centres a maximum of 1.5 years.

The phasing-out period enables the COMET Centres to continue their planned research activities at full capacity and conclude them by the end of the funding period. The annual funding for the phasing-out period is limited to a maximum of 50% of average annual funding of the last funding period (mean value). It gives COMET Centres the opportunity to apply under other calls prior to expiry of their funding period without losing any public funds already approved.

## **8. EVALUATION PROCESS**

### **8.1 Selection and evaluation**

Applications are selected based on a one-level, criteria-based selection process (see Fig. 2). The maximum amount of cash funding is proposed by FFG experts and recommended by the evaluation panel (jury). Jury results are merely considered as recommendations. The funding decision is made by the Federal Minister based on the jury recommendations, including additional requirements and/or conditions. The selection and evaluation criteria are specified in the Evaluation Manual and included in the guidelines of the relevant funding instruments/programme lines.

#### ***COMET Centres***

Applications for COMET Centres are evaluated in a one-stage selection process involving a hearing. The applications are reviewed both by FFG experts and external experts (international peers).

The consortia submit their applications together with a detailed research programme for the funding period, including mandatory letters of commitment from the company and scientific partners. The applications are subjected to an internal and external review process. Each consortium must also take part in a hearing.

A jury recommends which consortia should be selected as COMET Centres. The term of COMET Centres is 8 years and is divided into two funding periods. A mid-term evaluation is carried out in the 4th year. Only Centres that pass the mid-term evaluation may be continued.

#### ***COMET Projects***

Applications for COMET Projects are evaluated in a shortened process. This is similar to the evaluation of COMET Centre applications but does not involve a hearing. COMET Projects run for a funding period of 3 to 4 years. A review is carried out at mid-term.

## COMET Modules

Applications for COMET Modules are evaluated in a one-stage process without a hearing. The evaluation process is similar to that used for COMET Centres. COMET Modules run for a funding period of 4 years. A review is carried out at mid-term.

## 8.2 Decision

The final funding decision is made by the Federal Minister on the basis of the recommendations of the evaluation panel, including additional requirements and/or conditions. The Federal Minister may authorise a funding agency appointed in accordance with Section 7.1 of the “Struktur-FTI-RL” guideline to make a final decision on funding subject to adequate supervisory and discretionary powers. In this case, the funding agency makes the decision on behalf and for the account of the Federal Government.

The funding recipient must be informed about the funding decision in writing. Should the application be refused the main reasons for rejection must be indicated.

Evaluation process	
FWF / CDG External evaluation	FFG Internal evaluation
<b>Hearings (Centres only)</b> with experts taking part in all hearings (Standing Committee) and alternating Centre-specific experts (Review Team)	
<b>Funding recommendation Panel</b>	
<b>Funding decision of the Federal Minister</b>	

**Fig. 2:** Overview of evaluation process (no hearing takes place for COMET Projects and COMET Modules)

## 8.3 Processing of funding

The processing of funding is subject to Section 7 of the “Struktur-FTI-RL” guidelines. The funding agency must be notified immediately of any occurrences requiring a modification of details specified in the application or the agreed requirements and conditions. The agency must then adapt the funding agreement accordingly. The agreed maximum amount of funding may in no event be increased during the funding period.

## 9. VALIDITY OF THE PROGRAMME DOCUMENT

The validity of the Programme Document expires on 31 December 2020.

## 10. GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED DATA COLLECTION

A gender-differentiated approach must be applied when collecting personal data.

The personal data required for the funded projects must be differentiated by gender, i.e. the gender of commercial and technical contacts and project managers must be recorded statistically.

This is automatically the case for programmes managed by the FFG.

## 11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION CONCEPT

A COMET Monitoring and Evaluation Concept specifies the purpose, objectives, processes and schedules for the assessment of the funding objectives. It forms an integral part of the present Programme Document and can be found in the Annex.

The COMET Centres and Projects are subjected to regular intermediate evaluations, which may include small-scale reviews on site as well as more comprehensive evaluations involving external experts.

The COMET Programme is evaluated based on the results of the mid-term evaluations of the COMET Centres and in the form of an impact analysis. Evaluations at programme level are carried out at intervals of no more than 5 years. The last impact assessment was carried out in 2015, therefore the next Programme evaluation has to be carried out latest in 2020.

