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Coronavirus 'shows need for UK and EU to be together' on research

Influential Portuguese MEP calls for rapid UK-EU agreement on Horizon Europe association

March 13, 2020

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The coronavirus outbreak emphasises the need for the UK and European Union nations to continue to collaborate on global research challenges, and an agreement is needed quickly to keep the country in the bloc's next research programme, according to an influential MEP.

Maria da Graça Carvalho, a former adviser to Carlos Moedas in his time as European commissioner for research and a former research adviser to José Manuel Barroso in his time as commission president, said it was "also important that researchers in UK universities [put] pressure on the government" to "go fast" and ensure "that there are no diversions that could complicate the negotiation".

In its strategy for the wider talks with the EU, the UK government states that it will "consider a relationship in line with non-EU member state participation" with Horizon Europe, the EU's next research programme, starting in January 2021. A government source told *Times Higher Education* that the negotiating mandate "is for full association to Horizon Europe" (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/policy-experts-encouraged-uk-stance-horizon-europe>).

"I think everyone wants this to be solved, and to be solved really quickly," Ms Carvalho, a former engineering professor who has also served as a science and higher education minister in Portugal, told *THE*.



Source: Getty

"We have big, big challenges in front of us in global health, like we are seeing now. We really need to be all together...to solve all the problems we have to face in health, in climate change...We just hope that we find a solution [on UK participation in Horizon Europe] in a reasonable period of time."

The European Commission said this month (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_386) that it had scaled up funding for coronavirus research in Horizon 2020, its current research programme, to €47.5 million (£41.6 million), to fund work on developing vaccines, treatments, diagnostic tests and medical systems aimed at preventing the spread of the virus.

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Ms Carvalho, who was a European Parliament rapporteur on the development of Horizon 2020, said UK association to Horizon Europe was "a crucial issue both for the UK and the EU".

"We cannot afford to lose this [international] cooperation at the scientific level. In my opinion, we have to find a way to have a good deal that is good for both sides, and I'm hopeful that will be the case," she said.

Ms Carvalho acknowledged that an agreement in research would be subject to the UK and the EU agreeing a wider deal on their future relationship. "The overall negotiations need to go well to have an overall political agreement," she said. "And after, there are the detailed negotiations on each programme."

One potential key obstacle, for UK association and for Horizon Europe as a whole, is that a budget for the programme has yet to be settled, having been held up by delays in agreeing the EU's 2021-27 budget. This has raised fears that the start of Horizon Europe could be delayed (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/eu-leaders-desert-research-brussels-budget-showdown>).

"There is a lot of uncertainty," said Ms Carvalho. "But at least in the European Parliament, we are working hard [to ensure] that everything starts on time, both for the EU and for all the associated countries and third countries.

"We know that a gap [between research programmes] would be very damaging for research. Researchers and knowledge are very mobile. If you are not paid, you go somewhere else: you go to the US, Canada, Australia. There are plenty of countries that want to receive our best researchers."

The European Parliament would be ready to agree the Horizon Europe articles "as soon as we have the budget...and as soon as we have the political agreement to have the details of UK participation", Ms Carvalho added.

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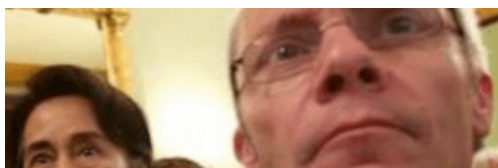


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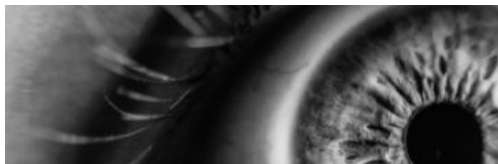


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