

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Brussels 1 May 2020

Dear President von der Leyen,

We write to you on behalf of the research and innovation community, represented by the Knowledge4Innovation Forum in the European Parliament. First of all, thank you for all the efforts being made by the European Commission to address the coronavirus crisis, and congratulations for the launch of an ambitious Recovery Plan.

For over a decade, K4I has stressed the importance of innovation to solve major problems. Now, more than ever, we not only need a robust innovation policy, but a set of policies that rely on innovation in all domains. Research and Innovation, in line with the core policies - Digital Transition, the European Green Deal and Industrial Strategy -, should be the foundations that support the Recovery Plan. An ambition that needs to be mirrored on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, with a strong budget for Horizon Europe.

While the COVID19 pandemic exposed serious vulnerabilities and weaknesses in our system, it also greatly increased the use we make of breakthrough technologies. That presents us with an opportunity to prepare for the challenges ahead. This is the time to start developing a better, more sustainable and highly innovative Europe, one that will be more robust than at the start of this crisis. We consider that there are three main angles to this role:

1. Exploiting innovation to aid the recovery itself

Both incremental and breakthrough innovations in nearly all sectors will accelerate the recovery of companies, ensuring employment and making them stronger and ready for the future. We fully realise that immediate disaster recovery is essential (the patient has to stay alive), but it should be seen as a temporary solution. Instead, most resources should be allocated to the uptake of innovative solutions that are needed to ensure long term and sustainable recovery.

2. Accelerating the Digital Transition and the Green Deal for a stronger Europe

Research and Innovation were already the strongest pillars for these core policies. The current crisis provides the EU with an opportunity to accelerate the agendas. Working and living digital will be ever more important. The past weeks have shown inequalities around Europe in terms of access to broadband, technology, infrastructure and skills. Innovation is needed to get everyone on board: entrepreneurs, employees, students, pupils, and not to forget the older generations. The same applies to the Green Deal implementation. Many sectors, such as transports, have been hard hit and will be quite different after the crisis. This creates an opportunity to reshape them in a sustainable manner, with significantly reduced carbon footprints, developing and deploying highly innovative solutions.

3. Innovation to shape the industrial strategy

We cannot overemphasise the importance of having innovation at the heart of the new industrial strategy. A close link with Horizon Europe, through the EIC, the EIT and several clusters and partnerships will deliver the needed impact. This crisis has exposed vulnerabilities to our industrial structure, especially in our value and supply chains. We believe that European high-tech startups that develop unique technologies of strategic relevance should receive the necessary support to make it through the crisis and be protected from foreign acquisitions as this is the case with CureVac for example. Besides all the support that is needed for SMEs to survive, we should not forget the many startups with great inventions for our future in their struggle to survive.

We remain at your disposal to further discuss our ideas and activities involving Members of the European Parliament and innovators from across Europe. Europe needs innovation!

Yours sincerely,

Roland Strauss
K4I Managing Director

Maria da Graça Carvalho
Chair of the K4I Forum Governing Board

Robbert Fisher
K4I President



K4I Forum Governing Board MEPs

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