

4th November 2020

Research in Europe – A Union that strives for more

This is an open letter addressed to the President of the European Commission, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen. A copy of this letter will be sent to Members of the European Parliament and Members of the European Council.

Dear Dr. Von der Leyen,

Your agenda for Europe bears the title “A Union that strives for more”. You envisioned a Europe that takes the global lead on the major challenges of our times. A Europe that leads the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world. A Commission who listens to the people of Europe and who matches aspiration with action.

We are writing to you today to say: Now is the time to strive for more. Now is the time to listen. Now is the time to act.

All of us are scientists. We work in an array of different disciplines and different countries. Some of us are PhD students. Others Nobel Prize Laureates. Most of us have never met. What unites us is the passion for science. The passion for Europe. And the devastation to see European ambitions slashed to save what represents less than 0.8% of total European spending.

The drastic cuts to European research will have devastating effects on our ability to address major challenges of our times – including climate change, pandemics, quantum technology, artificial intelligence or personal medicine. It will inevitably lead to an exodus of scientific excellence, technological dependencies, and diminished patient care. It will limit Europe’s ability to innovate and to develop a more prosperous and sustainable economy.

But you know this already. We are not the first ones to express our concerns. Many have done so before us – including the most experienced and respected policy advisers. Including almost every single research organisation in Europe. Including 25,000 citizens and scientists via an online petition. Including a former European Commission President.

So, what more can we say? We want to remind you that behind political discussions and budget decisions arranged behind closed doors, there are real people, exceptionally talented scientists, who will leave Europe; real scientific questions that will not be answered; real progress that will not happen. All of that to the detriment of the people whom you have sworn to serve.

As of today, we have collected letters from over 50 scientists in 17 different countries. Please read these letters. They are from European scientists who consider relocating their labs to places where outstanding research is encouraged and matched with ambitious funding schemes. Scientists in low-income countries write how cuts to European research will affect

intercontinental scientific collaborations and their ability to train and grow. Clinicians tell you how less basic science research will directly impact the care they can provide to their patients. Experienced scientists, many of whom have achieved breakthroughs that have revolutionised the world as we know it today, express their concern that future generations will not be given the chance to follow in their footsteps. Nobel Prize Laureates who have witnessed the establishment of EU 'framework programs' speak about how these have transformed the world map of scientific research. Young scientists feel that Europe is stealing their generation the chance of discovering great things and making the world a better place.

We continue to receive more letters every day and will continue to share them with you as we receive them.

All of us have united here today to ask you to stand up to the ambitions you have set out in your Agenda for Europe – the promise you have made to the people of Europe. It is time to keep it. Strive for more. Listen. Act.

Kind regards,

As of today, 60 scientists have co-signed our letter to you. More will join us in the coming days, please consult for the latest list of signatories: <http://www.rescue-horizon-europe.org>.

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