

To:

- Ursula von der Leyen  
President European Commission
- Mariya Gabriel  
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

Copy to:

- David Maria Sassoli  
President of European Parliament
- Cristian-Silviu Buşoi  
Chair of Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
- Manuel Heitor  
Portuguese Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education  
and Chair of Competitiveness Council

**Topics:** Concerns about approach to achieving a European Research Area (ERA) and the involvement of Research and Innovation (R&I) stakeholders

**Date:** 27 April 2021

Honourable Ms Von der Leyen and Ms Gabriel

With this letter, the undersigned representatives of leading research-intensive universities express their deep concerns about the current approach to achieving an ERA in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely (article 179 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). We invite the European Commission to come forward with proposals for (i) an improved Pact for R&I in Europe, (ii) a strengthening of its legally binding dimension, and (iii) a direct, immediate, inclusive, structured and sustained involvement of R&I stakeholders in the ERA governance system and in the development of the Pact for R&I in Europe.

We recall (i) our longstanding and strong commitment and efforts over the past decades to achieving the ERA, (ii) the Communication A new ERA for Research and Innovation and (iii) corresponding Council conclusions. We herewith express our deep concerns about the level of ambition and content of the texts for parts 1 and 2 of the draft Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe as presented to us on 20 April by the European Commission. In our view, the content and its non-binding character of this pact have no added value and threaten to lead to a regression of the ERA's achievements.

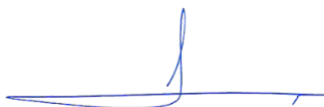
For example, any effective reconfirmation of the European Council conclusions from Lisbon in March 2000 and from Barcelona in March 2002 concerning the 3% of GDP for public and private funding for R&I is missing. In addition, equally absent are new commitments from the Member States and countries associated with the EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation to achieve the new 1.25% EU GDP public effort target in a coordinated manner by 2030 (as proposed by the European Commission).

Moreover, we point out the *ad hoc*, incoherent and opaque involvements and consultations of R&I stakeholders in the ERA governance (notably the ERA Transition Forum) and in the development of the Pact for Research & Innovation in Europe. The approach of moving in multiple steps towards a Council Recommendation this summer combined with (i) the lack of timely delivery of invitations for events and of documents, (ii) extremely short deadlines and (iii) the lack of transparency on how our input and feedback is effectively processed and taken into account raises the impression of *pro forma* consultation and presenting us with *faits accomplis* thereby not only side-lining our role in the co-creation of this pact and the ERA governance, but also the one of the European Parliament.

Realising the fifth freedom of the circulation of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology along article 179 is of highest importance and interest for the future of Europe, and more is needed to advance together on this important endeavour. We greatly appreciate the efforts of this Commission to improve its working when preparing new initiatives and proposals and when managing and evaluating existing legislation. With a view on an effective co-creation of the Pact and ERA governance, we invite you to come forward with coherent and consistent proposals for (i) an improved Pact, (ii) a strengthening of its legally binding dimension and (iii) a direct, immediate, inclusive, structured and sustained involvement of R&I stakeholders in the ERA governance system and in the development of the Pact. Given the importance of achieving the ERA and realising the fifth freedom, these proposals clearly should comply with the guidelines and toolbox for better regulation in the EU where decisions are prepared in an open, transparent manner, informed by the best available evidence and backed by the comprehensive involvement of stakeholders.

With a view on the ongoing work of the Expert Group on the ERA Transition Forum and the Council recommendation envisaged this summer, we would appreciate your notification at your earliest possible convenience.

Yours sincerely



Rik Van de Walle  
President of CESAER  
Rector of Ghent University



Jean Chambaz  
President of LERU  
President of Sorbonne University