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How can funding conditions for European research institutions be improved?

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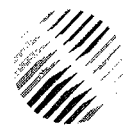
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European Research Area

Supporting excellence in a sustainable way: Toward responsible funding conditions in the European Research Area

Sabine Herlitschka

In November 2007 the European Commission initiated an independent Expert Group on the subject of external funding for university-based research. After extensive data gathering, interviewing and discussions the Expert Group finalized its report end of 2008 under the title 'Diversified Funding streams for University-based research: Impact of external project-based research funding on financial management in Universities'¹.

The expert group has come up with a set of recommendations which stresses the need for streamlining the conditions of external research funding and underlines the joint responsibility of all actors in achieving responsible funding conditions for universities as research institutions.

This set of recommendations invites the research community and policy makers to acknowledge the joint responsibility of actors (Research Funders, Research Institutions, National and European Authorities) in providing research institutions with the appropriate funding conditions they need in order to be able to deliver the type of research excellence expected from them. In itself, it suggests a vision for strategic development and concrete action for improving funding conditions for universities, and to some extent for research institutions at large.

I- Towards responsible funding conditions for research: what are the challenges?

The recent consultations on the future of the European Research Area (ERA) and other considerations stressed the need for Europe to have fully autonomous, accountable, well managed and performing universities and other research institutions, and recalled the current context of insufficient funding for higher education institutions in Europe.

Funders play an important role in this since their funding conditions and requirements influence and are closely interconnected with universities' management and in particular financial management.

Sustainability as prerequisite for excellent European Universities

There is a trend across Europe towards a mixed economy model whereby many universities are shifting from significant core funding, providing 'internal' resources which they are able to allocate according to their own strategic goals, to a model dependent on competing for funds and thus increasingly influenced by research priorities set by funders.

Autonomous, accountable universities have to deal with this situation, take care about their sustainable funding and diversify their funding streams. As a consequence, universities develop an increased awareness of the real costs – full costs - of their activities as basis for informed decision making with respect to their activities and the funding streams relevant for them, as well as a more strategic approach to the management of research and the internal allocation of resources to support their research. Full cost awareness as well as pro-active management are seen as two essential elements – key principles - on the way to achieve sustainability of university-based research.

¹ The full Expert Group Report is available via www at HYPERLINK "http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/index_en.htm"
http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/index_en.htm

The 6th and particularly the 7th EU Framework Programme had and have a catalytic role. Due to its specific nature and regulations, the Framework Programme generally and Framework Programme 7 in particular plays an important role in stimulating/strengthening the awareness of full costing (capacity of an institution to identify the real costs of its activities).

Full-costing and pro-active management: key pillars for accountable research institutions

Strong, autonomous universities have responsibility for their own sustainability and therefore need to have robust management structures and systems in place to support their decision-making. Full costing is a key tool in this regard as universities cannot plan strategically and decide what areas to develop and support if they do not know the real long-term cost of their activities. The ability of a university to identify robustly the true cost of a particular research project allows it to identify which sources of funding are appropriate to its activity and sector.

The ability to know the full costs of institutional operation is an essential prerequisite in order to develop a sustainable basis for a university that intends to pro-actively manage its future opportunities. Doing so not only has to do with technicalities of accounting but also with funders' perceptions towards universities and consequently cultures that need to be changed or adapted. However, changes in university acts already implemented or currently under preparation in many European countries show clear moves towards greater autonomy for universities and thus the development of full costing approaches within them. The ability to identify one's true costs comes with a responsibility to manage them strategically, which can only be achieved if all actors involved, including funders of research (whether core funding or competitive funding) understand and accept the principles involved and recognize the need for universities to recover the full costs of their activities. Whether or not funders then cover those costs is the second part of the issue. It is important, in this context, to recognize that costing and pricing are two separate but interrelated activities. The ability of a university to identify robustly the true cost of a particular research project allows it to identify which sources of funding are appropriate to its activity and sector. It also puts it in a better position to establish collaborations with industry and with other partners and to price its research competitively or at a level which matches the expectations of non-industrial sponsors. State Aid rules have to be considered and will also be a driver in this context.

