

Horizon 2020: vital investment for Europe's growth and competitiveness

When the Heads of State and Government meet later this week to discuss the global EU budget 2014-2020, the Rectors of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) urge them to take the hard decisions needed to secure Europe's future economic prosperity and competitiveness against an extremely challenging internal and external environment.

Above all, this means continued substantial investment in European research and innovation capabilities. These are fundamental to the vibrant knowledge economy that Europe needs to drive private sector investment, human capital formation, employment and sustainable growth in a rapidly changing global economic and political landscape and in the face of the multiple challenges that confront all our societies in the years to come.

Europe's future prosperity and well-being depend on world-class research and innovation. Even a small increase in R&D has the potential to translate into per capita growth and have significant and long term effect on employment. The rate of return for publicly funded R&D usually exceeds 30 percent¹ and there are significant benefits to cross-European programmes that complement significant national investments in excellent research and innovation. In particular, EU funding enables the best researchers in Europe to work with each other, resulting in higher quality of research as evidenced by its citation impact. So investing in excellent research and innovation at the EU level should be a top priority for all who want smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Rectors of LERU recognise, of course, that this is a time of economic difficulty, fiscal austerity and slow growth across the EU. However, this is precisely why LERU very strongly supports the R&I budget of €80 billion proposed by the European Commission in 2011 for Horizon 2020, to enable research-intensive universities within Europe to undertake the kind of cutting-edge research that will underpin economic prosperity and sustainable growth. Furthermore, LERU welcomes the European Parliament's efforts to assure a satisfactory budget on Horizon 2020 and urges them to work for an outcome that safeguards outstanding research and innovation across Europe. It is particularly important that no decision be taken on Horizon 2020 funding in advance or independently of a settlement of the overall EU budget for 2014-2020..

Transparency of the EU research and innovation budget is also crucial. This budget should continue to focus on the three proposed pillars of Horizon 2020: excellent science (with ERC and Marie Curie as crucial flagships), industrial leadership and grand societal challenges. No new topics or budget lines (e.g. large research infrastructure projects) should be added to the final research and innovation budget, unless the budget is increased accordingly.

¹ *Commission Staff Working Paper, Impact Assessment Accompanying the Communication from the Commission 'Horizon 2020 - The Framework Programme for Research and Innovation', Brussels, 30.11.2011 SEC(2011) 1427 final*

LERU strongly urges the European Council to make the right choice: indeed, a choice that would be consistent with many earlier declarations and decisions of the Council. Europe's future prosperity and well-being depend on world-class research and innovation and future funding should reflect this with an increase in real terms over current programmes.

Freiburg, 18 November 2012

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Notes for editors

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The League of European Research Universities (LERU) is as an association of leading research-intensive universities that share the values of high-quality teaching within an environment of internationally competitive research. Founded in 2002, LERU advocates education through an awareness of the frontiers of human understanding; the creation of new knowledge through basic research, which is the ultimate source of innovation in society; and the promotion of research across a broad front in partnership with industry and society at large.

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