

# Parliament hopeful over R&D budget fight

Leading MEPs say Parliamentary unity can reverse cuts to research, education and innovation

Ben Upton

**MEPs are confident they** will be able to gain more funding for R&D and higher education in negotiations with national governments on the 2021-27 EU budget—with representatives for these sectors warning of dire consequences if they fail.

“Our negotiating team is doing everything they can to negotiate an increase on these areas,” MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho (pictured) told Research Europe. “I’m convinced this will happen,” she said, citing strong cross-party Parliamentary unity behind the efforts.

Her conviction echoes that of Christian Ehler, one of two leads on the legislation for the Horizon Europe R&D programme, who said he was “sure there won’t be a deal with the Parliament without raising the R&D budget”, although he warned that the negotiations were “complex”.

In July, national governments in the European Council agreed they want a budget of €80.9 billion for Horizon Europe and €21.2bn for the Erasmus+ mobility programme, which funds

student exchange. This was down on the €94.4bn and €24.6bn proposed by the European Commission, and nowhere near the €120bn and €45bn sought by the Parliament and research organisations.

Formally, the Parliament can only accept or reject the stance adopted by the Council, but MEPs are using the threat of voting down the whole budget, which could seriously delay EU spending, to seek changes.

Kurt Dekelelaere, secretary-general of the League of European Research Universities, said he and other R&D advocates have been “feeding in with data and things like that” to bolster MEPs’ negotiating position.

Lidia Borrell-Damián, secretary-general of the association of research funders and performers Science Europe, warned that the next few weeks are “the last resort we have before [the budget is] rubber-stamped”.

Science Europe has written to every MEP in the budget and research committees, as well as Parliament’s president, David Sassoli, to argue its case.



IMAGE: MATTHEU CUGNOT/EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Among those demanding the Council think again are 19 young academies representing early career researchers, which warned on 14 September of “devastating consequences and...significant risks of marginalising Europe’s innovation potential”.

Former research commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who secured a 30 per cent budget increase for the 2014-20 EU R&D programme Horizon 2020, said her advocacy at the time focused

on net contributors to the budget. She said the use of corporations based in those countries had been “instrumental” in convincing their respective prime ministers to back research.

Ministers need to be convinced of “the reality behind their investments in terms of impact for the economy and society”, agreed Muriel Attané, secretary-general of the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations. 🌱

## Tussle starts over 2021 budget for Horizon Europe

National leaders seeking cuts across breadth of R&D programme

Ben Upton

**In a draft position on the budget for the first year of Horizon Europe**, national governments in the European Council have continued to try to reduce spending proposals put forward by the European Commission by seeking cuts across its various instruments.

The Council position, published on 7 September, seeks

a 2021 budget for the EU R&D programme of €11.5 billion, which is €758 million less than the Commission proposed.

The cut seems to have been applied uniformly across the programme, except for administration, such that the Council is seeking funding for the European Research Council of €1.9bn, which is €135m less than proposed by the Commission. Other instruments

that would be affected include the European Innovation Council, as well as thematic funding for R&D in areas such as health, climate, space and culture.

The Council will seek to reach a compromise with the Commission and Parliament so that Horizon Europe can start in January. On 8 September, one of the leading MEPs on the legislation, Christian Ehler, said at a conference that he

was “quite sure” the programme would start on time.

Reiterating Parliament’s support for Horizon Europe, the chair of its research committee, Cristian-Silviu Buşoi, said in a draft opinion on its 2021 budget published on 2 September that more funds would be needed for the EU to deliver promised progress on digitisation and environmental sustainability. 🌱