While it is important that the modernisation agenda² be managed so as not to destabilize European universities through too rapid changes, the Expert Group's view is that the majority of European universities are not developing fast enough. If universities are to compete at an international level and ensure the sustainability of their research it is essential, if they have not done so already, that they engage now in the process to identify the full costs of their activities.

Excellent research needs excellent management: it needs to be recognized that, as well as the ability to identify the full costs of their research, it is important that universities have the management and administrative infrastructure necessary to manage their internal resources so as to support the strategic co-financing of their research in a sustainable way. In other words, the move towards full costing is not an end in itself: it simply provides the essential tool which universities require for identifying and understanding their true costs and through which they can move towards sustainability.

² Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: 'Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation' COM (2006) 208, 10 May 2006

The diversity of funding streams and the conditions of external funding

All over Europe funding streams for universities are becoming more diverse, with a relatively lower share of core funding and by tendency a higher share of external, competitive funding. There appears to be little empirical evidence to show what the 'right' balance is between core funding allocated at institutional level, allowing the university to set its own priorities and develop long-term strategic planning, and external project funding that is very important for ensuring quality.

Funding organizations and agencies play an important role not just because they provide external funding, but also due to the funding requirements and conditions that are linked to this funding and which have obvious steering effects within universities. It is useful that there is a broader spectrum of funding opportunities offered at national level with the various agencies developing their specific profiles, e.g. focusing on basic or applied research, innovation or specific structures of research projects (cooperation with industry, centres of competence, etc.). However, these opportunities are linked to a substantial diversity in funding models and mechanisms applied.

Universities are thus confronted with very heterogeneous sets of requirements depending on the different types and roles of funders at national and European levels, ranging from classical additional cost or lump sum models to schemes supporting the full costing approaches at universities. It is clear that these conditions not only make it difficult for universities to develop their own coherent systems, but often force them to develop and maintain multiple systems based on different approaches and cultures.

What is necessary to improving funding conditions is a good balance of funding agencies and organizations at national and European level that work according to the same principles and procedures, while at the same time keeping the diversity in terms of the different objectives they pursue thus strengthening the competition between funding organizations for the best research projects with respect to their funding portfolio.

External funders, therefore, have a key role to play in assisting universities in developing improved management and accountability systems, in avoiding/reducing multiplied administrative burdens, and in achieving sustainability through identifying and recognizing the full cost of their research activity.

Funding research is not a procurement process

Finally, as indicated in Recommendation 4 detailed below, it is time to reconsider the philosophy currently applied in funding research which becomes more and more similar to procurement processes of goods defining all kinds of input details. Therefore, the financial and audit requirements need to be adapted to take this into account.

The implementation of Joint Programming...

Particularly with respect to discussions in the context of 'joint programming' it is important to see that funding agencies currently work with very different conditions and requirements not only in the respective countries but also all over Europe. This diversity is not related to the type of research (basic or applied) but depends on many different factors and traditions. In order to work towards Joint Programming, coordinated approaches in funding mechanisms will be essential.

II The recommendations of the Expert Group:

Recommendation 1: Responsibility at university level

Recommendation for Strategic Development:

Universities must recognise that excellence in research requires sound and pro-active management practices. Excellence in research and management go hand in hand, financial management is a condition for informed, strategic decision-making, in an environment where universities are expected to develop long term excellent research activities in line with their strategic profile.

Full costing is an essential component of appropriate financial management of research in this context.

Recommendation for Action: Universities need to adopt full costing methodologies appropriate to their national legal requirements as a key tool for sustainable development.

Recommendation 2: Shared roles and responsibilities for Member States and the European Commission

Recommendation for Strategic Development:

Member States have a responsibility to contribute to the sustainability of the university-based research sector together with the European Commission supporting this process at EU level. Both should, therefore, ensure that this objective be one of the principles underpinning all the research programmes they fund.

Recommendation for Action: Member States, working with the principal national funding agencies in the first instance, but involving other research funders in time, together with the European Commission should consider drawing up Good Practice Guidelines for External Funding Terms and Conditions in consultation with universities.

Recommendation 3: Role and responsibility at National level

Recommendations for Strategic Development:

The financing of university infrastructure underpins universities' ability to maintain research excellence and competitiveness.

In allocating core funding, Member States need to be clear about the purpose of that funding and recognise the cost of maintaining existing infrastructures as well as that of bringing them up to a globally competitive standard.

