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BEDA Position on Including Design in the European Competitiveness Fund

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Brussels is rewriting the rules of who counts as a strategic industry for the next seven years, and design is not included in any operative sense. The European Competitiveness Fund (2028 to 2034) defines which sectors qualify as strategic industries with access to funding, governance, and policy influence for the next funding period. The Council has set its position, and the European Parliament will vote in October. Thereafter, the trilogue procedure will begin, locking the text for the full seven-year cycle.

The European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) is the EU's primary instrument for industrial deployment and scale-up under the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). It sits alongside other standalone programmes under the same MFF heading and rulebook, including FP10 (Horizon Europe) and AgoraEU. The ECF will determine which sectors receive dedicated budgets, governance seats and increased relevance. Once the Regulation text is locked, it remains in effect for the full seven-year cycle.

At this decisive moment, the design sector—despite its cross-sectoral role in innovation and its position within the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs)—is not included in any operative capacity in the proposed framework.

Without inclusion, design is excluded from key decision-making processes, dedicated funding, and structural support—despite being a core driver of innovation across all major policy areas.

BEDA's Core Demands:

1. An explicit design representation in FP10 (Horizon Europe) is essential. Guarantee a governance seat for design stakeholders.
2. Name design activities explicitly, or the wider field of CCIs, as a strategic sector in the ECF Regulation.
3. Establish a dedicated budget line for design research and deployment and application in science-based innovation, not subsumed into a generic creative economy category.

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Key Arguments Supporting the Inclusion of Design

- Design is a knowledge valorisation infrastructure that produces methods, models, and meaning-making systems which activate innovation across all ECF Policy Windows.
- Design methodology is a knowledge translation process by definition: it moves research, user insight, and technological possibility into products, services, and systems. In every sector, it converts knowledge and human insight into measurable economic and societal value.
- Design operates across healthcare, mobility, digital infrastructure, public services, and manufacturing. This cross-sector function asks for a policy window to create a bridge to the Digital, Health, Industry, and Clean Transition windows.
- The development of new products, services, and business structures is fundamentally a design task. Design capability is measurable as a predictor of innovation success and startup viability. Designers are the structural architects of new value propositions.

Economic and Strategic Importance of the Sector

At a time when the European Union is shaping its future funding and regulatory architecture, including the European Competitiveness Fund, the Culture Compass for Europe, the Union of Skills, and the AI framework, design remains structurally underrepresented despite enabling innovation and value creation across sectors.

The Cultural and Creative Sector employs 8.02 million people in Europe and generates EUR 477 billion in value added — more than telecoms, pharma or the automotive sector. Design accounts for 18.2% of all enterprises in the sector. The European Commission has already classified CCIs as one of 14 industrial ecosystems within its industrial strategy framework, establishing a precedent for their treatment as a strategic policy domain.

BEDA supports the brandbrief.eu - an initiative including the CCIS in the European Competitiveness Fund and other relevant funding schemes prominently.

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About BEDA

BEDA boasts around 50 members from 27 countries across Europe. Members include publicly funded design organisations plus professional and trade associations, all of whom promote pioneering design nationally or regionally. BEDA is your industry counterpart for design.

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