

STRENGTHENING EUROPE'S KNOWLEDGE BASE TO SECURE ITS FUTURE

Declaration of the LERU Rectors' Assembly Leuven, May 21-22, 2005

At the Spring Assembly of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, the representatives of Europe's leading research universities assessed the status of research and innovation in Europe and their contribution to the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy¹. The Lisbon Strategy is vital for the shift to growth on which the European social model and the success of enlargement depend, and greater investment in research is a pre-requisite for that shift. But there has also been a decisive shift in the research/innovation relationship, where fundamental research has increasingly become a major driver of innovation and competitiveness². It is this need for a structural reinvigoration of fundamental research that has led the Commission to propose the creation of a European Research Council as part of Framework Programme 7 (FP7), which we strongly support.

In the light of this assessment and in the context of the Commission's proposals for FP7 and the accompanying debate, we strongly advocate the following:

1. If the proposal of the Commission to double the research budget of the EU and to establish an adequately funded European Research Council is approved, the scientific underpinning needed to accelerate economic growth will be greatly strengthened, provided that national governments contribute by working towards the goal of investing 3% of the GDP in research & development, as agreed at the Barcelona summit in 2002.
2. If the EU budget is frozen at the 1% level, there will be little possibility of achieving this vital enhancement in European joint research unless there is a significant redistribution of funds within the EU budget, with a switch from historic patterns of allocation to the knowledge-based areas on which Europe's future prosperity will depend.
3. If the increase in the EU budget is only a few percentage points a year, the European research effort, and the structural changes that it requires, will depend entirely on national governments' willingness to increase R&D funding. This will fail to realise the potential of a dynamic European Research Area, lead to increasing disparities between national research efforts and ensure that most will lose scientific and economic competitiveness, not only to the USA and Japan but also to China, South Korea and Israel, all of which are planning very significant increases in their R&D investment. Many of these countries already have R&D investment at a higher percentage of GDP than the European average.
4. The Rectors of LERU universities strongly urge the European Commission, the Parliament, and the European Council to act in the interest of Europe's future by strengthening the knowledge base in accordance with the principles of the Lisbon Strategy.

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1. *Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon strategy.* Commission of the European Communities, COMM (2005) 24.

2. *Growth, research-intensive universities and the European Research Council.* League of European Research Universities, 2005.