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"The European Commission's €7 billion invitation to researchers and innovators to bid for funding"

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Press conference at the European Commission

Brussels, 19 July 2011

I am pleased to bring good news before the summer break.

Today we are issuing the biggest ever invitation to researchers and innovators to compete for EU funding.

The 7 billion euro we are investing will create an estimated 174 000 jobs in the short-term and almost 450 000 jobs and nearly €80 billion in GDP growth over 15 years.

Competition for this money will raise standards across the board and bring the best talent in Europe and beyond together to work on everything from curing cancer to electric cars.

Many Member States, including France, Germany and Ireland – despite its serious economic difficulties - are increasing public investment in research and innovation. There is consensus that this is the route to sustainable growth and jobs, providing the light at the end of the dark economic tunnel many Europeans are currently going through.

Today, the EU is again playing its part.

Looking further ahead, we recently proposed significant increases in EU research and innovation funding for the period 2014-2020. If those proposals are adopted, research and innovation's share of the annual EU budget will, by 2020, have approximately doubled since 2007, the first year of the current Seventh Framework Programme.

Our argument for more investment at EU level is basically threefold.

First, it is only at an EU level that we can mobilise sufficient resources to tackle the huge societal challenges we face: issues like demography, energy and food security, climate change.

Second, only through EU funding can we get our best researchers and most innovative companies to join forces and work together across borders, disciplines and sectors.

And third, only the EU can organise Europe-wide competition to stimulate our researchers towards greater excellence.

This is not just about more money. It is about using money more effectively.

The calls for proposals I am announcing today are tailored to fit the Innovation Union action plan, the radical new policy framework set out by the Commission in October 2010 and endorsed in February by heads of state and government.

There is a stronger focus on innovation: on transforming knowledge into practical change for the better. The calls focus more than ever before on SMEs – for which one billion euro is reserved. There is a clearer emphasis on the toughest challenges of our time.

In human terms, our very future depends on tackling issues like climate change, energy and food security, health and our ageing population. But it is also cold, hard business sense.

If our economies are to grow, we must focus our scientific and entrepreneurial skills on meeting ever growing global demand for products and services that do not damage our eco-system, that are energy efficient, that produce healthy and affordable food, that relieve illness without unsustainable costs to the taxpayer.

So today, I am announcing 656 million euro for health.

There is 265 million euro directly for the environment, 313 million euro for transport – notably greener transport - and 235 million euro for energy.

We are putting 1.3 billion euro into digital technology and 488 million euro into nanotechnologies. Success in those areas can help tackle each of the grand challenges.

We are not forgetting basic research or the need to develop future research talent.

We are increasing the budget for groundbreaking frontier work by star researchers, under the auspices of the European Research Council, to 1.6 billion euro.

Nearly 900 million euro under the Marie-Curie actions will go to training researchers and helping them to work in Member States outside their own country of origin.

We are launching a new prize for women innovators who have taken part in our Framework Programmes.

The Commission is committed to building research excellence across the European Union and not just in the relatively few regions of a few Member States which are already world-class.

There will be €140 million over two years for regions to develop their research and innovation potential. In addition, several calls will cover areas of particular interest to new Member States.

I will be discussing with Ministers at the Informal Council in Sopot later this week how to do more to widen participation under the future Horizon 2020 programme, which will begin in 2014.

I want to finish with a word on progress so far on the Innovation Union policy agenda. This Commission has placed research and innovation at the centre of EU economic policy making.

We have made clear in our budget proposal for 2014-2020 that researchers and innovators need to be backed with hard cash. We have simplified FP7 already and much more radical reforms are in the pipeline with Horizon 2020.

We have taken the first steps towards tearing down barriers that have hampered EU innovators in their struggle to compete with the US and China. I am talking about things like the unitary patent, our proposals on venture capital and standardisation and the launch of the pilot European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. It is a good start.

However, making the Innovation Union vision a reality will require enormous political commitment from government at all levels. It will also require businesses to put aside short-termism and step up research and innovation investment – it is there that Europe lags behind the US. It will require banks to shun speculation and provide finance. It will require science to work closely with business.

Meanwhile, I believe the calls for proposals that we are announcing today will be an important step towards the challenge-based approach I have been advocating.

Thank you