## 12. LEGAL BASIS

Legal Basis for this Programme are the “Guidelines for the promotion of the industrial and technological research, technology development and innovation” (“FTI-Richtlinien”), explicitly the “Struktur-FTI-RL” (<https://www.ffg.at/recht-finanzen/rechtsgrundlagen>) issued by the Federal Minister of Transport, Innovation and Technology and the Federal Minister of Science, Research and Economy in agreement with the Federal Minister of Finance. The “Struktur-FTI-RL” is to be applied subsidiarily where the Programme Document does not provide relevant regulations. The legal basis for eligible projects are § 11 (1) to (5) of the Research and Technology Promotion Act (FTFG), BGBl (Federal Law Gazette), No. 434/1982 as amended.



Legal basis at European level:

- COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (General Block Exemption Regulation).<sup>7</sup>
- COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION – Community Framework for state aid for research and development and innovation (2014/C 198/01) of 27 June 2014 for specific parts of RTI funding, such as eligible costs or for distinguishing between economic and non-economic activities of research institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> OJ L 187, 26.6.2014

## 13. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

For a definition of R&D levels (basic research, industrial research, experimental development) and the terms “innovation”, “technology transfer”, “SME – small and medium-sized enterprises”, “research institution”, see the definitions in the guidelines stipulated by the Federal Government and the corresponding regulations issued by the EU Commission.

In addition, the following definitions apply in the Programme Document:

### **Excellence**

In the context of this Programme Document, the term “excellence” refers to outstanding quality in terms of science, implementation or application. Excellence is assessed by experts as part of the evaluation process based on the unique selling propositions of the research programme compared to the present international state-of-the-art.

### **Scientific partners**

Scientific partners in the context of this Programme are taken to include institutions for research and knowledge dissemination or research institutions as specified in the General Block Exemption Regulation (AGVO) or "Struktur-FTI-RL" guidelines.

### **Non-COMET Area (third party funded projects)**

COMET Centres should develop a “Non-COMET Area” complementing the research programme funded under the COMET Programme in line with the present Programme Document (“COMET Area”). The Non-COMET Area does not receive any public funds from the COMET Programme. It serves to carry out contract research for companies (company partners as well as other clients) in market-oriented fields at full cost and to fulfil complementary objectives of public interest, e.g. of the provinces. Other funded national and international projects (e.g. EU projects, etc.) are also carried out within the Non-COMET Area.

### **Phasing out**

Existing COMET Centres which have reached the end of their funding period and were not successful in reapplying in the COMET Programme or do not wish to pursue continued COMET funding may apply for a phasing-out period. The phasing-out period enables the COMET Centres to conclude research activities already started as well as to provide optimal conditions for the future professional careers of their scientists. The jury decides whether a centre qualifies for a phasing-out period based on minimum criteria. Activities and budgets planned for the phasing-out period must be submitted to the Austrian Research Promotion

Agency (FFG). Allocation of public funds takes place after evaluation and approval. COMET Centres are, of course, also free to continue without further public funding from the COMET Programme.

### **Bilateral research cooperations (“single firm projects”)**

Bilateral research cooperations (“single firm projects”) are projects involving only one company partner. These projects are limited to a maximum of 20% of eligible costs for COMET Projects and COMET Centres. No single-firm projects can be carried out in COMET Modules.

### **Multilateral research cooperations (“multi- firm projects”)**

Multilateral research cooperations (“multi- firm projects”) are projects involving more than one company partner.

### **Strategic research projects**

Strategic research projects are characterised by a high degree of novelty and excellence. Beyond the short-term requirements of company partners, they are guided by the long-term objectives of a COMET Centre/COMET Project and its partners. They should drive new research in their fields and be open to high-risk research. This research is usually relatively far away from development and implementation.

### **Competence Centre (COMET Centre)**

COMET Centres qualify as research institutions if they meet the definition of a “research and knowledge dissemination organisation” as specified in Section 83 of the General Block Exemption Regulation (AGVO)<sup>8</sup>.

COMET Centres are organised as independent legal entities (e.g. limited liability companies - GmbH) and are characterised by special governing structures, long-term perspective and size. Research activities should be concentrated in order for the competence Centres to achieve the required level of visibility and attractiveness. A Centre may be based at more than one location as long as it retains its character as a Centre.

Their position as Centres of expertise must be strengthened by building up and developing the relevant expertise and human resources.

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<sup>8</sup> The main activity of a COMET Centre qualifies as non-economic use if the economic use remains a purely ancillary activity which is directly related to and necessary for the operation of the research institution or intrinsically linked to its main non-economic use, and is limited in scope (20%). Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately.

COMET Centres consist of a COMET Area funded under the COMET Programme and a Non-COMET Area. The funded COMET research programme is implemented in the COMET Area, while the Non-COMET Area serves to carry out any additional projects, which usually include company projects, international and EU projects or other nationally funded projects.

## **Annex: COMET MONITORING AND EVALUATION CONCEPT**