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ETUCE Position on

A new ERA for Research and Innovation

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On 30 September 2020, the European Commission published a Communication on [A new ERA for Research and Innovation](#). The aim of the European Commission is to summarise the achievements of the European Research Area while celebrating its 20th year after its establishment, and present 14 initiatives to encourage more research and innovation investment, synchronize the level of quality of science in the EU, strengthen the relationship between research and industries, and achieve gender equality in research and development. The Communication also asks for more national investment to research and development to ensure the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

The below position paper demands respect of academic freedom and freedom of research, sustainable public investment to public research, gender equality, fair working conditions, decent salary and permanent contractual status of the researchers and early stage researchers, and effective social dialogue with the researchers' trade unions.

The following text is the response of ETUCE, which represents 11 million teachers and researchers in Europe, to the European Commission's initiative.

1. The COVID-19 crisis had a detrimental impact on the researchers and research in both the public and private research sectors. While their trade unions negotiated hard for employers to acknowledge that research carried out remotely during the lock-down be considered as work, still many researchers were laid off or threatened to be unemployed. ETUCE member organisations worry for those researchers who are not allowed to work remotely by their employers in the pandemic while health and safety conditions are not ensured in the workplaces. The impact of the pandemic has been especially hard on female researchers who being already a majority in precarious employment in the research sector, had to experience doubled caring and household responsibilities while trying to work from home. In addition, many university professors were forced to neglect their research duties in order to ensure good preparation and provision of online teaching for their students, with a considerable **impact on their working hours, workload, and ultimately their well-being and work-life balance**. Therefore, we welcome that the European Commission presented the Communication attempting to re-enforce research in Europe. The straightforward way to achieve this, is by increasing public investment in public research, ensuring academic freedom and freedom of knowledge, and by ensuring gender equality, fair working conditions, decent salary and permanent contractual status of the researchers and early stage

researchers. We remind that publicly financed and independent research is a crucial condition for democracy.

2. We strongly believe that the ERA should be strengthened with supporting the recovery of Europe from a social perspective. The COVID-19 crisis resulted in increasing social inequalities among parents and students and among socio-economically disadvantaged groups of people. We request that the European Commission and the EU member states ensure more social research and create strong connections between **social sciences and research** and social policies. The Recovery Plan and “New Generation EU” fund should provide EU funding to develop national actions on bringing together science and policy making also in relation to the societal impact and policy solutions on the greening and digital economy.
3. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic has made visible the damage of decades-long market and profit-oriented policies, we regret to acknowledge the lack of a structural reorientation in the European Commission’s proposal to reassert the value of research and **knowledge creation as collective goods**. Underinvestment from the public sector, business orientation, growing reform pressures to better align university outcomes and governance to the business needs, as well as financial incentives steering research and funding to business priorities undermine the freedom of researchers to conduct research without interference, as well as the ability of universities as collegial bodies to foster independent basic research including in such areas as health, the environment and social sciences, providing short and long-term benefits to society and the economy.
4. At times when **social dialogue and the culture of collegial governance** in higher education and research are questioned and under pressure, discarding the public responsibility to boost business-oriented research and the focus on commercialisation of research outcomes remains a source of concern for ETUCE. It endangers the quality of higher education and research, poses a threat to its democratic governance, to the autonomy of universities and research institutions and to the academic freedom for research and academics.
5. We acknowledge that the public investment of countries to research and development varies greatly in Europe from 0.5% up to 3.3% of the GDP while the EU target (3%) has not been achieved. We welcome that the European Commission encourages that the EU member states increase their R&D budget by 50% until 2025. However, as a result of the economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some Member States’ finances across Europe may be permanently weakened, endangering the achievement of this investment target. We are deeply preoccupied that the upcoming **ERA Forum for Transition**, which will ask 5% of national public R&D funding to be allocated to joint EU programmes and European partnerships by 2030 will reduce even more national investment to public research and will further marketize research in line with the EU policy on the business-related research focus of the Horizon Europe programme and ERA. The creation and transmission of new knowledge through research and innovation is a basic engine to advance productivity and European people’s living standard. Almost

all innovation rest on publicly-funded basic research which is then transmitted to the industry's own needs to develop new products which are economically and commercially viable. Research and Development (R&D) spending constitutes a significant share of total spending at tertiary level to structure, organise, and provide infrastructure for research and development.

