

## EU research needs a sense of urgency in new Trump era

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Researchers have a role in responding to the rise in populist support. Putting out the message about the value of the R&D it funds will help the EU to demonstrate its worth and relevance

The triumph of Donald Trump in the US presidential election last week and looming elections across Europe, has left officials in Brussels desperately searching for ways to counter populism.

In the coming months, anti-establishment forces will argue that the EU is the continent's bogeyman in elections in the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and France. After Trump's win and the British vote to leave the bloc in June, their odds of gaining ground suddenly do not look so long.

Brussels is feeling the heat.

"It's a wake-up call," said Kurt Vandenberghe, director of policy development and coordination at the European Commission's DG Research and Innovation, speaking at the 'Innovation Summit' in the European Parliament on Tuesday.

The feeling in the room was that – hardly for the first time – the EU is facing an existential crisis, with fresh doubt over its contribution to the world.

"If you asked people in Europe how important EU-funded research and innovation is to them, you might not get the answer you wish," said German MEP Christian Ehler. "It's somewhat important to people, but no more."

Trump's surprise win has piled pressure on the EU to demonstrate its worth, said Ehler. "Can we draw on a big example of where society changed because of EU research?" he asked.

While there is future potential in the EU's big billion-euro investment in quantum computers, the ideas behind the technology are not easy to sell, nor are achievements in the field perceptible yet, Ehler said.

"So what can we tell people? Without the right frame, we won't get €100 billion for FP9," Ehler added, referring to the upcoming budget battle over the successor to the current science programme, Horizon 2020.

Universities are beginning to look at their own role in halting a populist surge. The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, a lobby group in Brussels, issued a 'A Wake-Up Call for Europe' on Monday. Universities need to "take seriously the concerns of those that are disaffected and feel left behind" the statement said. There is a need to share platforms with think-tanks, publishing companies, print media and social media representatives, "especially those we disagree with".

Dutch MEP **Lambert Van Nistelrooij** said researchers should now be given more money by the EU to spend on promoting their research results. "Why not take 5-10 per cent of the budget and play the storyteller with it?" he suggested.

EU research suffers from a lack of publicity. "I have to look very hard to find our research stars," said Van Nistelrooij. The Commission should re-think its way of communicating. "If you go on the same way, what you do will not be felt by citizens."

The message is positive. "We have a success story in Horizon 2020 and we should talk about it more," Van Nistelrooij said. The programme has had a bumper two years, with floods of applications, over half of which came from first-time applicants.

"Europe can, and still, works, but I know it's going to be very difficult months and years ahead," he added.

