

European multi-annual budget great loss for research and innovation and society

How will we solve the challenges currently overwhelming us (like the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital society and a green transition with economic recovery) without an additional budget for fundamental research and innovation? That is the huge problem confronting more than just the academic world after the negotiations in the European Council on the EU budget. Everyone should ask themselves this, but especially the politicians in The Hague.

The universities, academic medical centres and research institutes are deeply disappointed by the outcome of the negotiations held in Brussels last Tuesday, July 21, during which a total of €13.5 billion was scrapped from the budget for the Horizon Europe research programme. The European Commission's proposal, to invest additional resources from both the Multiannual Financial Framework and the Corona recovery fund 'Next Generation EU' in research and innovation, fell by the wayside.

In addition, the heads of government cut the entirety of the budget of €9 billion from the European recovery fund for a health programme. Just €1.7 billion remains in the regular EU budget for collaboration in Europe to provide sufficient availability and implementation of new medical products, medicines, logistics, etc.

To be able to face the huge problems that are waiting for us in the fields of health and the economy, smart budgetary choices are essential. Science can provide the government and citizens with the knowledge to answer new and unexpected issues faster if it can continue carrying out structurally innovative research. It is a great help when scientists can collaborate on these issues in international research consortia. In addition, investment in research and innovation creates a multiplier effect of €8.50 growth in the gross national product (GNP) for every euro spent in the European research programme.¹ With this return-on-investment, science is the economic driver of the future.

To strengthen the Dutch knowledge economy and competitive position and to promote international partnerships, both national and European financing are vital. That is why the member states committed themselves almost 20 years ago to devote 3% of their gross domestic product (GDP) annually to research and innovation in their national budgets. The Netherlands is lagging behind the international leaders with its commitment of 2% of GDP. The Netherlands will have to realise this ambition as well, certainly now that Dutch researchers, the industry and non-governmental organisations cannot expect any additional funding from Brussels, while faced with major tasks. The recently realised reduction in the Dutch contribution to the EU budget will be much needed as investment in the coming years given the currently inadequate research and innovation portion of the national budget.

On behalf of the Association of Universities (VSNU), Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU) and Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)



¹ [Assessment of the Union Added Value and the Economic Impact of the EU Framework Programmes \(p. 95\)](#)