Recommendation for Action: Where such an exercise has not yet been undertaken an assessment of the current state and competitiveness of university research infrastructure (both human and physical) in individual Member States will be necessary so as to identify priority areas for investment.

Recommendation 4: Responsibility at European level

Recommendation for Strategic Development:

Research activities shall not be supported like procurement, as there are fundamental differences between funded research and procured activities. Where procurement requires the definition of all kinds of detailed input descriptions and reporting, research activities should be supported and funded by focusing on their contribution to the "production" of knowledge. Thus, consideration should be given to the financial regulations which surround research funding to ensure that they are suited to the nature of research activities, in terms of reporting

requirements and expected accountability.

The Commission should reward best practice and encourage the adoption of full costing while ensuring that those universities which do so are not placed at a disadvantage when competing for funds.

The FP 7 transitional flat rate can be used as major external driver towards full costing implementation but shall not be considered in isolation. Appropriate support at national level has to be provided to universities to facilitate their transition to full costing implementation.

Recommendations for Action: As part of the mid-term review of Framework Programme 7, the Commission and the Member States should review the state of play across EU 27 on the ability of universities to identify the true costs of their research as well as the national support mechanisms available to them to do so, and should promote the sharing of best practice and mutual learning while taking into account national legal and structural constraints.

III- A focus for our discussion: the need for common guidelines / shared principles for external research funding in the ERA

Despite the fact that all 4 recommendations form a necessary, comprehensive set, the ERA conference debate could focus on recommendation 2 addressing the shared roles of Member States and the European Commission and suggesting the development of Common Guidelines/ Shared Principles for external research funding.

The debate is suggested to be focused on the issues surrounding funding conditions for research institutions and potential steps forward, notably:

- common acknowledgement of the challenges recalling for further policy action: need for enhanced cross-border collaboration, inter-operability of funding conditions across ERA, long-term sustainability of public research base
- the usefulness and possible scope of common guidelines / shared principles for external funding in the ERA context. In this respect, the panellists are invited to take advantage of the workshop discussions held on this topic in September 2009.

'Funding conditions for research' and transparency, the experiences in the Netherlands

Francien Heijs

a) Government Perspective

The role of the government is to bolster a good tertiary education and research system. Conditions need to be created that serve to not only maintain but also improve a sustainable, well-functioning research system.

To realise such conditions the government provides resources (core funding) for the performance of three tasks: education, research and knowledge transfer in order to (1) allow young researchers to enter the research system; (2) reward excellent research performance; and (3) allow for long term risky research. Universities receive funding from many different sources:

- national public funding (ministry responsible for higher education, other ministries, research councils, governmental agencies; local government)
- national private funding (industry, tuition fees, academic fees, etc)
- international funding (EU, international organisations, foundations, etc.).

All these different sources have their own terms and conditions (funding schemes, rules for accountability, etc) even within one organisation and there is no coordination. This situation calls for simplification and coordination at the national, European and international level.

The full-cost system is aptly suitable for use as a management tool in this context. Full-costing is first and foremost of importance to university management and the conduct of research itself, increasing the financial sustainability of universities. It is important that universities have the management and administrative infrastructure necessary to manage their internal resources, so as to support the strategic co-financing of their research in a sustainable way.

Steps taken at the government level

- The Dutch legislation and regulations have been amended and strict frameworks have been set down in order to reduce the enormous jungle of regulations. Thus, we have managed to cut down the public research subsidies to a single comprehensive scheme. An example of enabling legislation: the Ministry of Finance has provided a framework, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Research and Science have adapted their regulations accordingly. Other Ministries will follow suit. The goal and the result are improving transparency and reducing red tape.
- Adaptation of the accounting requirements, enabling easier and more efficient auditing: SISA. To counter multiple audit declarations and other administrative red tape, the Netherlands recently introduced the so-called "SISA Single Information Single Audit". This system enables universities to account for the use of all kinds of financial instruments (subsidies, commissioned work, etc.) with one financial accounting document, one audit and one audit declaration. The system is based on a single accounting protocol (standard definition of eligible costs and other conditions) and a single authority (desk / mailbox) distributing the information among the other authorities concerned. It aims at reducing the redundancy of the system (avoiding duplication of accounting information and audits) and enhances the uniformity of applying rules. It also aims at harmonising Dutch and EU accounting basics as much as possible.

