

TOWARDS A TRULY REINFORCED EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

POSITION DATED 8 OCTOBER 2020

The leading universities of Science and Technology (S&T) united within [CESAER](#) warmly welcome the renewed impetus for the European Research Area (ERA) amongst the EU institutions and welcome the European Commission's [communication A new ERA for Research and Innovation](#) as a good start for further discussion. Indeed, the outbreak of Covid-19 has again testified the vital importance of S&T in addressing urgent and emerging challenges, which also include those that loom behind the current pandemic such as increasing inequality, climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

We congratulate Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and her team particularly with (i) prioritising investments, including establishing enforceable percentage of GDP targets for private and for public funding; (ii) further advancing open science, including the European Open Science Cloud; (iii) increasing efforts on sharing excellence and widening participation; (iv) supporting research infrastructures; (v) strengthening synergies between higher education and research, including acknowledging the unique and essential role of universities in general, and the European University alliances in particular, for linking the ERA with the European Education Area (see our [EEA position](#)); (vi) promoting equality, diversity and inclusiveness; (vii) improving the attractiveness of researchers' careers; and (viii) focusing on the vital contribution of S&T to sustainability and the digitalisation.

Herewith, we encourage the EU institutions to reinforce the ERA even more along three lines: (i) advance investigator-driven frontier research to boost disruptive innovation, (ii) boost European integration to establish favourable framework conditions and (iii) enable universities to build bridges within entire Europe and to play a leading role worldwide.

ADVANCE INVESTIGATOR-DRIVEN FRONTIER RESEARCH TO BOOST DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

We welcome the anchoring of the ERA in the 'principle of excellence', the acknowledgement of curiosity as a legitimate driver for S&T and the support to ideas-based fundamental research. However, we caution from too much top-down programming of S&T along linear innovation models. Such bias threatens to (i) distort the balance between investigator-driven frontier research and technological development, (ii) inhibit disruptive innovation and (iii) restrict the contribution of S&T to tackling the global challenges that loom behind the current pandemic.

- We call upon the EU institutions to put more emphasis on investigator-driven frontier research along the operational definitions and working methods under Pillar 1: Scientific excellence.
- We remind the EU institutions to empower researchers and universities more by embracing open and modern collaboration models between academia and non-academia therewith also strengthening the [integrating and directing roles of universities](#) in knowledge ecosystems.
- We recall that 'use' and 'utility' are equally legitimate drivers for investigator-driven frontier research next to 'curiosity' resulting in often unexpected and concrete solutions to real problems and thus having tremendous impact.

BOOST EUROPEAN INTEGRATION TO ESTABLISH FAVOURABLE FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

As the EU faces internal and external (geo-) political pressures and problems, it needs to integrate further also in research, education and innovation. To achieve this, more concrete proposals for legal measures at the regional, national and European levels are needed to break down the barriers and to remove obstacles to the free circulation of scientific knowledge, researchers and technology.

- We reiterate our plea to revert to the clear direction for the ERA and the concrete goals provided in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).
- We call upon the EU institutions to reinforce their efforts in guaranteeing societal conditions for peace, prosperity and sustainable development, i.e. safeguarding the respect for the rule of law and human rights, freedom from political interference, tolerance of divergent opinions, democratic citizenship, evidence-based policymaking, free circulation of knowledge and its bearers, academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
- We urge the EU institutions to pursue more concrete legal measures at the regional, national and European levels to break down the barriers and remove the obstacles in areas such as social security, pension rights and migration.

ENABLE UNIVERSITIES TO BUILD BRIDGES WITHIN ENTIRE EUROPE AND TO PLAY LEADING ROLE WORLDWIDE

As our network unites leading research-based universities of S&T from across all of the EU and beyond, we welcome the drive towards reducing disparities in research and innovation capacity amongst the EU member states. We also acknowledge the need for the EU to safeguard resources and technological independence. However, we caution from introversion and protectionism as they endanger the tremendous achievements in European cooperation in research since World War II.

- We urge the EU institutions to implement an inclusive ERA comprising entire Europe and to safeguard the institutional autonomy of universities so that they can continue to build bridges with their partners, particularly when political and economic ties are under pressure.
- We urge the EU institutions to ensure swift associations of third countries with Horizon Europe in time for its start. We must not endanger existing collaborations across wider Europe and with our close neighbours such as Israel, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia and the United Kingdom.
- We encourage the EU institutions to associate as much as possible like-minded industrialised third countries to Horizon Europe, enabling a leading role of European research and innovation and making genuine contributions to the world.

GENUINE OFFER TO IMPLEMENT THE ERA

We welcome the intention to establish a governance for the ERA including all relevant players in society. We recall our [commitment](#) and our [recent offer](#) in this respect. We call on the incoming Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU to endorse and promote multi-level governance for the ERA, including the institutional, regional, national, European and global levels and relevant partners. We further propose to explore together a 'trusted partner principle' whereby institutions assume duties in exchange for rights essentially moving from the level of individual cases to the institutional level through a register of trustworthy institutions.

To empower universities to assume leadership, fully contribute to the ERA and deploy diverse roles in knowledge societies, we reiterate that key research stakeholders and their representatives must be involved in the future governance of the ERA in a structured way and not in an incidental or *ad hoc* fashion. To ensure effective and genuine contributions to implementing the ERA, key stakeholder organisations should be those who pledge to commit to specific contributions. Recalling the strong commitment and efforts of our Members and association in achieving the ERA over the past decades, we offer our continued partnership and support, and stand ready to renew our commitments and efforts in the years to come.

Furthermore, we point out that to truly reinforce the ERA requires sustainable funding for investigator-driven frontier research, early-stage researchers, infrastructures and universities. Therefore, we deeply regret the proposed cuts and consequent underfunding of 'Pillar I: Excellent science' in Horizon Europe further lowering success rates of applicants for grants for investigator-driven frontier research, early-stage researchers and infrastructures. The EU institutions thereby threaten to undermine the attractiveness of these actions and thus damage the ERA. That is why we reiterate our [joint plea with other European university associations](#) to step up funding for Horizon Europe and Erasmus under the budget from 2021 to 2027 and urge the EU institutions to substantially increase the budgets for the respective actions of the European Research Council, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and research infrastructures.

Importantly, we particularly call on the German Presidency of the Council of the EU to assure the quick introduction of own income sources for the EU and to award revenues to future-oriented programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus. Furthermore, we urge all EU member states to use the funding available through the Recovery and Resilience Facility to support research, innovation and education.

For more information and enquiries, please contact our Secretary General [David Bohmert](#) or our Advisor for Research & Innovation [Mattias Björnmalm](#).

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[CESAER](#) is the European association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities of science and technology that: champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation; influence debate; contribute to the realisation of open knowledge societies; and, deliver significant scientific, social, economic, and societal impact.

