

Europe needs to engage and invest in national R&D budgets

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In June's edition of *Physics World* Portugal's former science and technology minister, José Mariano Gago, calls for more investment in, and engagement with, national science budgets in light of the European Union's (EU) stagnated investment.

Gago also proposes a totally independent and credible "[observatory](#)" that would analyse national science policies and science budgets across Europe and give early warnings to [scientists](#) and the public on their developments.

The [economic crisis](#) has – at least since 2007 – divided [research and development](#) (R&D) within the EU. Large growth in investment in Germany and the Nordic countries has been set against a relative overall reduction in investment of resources in other large countries such as Spain, Italy, France and the UK.

As a whole, R&D budgets in the EU have stalled while R&D budgets in the US have grown rapidly, leading to a continent-wide brain drain that has detracted the best talents. According to Gago, sustained national budgets over the last decade could have led to better universities and research facilities and increased private-sector funding.

Around 90% of research spending in Europe is through national budgets – the remaining 10% being channelled to pay for the EU Framework Programmes, which for the period 2014 is named Horizon 2020.

The €74bn Horizon 2020 programme has seen a slight real-terms increase in funding – as compared with its predecessor the Seventh Framework Programme – but Gago believes this increase is quite modest compared with the hopes and proposals of the European Parliament and, above all, with the overall evolution of the national R&D budgets of member states.

Gago writes, "We as Europeans should now focus on raising national budgets for R&D: our own as well as those of all other European countries. We should be helping each other across borders, campaigning for a stronger constituency for science and ensuring education and research in each of our countries stay well funded even during an economic downturn."

The scientific communities themselves, Gago believes, are the missing piece of this jigsaw. He calls for scientists, organizations, universities and industry to take more responsibility in pursuing a higher priority for science and technology at national level and raising more concern about negative policies in other EU countries.

Waiting for this to spontaneously happen is both "erroneous" and "naive", he believes.

José Mariano Gago is at the Instituto Superior Técnico, Lisbon, and director of the Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física de Partículas. He was [Portugal's science and technology](#) minister from 1995 to 2002 and again from 2005 to 2012 and has been recently elected an honorary member of the European Physical Society.

Provided by Institute of Physics

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