- Simplification of institutional funding by subsuming as many separate subsidies as possible in the lump sum (core funding). This comprises all the statutory tasks: education, research and dissemination of knowledge. The core funds are also used for the aggregate infrastructure needed to facilitate the above tasks. In the Netherlands, core funding accounts for 66 per cent of research provided to Dutch universities.

b) Universities and external funders

It is the responsibility of the autonomous universities to develop strategies and spend the funds made available to them in a transparent manner, in a way that contributes towards achieving the goals they have set. Full-costing is of paramount importance to that end. Whether or not funders then cover those costs is the second part of the issue.

The desire to switch to full costing alone is not sufficient to enter into a dialogue. Equally important is a clear definition of how this is interpreted by the various institutions. There is a need for commonly understood terminology and definitions for finance, costing and accounting. This is particularly important for cooperation in the 7th framework programme (FP7) and also in the context of Joint Programming

In the Netherlands, the key stakeholders (universities and external funders) have signed a **covenant** on the funding of scientific research conducted by external parties. This specifies what (direct) costs involved in external research are reimbursed. The parties involved are:

- Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)
- Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)
- Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)
- Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw)
- Charity funds / VFI

Peer review

Universities and external funders have agreed on a uniform protocol for research assessment (Standard Evaluation Protocol). The aim is: improvement of research quality based on external peer review, and accountability to the board of the research organisation and to the funding agencies. The main elements of the SEP are:

- assessment at two levels: the research organisation (institution, faculty or research school) and research groups or programmes;
- focus on the three vital tasks: producing results for the academic community, societal relevance, and education and training;
- four criteria: quality, productivity, relevance and vitality & feasibility.

The future

The first steps have been taken but more still needs to be done:

- developing common terminology and guidelines
- Involving all stakeholders
- Identifying and exchanging best practices and experiences
- Demonstrating clear advantages at all levels
- Keeping things as simple as possible (simplification)

Supporting excellence in a sustainable way: toward responsible funding conditions in the European Research Area

Erkki Leppävuori

Sabine Herlitschka's excellent overview paper focuses particularly on universities and emphasises especially the need for them to continue to move towards full-cost accounting. The experience of Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) confirms the importance of adopting full-cost accounting. Most RTOs made the transition to full cost during the past two decades or so, and the results have been clearly positive: transparency with regard to costs is essential for strategic planning and for prioritising investments; it allows the setting of realistic prices when undertaking contract work for private companies or government agencies, and it provides a reliable basis for conducting negotiations with government about medium- to long-term basic funding requirements. If individual universities are to assume greater strategic and operational responsibility for their own future development, RTO experience suggests that full-cost accounting is the necessary first step.

Full-cost accounting is also important in the context of universities' "third mission". As universities engage more and more with third parties in both the public and private sectors, and provide services to them on a remunerated basis, those services must be sensibly priced. This is essential for the universities themselves, in order to allow them to fully cover their (true) costs. But it is essential, too, in order to avoid situations of unfair competition. Universities must recognise that their third-mission activities frequently take them into "markets" where other players, operating according to commercial, i.e. full-cost principles, are present. In such circumstances, universities must compete on equal terms, i.e. according to their real costs: a level playing field must be assured.

In order to avoid any ambiguity, full-cost accounting means more than budgeting real personnel costs plus consumables. Universities, like RTOs, frequently own sophisticated and costly facilities (including buildings) and equipment. Full-cost accounting of such facilities and equipment is equally essential. It is essential for strategic planning and budgeting (buildings need to be operated, equipment needs to be maintained, upgraded and replaced over time) but also for the proper costing of operations and services to third parties. Effective full-cost accounting can perhaps best be achieved by operating an "internal market" where, for example, the use of a particular facility for performing a research project or delivering a service to an outside party involves the payment of a rental fee to the university for the use of the facility (activity based costing).

It has been suggested that this conference should result in an agreement by the major stakeholder organisations – both research funders and research performers – on a common set of guidelines for responsible external funding across ERA. That is a worthwhile objective, although one should recognise that individual stakeholder organisations such as EARTO - perhaps also the EUA or TAFTIE – cannot commit their members to detailed principles or binding rules. What we can do is all work together to establish general principles for the main research budget providers to follow. There is sometimes an unspoken assumption in discussions on research funding that a research organisation (RTO, university, etc.) has a right to exist and that it is the duty of the budget provider to ensure that adequate funding is forthcoming. We should perhaps be a little more humble: those who are funded by the collectivity have a responsibility towards the collectivity, and so we should not expect funding as a right, but as recognition that we have something of value to offer the collectivity.

For the purpose of establishing the general principles for sustainable research funding to which I just referred, it could be very helpful to set up a representative stakeholder forum bringing together both the funders and performers of research. It is important that such a forum be fully representative: with regard to the research performers, for example, it should include not only universities and RTOs but also industry, partly because industry may be the recipient of public funding (e.g. R&D grants) but also because industry frequently co-funds, for example, collaborative research with universities or RTOs and so has a vital interest in the overall funding framework.

I should like to propose that the remit of such a stakeholder forum should be broader than may be apparent at first glance. We have already discussed that full-cost accounting is the necessary basis for a truly sustainable research funding regime. This implies that we recognise and accept all of the costs necessary for performing research: we are talking here of much more than the immediate research costs of working time, laboratory consumables and perhaps equipment costs. We need to recognise that there are significant necessary costs upstream of research *per se*, for example: technology and market foresight to anticipate future technology and knowledge needs in the economy and society; strategic research to develop new knowledge in response to identified probable future needs, and continual upgrading of personnel to ensure the necessary skills; and let us not forget building up trust in various networks and consortia to perform dedicated research! Similarly, there are costs downstream of research *per se*, for example: broad-based knowledge transfer activities to ensure wide dissemination of knowledge, and IP protection and maintenance. We frequently underestimate the true, necessary economic cost of research: but a research funding regime which does not recognise the necessary cost will not be sustainable and any reference to full costing principle will become fuzzy.

Having said that, I feel obliged to make a reference here to the current FP6 ex-post audits as well as the FP7 funding regime and I hope that my remarks will be understood in the constructive sense which I intend. The Framework Programme applies restrictive definitions of eligible personnel costs and of overhead costs that are hardly compatible with the idea of truly sustainable research funding. The ex-post FP6 audits also remind us that funding regimes must be predictable and provide a minimum of legal certainty.

A broad stakeholder forum to establish general principles for sustainable funding for research – proceeding from the idea of the full economic cost of research, such as I have just outlined – would surely be a very helpful step on the way. It will, or course, then be essential for the Member States and the European Commission to agree how they, jointly and separately, can contribute the necessary public funding.

The usefulness and possible scope of common guidelines / shared principles for external funding in the ERA context

Tatjana Volkova

Following the invitation to focus debate of the workshop session around the two main issues mentioned by Sabine Herlitschka toward responsible funding conditions in the European Research Area I support the idea that there is a strong need for development of common shared principles (guidelines) for external funding in the ERA context.

1. The usefulness of common guidelines/shared principles for external funding

Due to the current context of insufficient funding for higher education institutions in Europe and the globalization the Universities are operating in a more competitive environment. Thus the University and other Research Institutions leaders have to develop entrepreneurial mindset and implement managerial approaches for ensuring long term sustainability of Universities and other Research Institutions. The clusters based economic policies also require stronger collaboration of all actors involved at many different levels based on common understanding of funding conditions for research and of their impact on the sustainability of the Universities and other Research institutions. As it follows from European Clusters Memorandum the strategic importance of clusters for European innovation and global competitiveness is only now becoming fully recognizing and success depends on concerted changes in policies, programmes, initiatives, and thinking at many different levels and in many different places across Europe. The 7th Framework Programme is already a good sample of including a wide range of activities open to clusters, innovation and competitiveness.

The opening debate of necessity for developing common guidelines/shared principles of external funding in ERA context is in line with clusters and partnership development and will help to foster mutual trust and understanding between all partners involved in research over Europe as well will serve as a good sample for developing a new initiatives based on already existing experience and expertise. The necessity of developing common shared funding principles is linked to the fact that different funding schemes impose different (even conflicting) rules for institutions that make it difficult for them to establish well designed processes and have heavy burden on time and human resources. The common guidelines would serve as a good communication and transparency tool on national, transnational and regional level with wider public.

