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### **Scientists persuaded Politicians that research is crucial to deepen EU. President von der Leyen agreed**

In the midst of the Italian political uproar that has overwhelmed public opinion, it is especially challenging to stop and consider events that concern European and Italian institutions unless they are used to instrumentalize what has been decided “by other bodies”; that is, by other governments or in Brussels.

Yet, laudable examples do exist of cooperation among competent bodies, responsible professionals and institutions in promoting progress at the European level, especially when it is difficult (if not impossible) to promote at the national level.

In shifting from general statements to practical and functional examples, let’s consider research, the training of scientists, innovation and education. These are crucial themes which characterize the 21<sup>st</sup> century assailed by radical change and often defined as the fourth industrial revolution.

Such a label is, in our view, inappropriate given what now appears as a new wave of hyper- and mega-science. It must be stated clearly that “Innovation and Youth” is not equivalent to “Education, Research, Culture, Innovation and Youth” as we shall now explain.

#### **Inexplicable Innovations**

It is well known that Ursula Von der Leyen, the new President of the European Commission, in the complex process that brought about the composition of the current Commission, merged and renamed many “portfolios” (now called Policy Departments); in some cases improving them, while in others worsening their titles and missions.

For example, a Policy Department which has had its name and mission appreciably strengthened is “Economic and Financial Affairs” (ECFIN) under the guidance of Paolo Gentiloni. Conversely, a Policy Department which risked becoming incomprehensible

initially had been attributed the name: "Innovation and Youth". This Policy Department, under the supervision of Commissioner Mariya Gabriel (a Bulgarian intellectual and politician), was the result of merging the Directorate-General (DG) for "Education, Culture, Sport and Youth" and the DG for "Research, Science and Innovation". It was immediately evident, from the new name, that the central role of research had disappeared. While it is true that the mission statement given to the Commissioner contained all the crucial categories, the *identity* of the scientific community had been blotted out.

One could argue that this was secondary since the substance set forth in the 2021-2027 Horizon Europe framework programme for Research and Innovation has increased to €100 billion from the €70 billion budget allocated in the current programme, which will end in 2020. But, this is not enough; suppressing a crucial identity means demotivating the scientific community and maybe even creating a prelude for a shift toward a more market oriented approach of the apportioned resources.

This fear might have been excessive, nonetheless, the initially proposed new name would have weakened Commissioner Gabriel's scope of action, at least within the European scientific community (ESC).

### **Identity and Innovation**

This circumstance immediately alarmed a large portion of the ESC, even though it did not lead to a unified reaction. The opposition grew from the decisive initiative of two professors, Nora Brambilla (Technical University of Munich, Germany) and Alexander Rothkopf (University of Stavanger, Norway).

These two generous researchers dedicated their (precious) time to defend science and research, the European scientific community's identity, as well as progress in terms of education and culture and thus civil and human advancement. Their Open Letter ("Appeal") received the immediate and fundamental support of six European scientists who undersigned it: S. Bethke (MPI Munich), A. Deandrea (U. Lyon-1), C. Guaraldo (INFN-Frascati), L. Maiani (Lincei U. La Sapienza, Rome), A. Pich (U. Valencia), J. Stachel (U. Heidelberg).

This led to an outflow of support. The Appeal was addressed to the outgoing President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, and the neo-elect President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

The letter, circulated on 17 September 2019 and gradually signed by more scientists, reminded the three presidents of their responsibility and the risks of inadequately representing the Policy Department's role with an inappropriate title, which could hinder the substance of the new Commissioner's mandate and the support of the scientific community.

Within a few months, 13,000 signatures were added, mostly from the European scientific community, without the help of media coverage. The Open Letter was explicitly mentioned by merely 18 European newspapers (4 of which were Italian, including the Huffington Post) and it was basically ignored by the television networks. Unfortunately, it lacked a

homogenous adherence from the political and academic establishments; but even so, 19 European scientific organizations provided their explicit and unwavering support.

It is regrettable, however, that the European Federation of Academies of Science and Humanities (ALLEA), which represents more than 50 academies and 40 countries (EU and non-EU), has not indicated on its website a clear and resolute support in favour of the Open Letter.

### **Research and Innovation**

The promoters of the Open Letter sent all the members of the European Parliament a personalized printed version, and immediately received the support of two Italians: Patrizia Toia (Vice President of the Committee for Industry, Research and Energy) and David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament. Others also offered their supported, but here we are pleased to mention here the commitment of these two Italians.

Commissioner Gabriel also played her part, to the extent that her role permitted, in addressing the matter to the President of the European Commission, who demonstrated flexibility and submitted to the European Parliament a new name for the Policy Department: "Education, Research, Culture, Innovation and Youth".

We welcome the change since it strengthens the choices already made by the past President of the Commission, Juncker, to increase the importance and allocation of funds for the new 2021-2027 Horizon Europe Framework Programme. As stated above, it will receive €100 billion, and maintain its three fundamental pillars: *Excellent Science*, *Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness*, and *Innovative Europe*. I believe that the initial multiplier effects can be up to fivefold, which is equivalent to merely one third of the multiplier effects, which seems to work in the Juncker Plan.

Horizon Europe will also introduce various innovations. There will be *missions* which define the necessary specific objectives for society, science and Europe's population, to be implemented by specific deadlines.

A €2 billion budget has been established for the creation of the European Innovation Council which will have the task of actively supporting innovative ideas in research in support of production and the economy.

International scientific cooperation will be further strengthened. There will be an emphasis on including high quality work from third countries, greater exchanges and a redefinition of the framework for European partnerships on the basis of co-financing and co-programming criteria as well as institutionalization. In this manner, a functional differentiation will be made according to the strategic needs implemented in specific fields.

An Open Science policy approach will be applied for greater and improved sharing of scientific results and Research & Innovation through the use of European Open Science Cloud.

## **Conclusion: promoting scientists**

The themes on which Italy should concentrate could perhaps also include the support (for “consultation” and not “supranational” imposition) of Italian (scientists) living abroad, who can contribute with a more cosmopolitan or European flair.

Competent professionals such as these exist. It should be mentioned with satisfaction that the European Research Council (ERC) as of 2020 will be directed by Mauro Ferrari, a world renown Italian scientist.

In redefining how Horizon Europe 2021-2027 will function, the ERC will play a key role in determining the pillar of *Excellent Science* in supporting researchers develop innovative methods and for disseminating specific and technical knowledge as well as the results.

Let us not forget that there are thousands of Italian researchers who actively contribute to the progress of science and therefore, to civil and human advancement. More must be done at the national level to support them.