

Full text of a letter from the ALLEA President to the President of the European Commission, sent on 9 December 2014, in response to the proposal for a European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI):

I and my colleagues in ALLEA welcome the emphasis that you have placed in your Presidency on fuelling sustainable growth and prosperity in the European Union, and restoring trust in the European project.

Unemployment across the Union, particularly for young people, is a major concern on which I know that you, the Council and the Parliament are rightly focusing your efforts. The jobs, investment and growth package which you unveiled last week will hopefully support this overriding concern if accurately shaped and deployed. I know also that you wish to roll out this package as rapidly as possible with a preference for ‘shovel-ready’ projects. In many respects, however, this conflicts with the aim of achieving sustainable growth, which is central to your Political Guidelines and for the call that “the first purpose of the Union’s work over the coming years must be to equip our societies for the future and to foster confidence” as the European Council set out only in June.

The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) aims to boost job creation and economic recovery by counter-intuitively taking money from the budget of Horizon 2020, which is already focused on fuelling the prosperity and growth that you are calling for through research and innovation. Research is a critical requirement for driving economic growth as you have rightly and helpfully highlighted.

Thus to take money from Horizon 2020’s painstakingly agreed budget could be counterproductive: it neglects the way in which high-quality research drives growth and prosperity. In these difficult times, the research and innovation budget of the Union is uniquely well placed to invest in sustainable foundations for the growth and prosperity that you seek to achieve.

Horizon 2020 is an absolutely key European instrument for investing in research and innovation. It is fundamental to the research capabilities of Member States, by developing their knowledge and skills base: the foundations of our future economy and society. The Horizon 2020 budget is already under pressure, with vastly increased demand and lower budget available in 2014 for key areas than the preceding year. In our view, decreasing this budget further in an area already agreed as a priority is not the way to proceed in order to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity.

In addition, two parts of Horizon 2020 are critical to my mind. First, the European Research Council is the flagship European research initiative, which has firmly placed us on the world map as a leader of frontier research across the scientific disciplines, and crucially, that includes the social sciences and humanities. Secondly, European research funding for the social sciences and humanities through Horizon 2020 needs reinforcement not reductions, if we Europeans are to drive innovation and creativity, to deal with the unexpected, and to strengthen our understanding of the multiple challenges that we face today which require far more than only technical solutions.

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My colleagues across the academies in ALLEA join me in urging you to ensure that the budget of Horizon 2020 is maintained so that we can play our part in achieving your objectives.

The letter was brought to the attention of:

Mr Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

Mr Donald Tusk, President of the European Council

Mr Carlos Moedas, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation

Mr Jerzy Buzek, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)

Mr Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, President of the European Research Council (ERC)