

Research funding must focus on health

The Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe (Bio-Med Alliance) warmly welcomes the European Commission's Horizon 2020 proposal, the EU's funding instrument for research and innovation for the period 2014-20 ("Commission unveils €80bn research funding programme", 1-7 December). In particular, we welcome the increase of the overall research funding budget, which is all the more remarkable given the economic crisis.

However, we are very concerned about the decrease in the budget allocation for health research. In the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), 12% of the budget was allocated to health research; in Horizon 2020, the figure is 10%. This decrease is regrettable.

Healthcare costs are rising rapidly and, given the ageing of Europe's population, radically different approaches are urgently needed to bend the costs curve. Investment in biomedical research is essential if we are to tackle our many health challenges. We are already far behind our international competitors in getting organised and



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recognising the significant return on investment in this area.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), non-communicable diseases – a group of conditions that includes cardiovascular diseases, cancer, mental-health problems, diabetes mellitus, chronic respiratory disease and musculoskeletal conditions – are the cause of 86% of deaths

and 77% of the disease burden in the WHO's European regions.

Under status-quo prevention and treatment trends, estimates indicate that non-communicable diseases worldwide will cause an output loss of \$47 trillion (€35 trillion) over the next two decades. Yet such diseases are largely preventable and are linked by common risk factors, underlying great

opportunities for intervention through research advancements and research-informed policies.

The return on investment in medical research is significant, at around 39%, according to the UK's Medical Research Council. It could create employment and improve health, reducing the growing economic burdens Europe faces. Indeed, biomedical research clearly

meets the targets identified in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Our view – and we represent around 200,000 biomedical researchers in Europe – is that 'health is wealth' and must be at the forefront of Horizon 2020, both strategically and financially. We believe that health research should receive 20%, rather than 10% of the

budget. With this, it would be possible to improve coordination of the fragmented health field in Europe, accelerate innovation and speed up the translation of discoveries into applications that will have an impact upon healthcare delivery.

Ulf Smith

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A Brit should lead financial 'wise men'

Could I make a suggestion? In the interest of Europe's financial markets, the European Commission should consider putting a Brit at the head of its group of 'wise men' charged with mulling ways to insulate traditional retail lenders from riskier investment banking ("Barnier plans committee to discuss breaking up banks", 24-30 November).

This would make sense in terms of the City of London's role as a financial centre and of developments in the UK banking sector, particularly the Vickers report, which could be usefully fed into EU thinking. It would also counter any view that the EU is out to 'get' the City. Such a move would also allow the UK to re-engage constructively with the EU, which in turn could address a more fundamental problem: a looming shift of balance between member states.

As someone from the Netherlands, a country geographically and often ideologically in between the EU's three biggest member states, and as a former negotiator – at the Dutch permanent rep-

resentation – in talks on financial regulation, I am concerned by the tone and direction of the current legislative discussions.

In recent years, and as proven by the UK's use of its veto last week, the UK has become more isolated in the EU. Contrary to various claims, no single country or person is to blame. The EU is 27 member states, so nothing happens without the support of a sufficient majority. Countries that have been sympathetic towards the UK are now less so, because of a perception that it wants to enjoy internal-market freedoms without accepting pan-EU supervision of banks.

The City of London is an asset for Europe. Brussels would therefore benefit from the UK's expertise when developing financial-market policy. By putting a Brit at the head of this new banking group, the Commission would demonstrate that it recognises this.

Hans Hack

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The benefits of opening up the internet

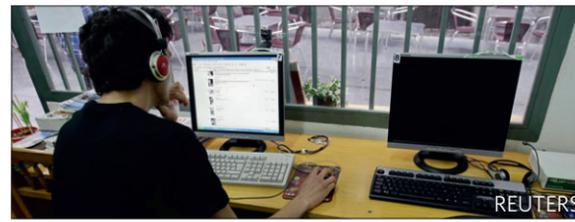
Following on from your article "Ministers want an 'open internet'" (8-14 December), the Internet Society is encouraged by EU member states' conclusions on Tuesday (13 December) on the open internet and net neutrality in Europe.

They agreed on crucial parameters ensuring the openness of the internet for the future, in line with the main points of a report published in April by Neelie Kroes, the European commissioner for the digital agenda.

The Internet Society is

pleased that member states recognise the importance of preserving the "open and neutral character of the internet and to consider net neutrality as a policy objective". Only an open internet can ensure the basis for media pluralism, freedom of expression and information as well as the development of business.

At the same time, we share the member states' concerns about price transparency and quality of service. Transparency is crucial to ensure net neutrality and to foster real competition in



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service offerings. Therefore, internet protocol-based services – such as Voice over Broadband, or some TV and video delivery services – should not be confused with internet services and should not be labelled as such.

The implementation of

these principles of competition, transparency and informed choice for users will be vital and will have to be monitored closely.

Frederic Donck

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