

**Joint Statement of National Rectors' Conferences  
to the Members of the European Parliament  
on the budgetary decisions of the European Council of 21 July 2020**

The undersigning National Rectors' Conferences strongly regret that, in the Council's conclusions of 21 July 2020 on the European budget for the next seven years, the budget for higher education, research and innovation is diminished compared to the proposal of the European Commission of May 2020. The Council's decision puts the European Union far from the ambitions of European resilience and sovereignty, which depend on a growing investment in education, research and innovation.

Until now, the existence of a €13.5 billion funding line directly earmarked for Horizon Europe within the recovery plan fostered the illusion that the overall R&D budget, although already well below the €120 billion mark (2018 current prices) in Pascal Lamy's Lab-Fab-App report and subsequently by the European Parliament, could be maintained at a sufficient level.

These hopes were shattered by the decision of the European Council of keeping only €5 billion out of the €13.5 billion initially envisaged. The health component of the recovery plan (EU4Health), which has been reduced from €9.4 billion to €1.6 billion, is the main victim of this cut, casting deep doubts on the willingness of Member States to give Europe a meaningful role in public health. This is especially relevant in view of the current Covid-19 crisis that shows the importance of collaborative research in the area of public health.

More generally, at a time when the benefits of research and development for citizens have never been more obvious and when society's expectations regarding the impact of science are increasingly high, Horizon Europe's ceiling of €75.9 billion within the multiannual financial framework jeopardises both basic research and research defined by challenges or missions.

A similar observation applies to the Erasmus + programme. By reducing it to €21.2 billion, a drop of almost 15% compared with the Commission's last proposal (€24.6 billion), Europe is limiting mobility and the opportunity for its citizens to experience the values of Europe and European diversity. We do especially regret that the development of the new 41 European Universities' Networks will be substantially restrained by these cuts.

The National Rectors' Conferences have long emphasised the need for more European cooperation in education, research and innovation. It therefore appears all the more paradoxical that at a time when a very ambitious recovery plan is being put in place, we are witnessing an unprecedented reduction in budgets that embody first and foremost the development of knowledge, the creation of new skills, and therefore the means of European sovereignty.

The National Rectors' Conferences are therefore asking the European Parliament, in its capacity as co-legislator of all European programmes, to take necessary steps to ensure a return to its initial proposal, or to a level at least equivalent to the European Commission's proposal of last May, that is a figure between €90 and €100 billion. In addition, we ask for the introduction of a new provision, analogous to the procedure chosen to reverse the 2015

cutbacks for Horizon 2020 and the ERC in particular, whereby all dedicated funds from all European programmes that have not been used be reallocated to Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

This would send the signal to European societies that lasting improvements in the living conditions and well-being of hundreds of millions of citizens are a political priority and that the higher education, research and innovation community will be sufficiently supported to achieve this goal.

18 August 2020

To this date the statement has already been endorsed by:

AT - Austrian Rectors' Conference

BE - Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR)

BE - Rectors' Council of the French-speaking Universities of Belgium (CREF)

CZ - Czech Rectors' Conference (CRC)

DE - German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

DK - Universities Denmark (DKUNI)

EE - Universities Estonia

ES - Spanish Rectors' Conference (CRUE)

FI - Universities Finland (UNIFI)

FR - French Rectors' Conference (CPU)

GB - Universities UK

HR - Croatian Rectors' Conference

HU - Hungarian Rectors' Conference (HRC)

IE - Irish Universities Association (IUA)

IS - Icelandic Rectors' Conference

LT - The Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference

NL - Dutch Rectors' Conference (VSNU)

NO - Universities Norway (UHR)

PL- Polish Rectors' Conference (KRASP)

PT - Portuguese Rectors' Conference (CRUP)

RO - Romanian National Council of Rectors (UPB)

SE - Swedish Rectors' Conference (SUHF)

SK - Slovak Rectors' Conference (SRK)

SL - Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia