



THE ACADEMY OF EUROPE

# A commentary on the European Commission strategy: „Europe 2020”

Academia Europaea 2010

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# **“Europe 2020, a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”**

**A Commentary from the Academia Europaea<sup>1</sup>**

April 2010

The Academia Europaea welcomes the strategy document 'Europe 2020'<sup>2</sup> that was published recently by the European Commission. The emphasis on 'smart growth', based on knowledge and innovation and specifically endorsing the notion of strengthening of research and education, provides a promising frame for the future development and continuing prosperity of the European Community of member countries. We endorse the direction that this strategic thinking is taking and it is our opinion that in these very difficult economic times, it is essential not to retrench, but to look ahead of the immediate and to assess what needs to be done to position the Union at the forefront of future global developments.

In general, we find the targets and goals outlined in the "Europe 2020" document are well chosen. We now encourage the Commission to undertake a wide and open consultation so as to enable further focusing and prioritisation and ultimately to a clear delivery and achievable and pragmatic resource strategy. Mobilisation of all intellectual and material resources of all 27 member states, plus the cooperation and engagement of the wider 'neighbourhood', are needed to make these aspirational targets real and operational.

This commentary specifically seeks to illuminate those components of the strategy that we feel are perhaps understated or unclear in the document, as currently presented. Since we focus on the positive contribution that research and scholarship has made in the past, and should continue to make to the future overall economic prosperity of Europe, our emphasis is that at the European level, research and education must be treated as core to the success of the strategy. Hence, we stress the need for a balanced approach, where knowledge and innovation are parts of an overall approach that sees investment in 'scholarship' and education as much a cultural (or societal) good as an economic good.

The Academia Europaea feels that a genuine 'knowledge and innovation economy' must be supported by practical commitments. A clear and realistic proportion of the EU budget must be earmarked to the support of Research, Education and Innovation (an 'REI European Space') as a balanced and integrated portfolio, free of the current over-compartmentalisation. We see;

1. Excellence as always a priority. But we recognise that it is only a part of the message. Equally important, is a recognition and commitment from member states to ensuring a viable, high quality research and education base. A base that reflects the needs of their societies should be one that is responsive and sympathetic to industrial needs, but which does not exclude or destroy those areas of 'scholarship' which cannot demonstrate for political reasons any immediate short-term technological benefit. Especially critical we feel, is to prioritise investment in the development of science education capacity at all levels. Appropriate benchmarking and applicable and relevant statistical measures (indicators) should receive some priority as part of the strategic process. The Academia Europaea would encourage the Commission to create the best conditions for attaining this goal, in a timely fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the Board of The Academia Europaea (The Academy of Europe)  
[www.acadeuro.org](http://www.acadeuro.org), April 2010.

<sup>2</sup> **EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**, COM(2010) 2020, 3.3.2010.

2. Education, and particularly higher-education, as vital in assuring the long-term goals outlined in the “Europe 2020 strategy”. We do not believe that it is the role of Universities to compensate for the relative weakness of industrially driven R&D in Europe. The Universities and other public research bodies have to focus on the dual roles of education and delivering high quality science and scholarship outputs that underpin the cultural demands of the system. Universities seek to excel at basic knowledge generation and the basic ideas that can subsequently be developed and finally exploited by industry and developed in society. Close contacts and mutual involvement with industry are helpful in general and crucially important in some fields of endeavour. The Academia Europaea stresses the need to maintain a vigorous and broadly based scholarship capacity across Europe. The time from discovery to practical realization is very variable, unpredictable and frequently long and any significant decline in the collective capacity of Europe to respond to the unpredictable and unforeseen would put Europe at a strategic disadvantage.
3. That following on from our view on the need for a broad scholarship base in Europe, we also reject the notion that there should be any exclusive emphasis only on those parts of science and scholarship that seem to be able to deliver short-term economic benefits through technology. We strongly believe that research in the arts and the humanities is just as essential for the future of Europe, as that of the sciences. For example, in the very rapidly expanding field of neurobiology, the borders between molecular, cellular and systems neuroscience, psychology and all the branches of the arts are likely to become increasingly blurred over the next decades. Some of the most profound psychological analyses are deeply embedded in the best of European literature. The Academia Europaea feels that research and scholarship are as much a cultural good as an economic good. European society can only benefit from having a strong, cultural academic diversity and plurality.
4. Europe is right to be concerned with the continuing outflow of young talented Europeans overseas. We cannot, however ignore similar flows that are occurring within Europe, from the less infrastructure developed but intellectually resourceful regions to the better resourced regions. The resulting divide has the potential to be a major obstacle in solving serious economic problems of Europe in some regions and *de facto* create tensions within the EU-27. The Academia Europaea would not wish to see any future research funding programmes resources diverted away from research support towards re-dress of interregional and regional structural and cohesion issues. These should constitute a significant portion of the structural funds system<sup>3,4,5</sup> and both Framework Program and Structural Funds should form a coherent system of building knowledge-intensive Europe.

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3 **Creating an Innovative Europe**, Expert Group on RTD chaired by Mr Esko Aho, EUR 2205, January 2006.

4 **Energising Europe’s Knowledge Triangle of Research, Education and Innovation through the Structural Funds**, EURAB Final Report, April 2007.

5 **Preparing Europe for a New Renaissance A Strategic View of the European Research Area**, ERAB first annual report, DG-Research: Brussels, 2009.

5. There is urgent need to turn the EU 2020 proposal into a concrete set of actions and to develop a pragmatic plan. This implies a thorough and rapid debate on priorities, implementation, instruments and assignment of resources to given tasks at the Community and the Member States levels, and setting a timescale should be an urgent priority.
6. The EU budget with accompanying instruments and allocation policies is indispensable if the EU 2020 strategy document is to become viable. It implies however, a major 'future oriented' redirection. It should be looked at as the joint investment resource – a large "Community financial investment common pot". The cohesion and sectoral compensating actions can often be better achieved by other policy instruments, like fiscal rules or appropriations. The use of the Community money for such purposes should be much more preconditioned by the Lisbon targets, updated and streamlined in the "Europe 2020" strategy.
7. Europe's gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) is one third of the world research total <sup>6</sup>. The Framework Programme is relatively small when compared with the total expenditures committed to R&D by individual European states. Despite this, the Framework programmes have over the past decades been highly successful in creating a dynamic international community of scholars, undertaking value added research and networking that is highly transdisciplinary; collaborative and productive. These structural developments must be built upon to ensure that future Framework programmes can deliver the highest quality research that is fit for purpose. It is our view that future framework programmes should be better focussed to play much more significant role than currently.
8. We believe that the Community R&D budget must become a major European resource that addresses in a comprehensive way, a small number of European level 'Grand Challenges' that we and the rest of the world faces<sup>7,8</sup>. Their identification and prioritisation is immense task carrying enormous responsibility, and some risk. To achieve that, Member States and the Institutions must cooperate to avoid bias in favour of sectoral interests.
9. The Academia Europaea would support "Great Ideas, moving frontiers" as a flagship second pillar of the future Framework Program. We think that this approach would satisfy the need for a 'bottom-up' approach to enabling science, with quality and originality being the guiding criteria. The European Research Council, currently administering a 1bn-euro yearly budget has proved to be a sound platform. However, the initial emphasis on an elitist individual system should be broadened in the future; to include high quality transdisciplinary research funded networks. It is extremely

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**6 A more research-intensive and integrated European Research Area, Science, Technology and Competitiveness key figures report 2008/2009**, EUR 23608 EN, DG-Research: Brussels, 2008.

**7 Challenging Europe's Research: Rationales for the European Research Area**, ERA Expert Group, EUR 23326, DG-Research: Brussels, 2008.

**8 Europe must focus on the grand challenges of our time**, Lund, July 2009, <http://www.vr.se/lunddeclaration>.

difficult, if not impossible, to predict the most fruitful future research fields and history demonstrates that the most significant discoveries with the greatest long term impact on society, both in terms of economy and human well being, have more often than not come from frontier 'blue skies' research. Europe has a proud history and research culture in this respect, but our position is under threat from increasing investments in major sustained programmes in other parts of the world – not only in the USA but particularly in South and East Asia. A number of European states are embarking on major shifts in emphasis in public funding of research and higher education. A relative lack of investment in basic research and in some subject areas and fields of scholarship in parts of Europe does in our view threaten to weaken our collective research and scholarship capacity over the longer-term. These trends may serve to seriously weaken delivery of the ambitions of 'Europe 2020'.

10. The Academia Europaea feels that the third and final pillar of a future Framework Programme should be assistance to the member states in stimulating joint undertakings, via clear, goal-oriented networking (like in the ERA-NET programs), enabling more joint research infrastructure by appropriate financial and personnel support and dedicated mobility actions. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science is increasingly a collaborative effort, sometimes in giant and very distributed networks, but more often, in much smaller groupings created to solve a particular problem. A significant added-value of the European Research culture, which has been especially stimulated through the development over time of the Framework programme system, has been a better exploitation of talents and of training and resources. There are, however still major obstacles for international and inter-institutional collaboration which have not yet been resolved despite the fact that they have been clearly enunciated for at least a decade. These are not necessarily of a financial character but rather regulatory, like the lack of the portability of social rights, which impede longer-term mobility of researchers.
11. The Academia Europaea would strongly encourage all parties involved to build into any future Framework Programmes greater flexibility and time responsiveness. The current Framework programme has seen some innovation with regard to administration and financial rules<sup>9</sup>. However, we feel that these are nowhere near substantial enough. Good practices of the member states should be built into the Framework procedures as much, as possible.

The Academia Europaea (directly, or on specific policy issues through the EASAC<sup>10</sup> organisation), which is a completely independent body, with over 2000 members elected via a competitive peer review process, comprising the best scholars and scientists in Europe, is willing and able to assist the Commission and other institutions and organisations, in progressing the visions and aspirations of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

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<sup>9</sup> **Evaluation of the sixth framework programmes for research and technological development 2002-2006, Report of the Expert Group**, DG-Research: Brussels, Feb. 2009.

<sup>10</sup> **EASAC** is the European Academies Science Advisory Council of which the Academia was a founder academy: provides an independent academic advice on specific and timely issues (<http://www.easac.org>).

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