

Europe's research plan starts to take shape

Teresa Riera Madurell describes her goals for the Horizon 2020 funding programme.

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03 February 2012

Teresa Riera Madurell, member of the European Parliament from Spain, was appointed last month as the rapporteur responsible for establishing Horizon 2020, the next European Union (EU) research-funding programme that will run during 2014–20. The former computer scientist leads five other parliamentary rapporteurs who, over the next year, will craft four legislative documents that will dictate the structure of Horizon 2020 and related European research initiatives. She tells *Nature* how she hopes the programme will develop.

How will Horizon 2020 differ from the last EU funding programme?

We've learned a lot from the Seventh Framework programme (FP7), but today's context demands that we prioritize getting out of the economic crisis. Horizon 2020 is very directed at solving the grand challenges of society, such as climate change and energy, but at the same time it has to be directed at creating jobs. There will be more funding for the new programme, but it still seems insufficient, especially in this crisis. When the member states have less money to spend, it is important to use the communal funds to help them get out of the crisis.

What other changes do you think are necessary?

We need to change the concept that failure is negative. Failure and repetition are necessary in research. Maybe it's better to be more demanding and have the researcher persuade us of the value of their research at the beginning, rather than trying to justify the work afterwards.

Another problem of FP7 that we'll try hard to avoid is the excessive bureaucracy. Previously, many researchers decided to stick with national funding programmes to avoid that. We've analysed the things that could be changed immediately, and others that can't be done until later [after changing Europe-wide financial rules]. We're going to push hard on this.

What policy challenges do you foresee?

We are still constructing a European research space. And within this, some countries excel [at research] more than others. We believe that all countries have the right and the possibility to be excellent. So we have to combine policies that support excellence with policies that support cohesion.

Do you think that the programme unfairly favours countries that already do well in research?

Well, we have to support excellence if we want to compete internationally. But if only the excellent ones get support, then we don't support those with potential. So we need large projects that compete at an international level, but we should also open parts of these projects to include investigators who have potential.

What are your goals for drafting the Horizon 2020 legislation?

We're trying to achieve a European research space, but there is still no single European market for researchers. The Marie Curie Actions mobility grants are a good start, but for a researcher to go elsewhere there are still a lot of obstacles in employment law. We need conversations between labour ministers and research ministers to create this market. I also want to make it more attractive for foreign researchers to come to Europe. All of this is part of creating the European Research Area.

Then we need to look at how to solve the problem of converting research results into industrial products. This is a big theme in the next funding programme. We also have to think about how to attract private funding to research.

We're trying to look seven years ahead, but research moves fast. Although it's important to plan, we'll also have to leave for later some lines of research or societal problems that we can't predict.



European Union

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