

Policymakers renew call to strengthen R&D budgets in central and eastern Europe



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The first step needed to fix EU's east-west research and innovation gap is to preserve the Horizon Europe budget and make sure member states do not tighten national research funding, policymakers told a Science|Business conference on Wednesday.

In an annual ritual, EU institutions are currently locking horns over next year's budget for Horizon Europe. At the same time, EU governments are having to adjust their budgets in the light of the economic downturn caused by the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis.

EU commissioner for research and innovation Maryia Gabriel warned member states that cutting R&D budgets in this situation would be a serious mistake, since research helps build resilience in times of crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, "We were able to have the vaccine because many years before investments were made in that area," said Gabriel. "If we want [...] to be better prepared for crises we need to invest more in research innovation."

The EU is trying to convince member states to boost public and private investments in R&D to 3% of GDP, but very few countries have done so. An economic crisis fuelled by war, energy shortages and inflation could put further strain on national R&D budgets.

Gabriel's views were echoed by Latvian MEP Ivars Ijabs, who said EU countries neighbouring Russia and Ukraine are the most vulnerable. "We are expecting a meltdown [...] which would decrease private investment," he said. In that case, governments should increase R&D budgets.

At the same time, policymakers in Brussels must fight to preserve the budget of Horizon Europe for 2023. At the moment, budget talks are at an impasse, with member states refusing to accept proposals by the European Parliament to recycle unused money from Horizon Europe's predecessor programme Horizon 2020. Preserving the Horizon budget, "is the most important task," Ijabs said.

More details: [here](#)