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Research and innovation are a strategic pillar for the competitiveness, economic resilience, and sustainability of the European Union. In 2024, the EU invested €403 billion in R&I, equivalent to 2.24% of GDP, a level still far from the 3% target and below that of major global competitors such as South Korea, the US, Japan, and China. This gap highlights the need to strengthen the role of R&I at the heart of European strategy, so that Europe can cope with green and digital transitions without losing industrial and technological capacity.

Strong disparities within the European Union

Within the Union, strong asymmetries between Member States remain: a few countries consistently exceed 3% of GDP in R&D, while several remain below 1%. Italy, with an expenditure of 1.38% of GDP, is below the EU average and in the group of “Moderate Innovators”. Despite signs of improvement, the national system continues to suffer from structural criticalities, including private under-investment, the gap between large companies and SMEs, weak innovation financing, and fragile human capital.

In this context, the ongoing negotiations on the new Horizon Europe 2028-2034 (FP10) and the future European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) are of strategic importance. FP10 and ECF will support universities, research organisations and companies, enabling a seamless path from research to industrial scale: from the generation of scientific knowledge to market adoption and deployment, benefiting European citizens and the European economy. The debate on the multiannual financial framework and the adequacy of resources for R&I is therefore crucial to avoid a further widening of the European gap with global competitors.

Strengthening participation, project quality, and coordination

For Italy, the ability to influence these choices and participate more effectively in European programmes is essential to consolidate the results of the PNRR, overcome the logic of temporary interventions and achieve structural benefits for the national research and innovation system. In this sense, initiatives aimed at strengthening participation, project quality, and coordination between national and European policies represent a decisive lever to improve the country’s competitive positioning in the medium to long term.