

# FALLING WALLS SCIENCE SUMMIT

## KEY RESULTS OF THE PLENARY TABLE

### “BACKING WILD IDEAS: HEIS, RESEARCH & INNOVATION IN EUROPE”

— Europe must learn to love risk if it wants its wild ideas to matter

Europe excels at frontier science but struggles to turn high-risk, curiosity-driven research into scalable innovation. The core challenge is to reshape funding, institutional structures and cultural norms so that bold ideas can move more smoothly from early insight to real-world impact through flexible, entrepreneurial and risk-tolerant mechanisms.

Yet Europe's systems still reward predictability over exploration. Funding schemes prioritise compliance, universities remain structurally cautious and rules on state aid, procurement and intellectual property (IP) often prevent early testing and transfer of new ideas. Despite strong scientific capacity, rigid processes and a persistent aversion to failure slow progress. Building a more porous interface between deep science, entrepreneurship and patient European investment is essential to unlock the full potential of wild ideas.

### THE PANEL CALL TO ACTION:

#### 1 — Redesign public funding to reward high-risk, fail-forward research.

Shift from tightly managed, low-risk projects to challenge programmes, micro-grants and portfolio funding that treat failure as learning and back long-horizon curiosity.

#### 2 — Actively manage the interface between excellent research and innovation.

Establish regulatory sandboxes, reform state-aid and procurement rules and standardise IP transfer so that early piloting with real-world partners becomes possible.

#### 3 — Rewire incentives and structures inside higher education institutions.

Increase stable base funding, reduce administrative burdens and ensure that entrepreneurship and industry collaboration count in hiring, promotion and tenure.

#### 4 — Build European-scale ecosystems, infrastructure and patient capital.

Invest in shared research and data infrastructure, mission-driven programmes and long-tenure public-private partnerships able to take radical ideas from lab to scale.

#### 5 — Make entrepreneurial experimentation part of Europe's culture of science.

Embed entrepreneurial learning early, train evaluators to manage risk portfolios and highlight scientist-entrepreneur role models so that bold experimentation becomes normalised.

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## SPRIND

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