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European Union : « Once again, research is the adjustment variable.»

Op-ed
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Director of École normale supérieure, Marc Mézard, denounces, in a column to *Le Monde*, the Commission's absence of strategic foresight as well as the budget cuts expected for research and innovation in the EU Recovery Plan.

Op-ed. Europe managed to mobilise and adopt a Recovery Plan that is essential to get away from the current health and economic crisis. While there is political will, strategic foresight is however sorely lacking, as the framework programme for research and innovation sees its budget stagnate. Once again, research is the adjustment variable.

There is no need to demonstrate that investment in cutting-edge research is crucial to Europe's future and in its global competition with the United-States or China. Europe eventually developed remarkably effective tools too. Launched in 2007, the European Research Council (ERC) is one of the pillars of the European strategy.

By supporting projects offered by researchers themselves, by favouring risky initiatives, supporting them in the long run, funding them well, and by organising a peer-review selection process that is both rigorous and open to breakthrough research, the ERC has established itself as a universally recognised quality standard.

Necessity of a European research policy

In French main research universities, whose recent breakthrough in the Shanghai Ranking is noticeable, such as PSL Research University, the number of ERC grants researchers get is regarded as a reliable indicator of research qualitative progress in different fields.

It is important to acknowledge that in certain disciplines, namely in experimental sciences that require significant resources, French research at the best international level owes its survival to the ERC, which has funded more than 500 teams since 2014.

In front of a sanitary crisis and soon an economic one, in front of the challenges of population ageing, global warming, biodiversity loss, industrial mutation, artificial intelligence or data

processing and protection, at a time when private investment in research is also likely to decline, a strong European research policy is absolutely necessary.

Away from a major strategic challenge

With the tools it has established over the last 15 years, Europe has a major, effective and well-known lever to lead its research ambitions. Pascal Lamy's 2017 report on how to maximise the impact of EU research and innovation programmes suggested dedicating 120 billion euros to the "Horizon Europe" framework programme. But successive revisions resulted in a projected budget of 85 billion euros, for 2021-2027, with 5 billion taken from the Recovery Plan.

The Commission's current proposal, which suggests the stagnation of the EU research budget, completely misses this major strategic challenge. If this meagre budget were to be confirmed over the upcoming days, it would mark the end of European research ambitions.