

# Understanding EU R&D Policy

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1. Three aspects of European research policy call for clarification: (i) concept of “knowledge-based society”, (ii) validity of 3 % “Barcelona target”, and (iii) investment in “risky research”. Each one of the three principles contains a degree of misapprehension.

This paper addresses the above issue in an unbiased manner.

2. Throughout history, progress has always been based on state-of-art, i.e. current best knowledge. Progressive societies have always been knowledge-based. Today creativity and imagination in connection with communication and marketing have become the key driving forces for progress and competitive success.

We suggest moving away from the overused expression “knowledge-based society” and referring rightly to the current situation as being the “creativity-based society”.

3. It has been repeatedly demonstrated, that it is the absolute research effort that may lead to a competitive advantage. A pre-determined percentage figure of R&D spending is useful as long as it draws attention to the need for adequate research funds. The EU’s Barcelona target of 3 % public spending on R&D must be seen in this context.

The 3 % shouldn’t be considered as an objective in its own right.

4. Political leaders must take a view of longer time horizons and understand that it is not possible to force human creativity into a straitjacket. Failure must be accepted as an unavoidable “ingredient” of research.

Political guidance is helpful. But there must be room for failure. Excellent scientists should be encouraged to conduct risky projects. An unavoidable side-effect may be more European Nobel Laureates.

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