6. We call the EU member states to refrain from **further marketising public research** outcomes and to avoid that precious resources are diverted from publicly-funded research and innovation to raise private market and business opportunities, which are not necessarily compatible with the needs of society and the citizens of Europe. We already experience that cuts in higher education and research budgets have resulted in competition-based research funding for universities and the adoption of 'business-like' practices in the management of higher education and research institutions. We are indeed concerned that equal access to research funding and increase in public funding, deeply connected to the quality of scientific output, will not be achieved if the European Commission further encourages this competition when it states that "The principle of excellence, meaning that the best researchers with the best ideas obtain funding, remain the cornerstone for all investments under the ERA." ETUCE recalls that insufficient public funding, performance-based and incentive-related funding leading to competition rather than cooperation where creativity can flourish hamper, rather than promote, the possibility to attract highly qualified staff and therefore a given country's innovation capacities.
7. We resent the European Commission's view on the aims of the European Research Area to serve as "single market for research and innovation". This policy turns research fully into a commodity. We recall the [UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers](#) (2017) which clearly underlines that academic freedom in relation to open communication of the results, hypotheses and opinions are the core of the scientific process. We call on the European Commission to acknowledge that considering research from an economic perspective does not at all support the principles of academic freedom and open science. As the ERA policies are implemented with the Horizon Europe fund, we [remind](#) the European Commission about our strong reservations that one of the main objectives of the programme is **industry-based research and innovation**. The promotion of such collaborations between higher education and industry are not novel. However, evidence¹ suggests that their active promotion within the frame of the **European Semester** since almost a decade, together with the promotion of competitive funding models, risks to lead to greater hierarchy and inequality in university and research systems, as higher education institutions

¹ Stevenson H., Hagger-Vaughan L., Milner A., Winchip E., 'Education and Training Policy in the European Semester. Public Investment, Public Policy, Social Dialogue and Privatisation Patterns Across Europe' (2017), European Trade Union Committee for Education, Brussels. Available at: <https://www.csee-etuice.org/en/resources/publications/2042-education-and-training-policy-in-the-european-semester-public-investment-public-policy-social-dialogue-and-privatisation-patterns-across-europe-2017>

increasingly behave as if they were commercial organisations operating in a global market. Alike, the active promotion of private investment in research, development and innovation by strengthening the cooperation between academia and business, against the background of deteriorated public finances and fiscal restraints increases the potential for private sector investment to become a substitute, not a complement, of public finances.

8. We understand that the European Commission also plans to “Develop a roadmap of actions for creating **synergies between higher education and research**, notably building on the dual role of universities.”, and we are concerned that the view of the European Commission on research will push further for the privatisation of higher education. We request, that the **higher education and research connection** should be further examined from the perspective of how to ensure that teaching and research have equal value in universities and how to ensure high quality education and research in universities.
9. We call on the European Commission to provide solutions on how to better ensure appropriate working environments and contractual situations for academics. In recent years, the reduction of core **public funding in higher education and research** has had a major impact in the increasing number of part-time and short-term contracts of higher education and research staff, multiplying inequalities and deteriorating working conditions. These budget cuts happened many times in line with policies that required universities to fulfil labour market needs, shorten the curricula, introduce lifelong learning, and seek the necessary funding from companies. According to a European Commission report², several countries recently adopted reforms which extend the possibilities for performance-related pay of academics, making this kind of remuneration possible in virtually all European higher education systems. The same report says that there are high disparities regarding the contractual arrangements of academic staff across Europe and in many countries only 30 % or fewer academics have permanent contracts. Academics across Europe face **decreasing job security**, due to budget constraints, reduced employment opportunities, and an increasing proportion of staff in externally funded positions. We request the European Commission to put special emphasis on the implementation of the **European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers**³ within the ERA. We clearly request that the **ERA4You** initiative which will work on enhancing researchers’ mobility between industry and academia by 2024 should be developed with the involvement of the trade unions of the researchers.
10. ETUCE supports the career and skills development of researchers for academic and non-academic careers and we therefore ask the European Commission to involve the trade unions of researchers in developing its plan on a **European Competence Framework**

² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017): Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

³ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter>

for Researchers, Taxonomy of Skills for Researchers, and developing curricula for researchers on open science and science management by 2024. We remind that the researchers know best how requirements towards them change and what skills needs they have. We propose that the European level competence framework be used as a guideline for the initial and continuous professional development of researchers in a motivational approach not punitive concerning the recruitment, career development, salary and working conditions of researchers. We remind that “Freedom to teach and freedom to research are being undermined by the growing use of heavy-handed quality assessment procedures and performance metrics that have been established to distribute funding and to recruit and evaluate individual teachers and researchers”⁴. The European Commission’s work on these initiatives also needs to respect already existing national and institutional frameworks and agreements, including collective agreements, on researchers’ career development. Institutional autonomy and academic freedom need to be respected within this work in line with the *UN Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel of 1997*⁵, the *Art. 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU*⁶, and *Council of Europe Recommendation 1762 (2006) on Academic freedom and university autonomy*⁷.

11. As only 33.4% of researchers in the EU and only 27% of members on academic boards (such as scientific or research and development commissions, councils, committees, foundations or academic assemblies) are women⁸, we fully support the European Commission’s future plan to develop “inclusive gender equality plans with Member States and stakeholders in order to promote EU **gender equality** in R&I”. We strongly recommend the European Commission to include the trade unions of researchers within this work as gender equality within the profession can be best achieved by bringing in the experience of the trade unions who fight against precariousness of female researchers and their exclusion from career progression and international mobility due to maternity leave or their caring responsibilities with children and family. Effective support should be provided to female researchers starting at an early stage of their career to ensure work-life balance and working conditions, as well as in receiving funding for research. Female researchers, many time because of their family engagements, are less likely to be assign other side-official roles in academia and to receive advancement of career. We remind that female researchers in STEM sector are significantly underrepresented and effective measures are needed to combat the social biases for which mathematics and technology are not a sector for women.
12. We request to ensure open science and intellectual property rights of researchers within the ERA. We understand that the European Commission will develop “guiding principles for knowledge valorisation and a code of practice for the smart use of

⁴ [ETUCE Resolution Strengthening academic freedom in Europe](#), 2018

⁵ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁶ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/13-freedom-arts-and-sciences>

⁷ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/xref/xref-xml2html-en.asp?fileid=17469&lang=en>

⁸ European Commission, [She Figures 2018](#).

intellectual property [...] to ensure access to effective and affordable intellectual property protection". We call on the Commission to ensure that protecting intellectual property of public sector research is free for the researchers. Trade unions of researchers are committed to open science but they worry that researchers who work in or for companies need to respect business secrecy while researchers committed to open science need to communicate their research outcomes, which is a conflict of interest when researchers move between public and private sectors. We also request the European Commission to consider the discrepancy of mostly financial possibilities of big companies and SMEs on research and development and different job opportunities companies can offer to researchers. We bring to the European Commission's attention the problem that opening career pathways to researchers to the private sector must align with ensuring their fair recruitment, decent working conditions and salary, and permanent contractual status, which is amiss in many private and public research institutions.

13. **Social dialogue** with researchers' trade unions is an essential tool to achieve reforms of research policy, funding on research, and improving skills development of researchers. Therefore, we call on the European Commission and the EU member states to involve the researchers' trade unions in policy design and implementation to reach the goals of the ERA. This needs to start with involving the trade unions in the *European Research and Innovation Area Committee* and other EU-level bodies dealing with researchers. Moreover, most of the Country Specific Recommendations 2020 and 2019 which will steer reform priorities within the next National Recovery Plans, potentially financed by the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, the main instrument proposed within the NextGenerationEU, are intended to promote financing in innovation and research. We call therefore the European Commission to ensure social partners' participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of such plans, and to ensure that the principles of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, and of the **EU Green Deal** remain the hallmark of research and innovation policies that serve society and future generations.