On the level of society (including NGO's; mass media, etc.) the development of common guidelines/shared principles of external funding will help to build mutual understanding and trust, to increase awareness of the research importance for European innovation and global competitiveness as well necessity to increase funding for the research both from public and from private resources. It will be helpful in communication process with society for increasing transparency of funding of research activities and helping to build trust between Universities and other Research Institutions, business, society and government.

The European University Association (EUA) project „Towards full costing in European universities” showed that Higher Education Institutions are still largely state funded, but at the same time institutions have to adapt to more

Arvid Hallén

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate at this important conference.

Stakeholder organizations have an important role in the ERA process, and I am glad to see that the opinion of TAFTIE - the European Network of Innovation Agencies is widely sought and valued. This year the Research Council of Norway is chairing TAFTIE, and my colleague Executive Director Lars Aukrust is the TAFTIE Chairman.

Europe faces many challenges and opportunities in building the European Research Area.

Our universities are among the most important actors in building the ERA. On many arenas our universities are crucial players - as hosts for world-class research facilities and as providers of top notch research and education. Our universities are also key institutions in developing the knowledge triangle. I welcome that EU research ministers through their informal meeting of the ministers in mid-October are giving impetus to this development.

I observe that a restructuring of the European research landscape is taking place, with many actors seeking a better organized and a more structured approach to their conduct of world-class research. A good example of this type of restructuring is the cooperation between national research institutes in the European Energy Research Alliance (EERA). I note that the European University Association has created a platform to enable the best brains from the universities to take full part in this cooperative effort. In my view such a model could also be applied to other areas of research.

It is however of vital importance to create sustainable framework conditions for this cooperative effort. In this context it is therefore important to include stakeholders, such as umbrella organizations, which can make their own vital contribution to building the European Research Area. As an example, TAFTIE, the European Network of Innovation Agencies, is one of the stakeholders which has been identified as a contributor in developing suitable framework conditions.

The need to make universities more autonomous and sustainable has been underlined both by the Expert Group on external funding for university based research, the ERA Expert Group on strengthening research institutions with a focus on university-based research and many others.

Modernization of universities is essential for the development of a successful ERA. There is a joint responsibility between national ministries and funding agencies, the Commission and not least the research institutions themselves to work for modernization. I agree with these concerns and support the recommendations from the expert groups. As funding agencies, we must ensure that our instruments contribute to this modernization process.

To achieve sustainability, universities should give priority to develop full costing methodologies.

Based on an initiative from the Research Council of Norway, and under our auspices, a working group of the seven Norwegian universities was established in autumn 2008. Its remit has been to establish common principles for the Norwegian universities when moving to full costing. The final report will be published next month.

I believe that this is the way forward for universities in the context of the European Research Area, and will support further initiatives in this area which will promote a shift to full costing methodologies.

I support a review of the financial regulations surrounding research funding. This will ensure that the regulations reflect that funding of research is not procurement of goods or services, but rather supports a research process – i.e. a stress on the process, not only on the result. That said, it is of course important to continue the ongoing efforts to disseminate and exploit the results of research for the benefit of society.

A main concern for the expert group on external funding is the present lack of consistency and compatibility of funding requirements and conditions between different national and European level funding organizations and agencies. Responding to such multiple and differing requirements creates an obvious challenge for universities, and increases their administrative burdens. The transaction costs for university participation remain high, and places great demands on universities' professional management in dealing with such varying requirements.

The present situation is counterproductive for the universities, and also unsatisfactory from the point of view of the funders. Mutual recognition of national funding practices may be a step in the right direction, and will hopefully lead to some alignment of the differences in the requirement. But this may not be enough.

In my view it is of great value to establish common principles for responsible external funding between all relevant actors and stakeholders, as has been proposed. I agree with this approach and fully support the development of a voluntary agreement on common principles for external funding.

When mutual trust and understanding has been established between actors and stakeholders, such voluntary agreement on principles may gradually lead to the establishment of common guidelines. I would in this context like to stress that the development of Framework Conditions for Joint Programming Initiatives, and specifically the development of a coherent approach to funding of cross-border research by national or regional authorities, underlines the timeliness of establishing common guidelines for external research funding in the European Research Area.

In my view, we should start the discussion as soon as possible on how to proceed towards the establishment of common principles.