

To

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OPEN LETTER

Europe's leading science academies call for a strong Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

The self-image and the outside perception differ – Europe has lost its leading position in the field of research and innovation. In the various rankings, European universities are in the mid-tier, research and innovation spending in the EU is significantly lower than that of its global competitors, the number of publications with high impact is declining, as is the number of patent applications. **Europe is falling behind**, and is being overtaken by the USA, China, and others. Overall, Europe is investing too little, and in research and innovation in particular.

The figures are a **wake-up call** for Europe and anyone who reads the writing on the wall will come to similar recommendations: We need more investment in research, technology development and innovation. Research promotes innovation, innovation is essential for a prosperous economy which is vital for the green deal and the preservation of the social welfare state. Mario Draghi's recommendations emphasize this connection, as does Enrico Letta's report.

In autumn 2024, a group of 15 experts led by former Portuguese research minister Manuel Heitor thoroughly pointed this out, with the title of their final report being the program: "**Align, Act, Accelerate - Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European competitiveness**".

"Align" means rigorously enhancing coordination with other funds and with the individual EU member states; "act" clearly stands for getting back into the driver's seat; and "accelerate" leaves no doubt that we have to speed up, we have to radically simplify funding, and above all, we have to become faster in transferring research results into tangible, economically relevant output.

Of the 12 Heitor Report recommendations, three central demands are singled out:

1. Make Europe globally competitive, secure, sustainable and resilient by delivering more excellent research, impactful innovation and technology scale-ups through a **comprehensive and strong framework program**. The program should include incentives across the full research and innovation continuum and should counteract Europe's declining competitiveness.
2. A strong framework program needs **substantial funding**. The Heitor Report proposes a budget for FP10 for 2028-2034 in the order of 220 billion euros. The well-founded request is based on previous experience with the proposals received by the ERC, EIC, the collaborative projects and the partnerships, their qualitative assessment and the assumption of fair approval quotas. Excellent research needs excellent funding.

3. Europe's overall research strength is determined by the research strengths of EU's member states. A framework program, no matter how strong, cannot compensate for the shortcomings of individual member states. We need mechanisms that **activate the national research systems**, so that Europe strongly pulls together. We have to foster an attractive and inclusive research and innovation ecosystem in the EU by ensuring ambitious national plans and investments in research and innovation through the European Semester process, including the use of structural funds and of instruments that support a catching-up process.

Europe's leading science academies fully support the goals of the Heitor Report and its key demands: It is **excellent research** which paves the way to a **competitive Europe**.

The **undersigning science academies and academies' networks** are more than willing to provide further advice to the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament based on their expertise and experience.

Moreover, the science academies will **contribute to advancing their respective national research systems** with a view to strengthening the European Research Area as such.

In a nutshell, the science academies of Europe are prepared to **align, act, and accelerate for the sake of excellent research and innovation**. They call on the EU institutions to do likewise.

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