To the Heads of State or Government of EU Countries, Presidents of EU Institutions,

It is often said that every crisis also presents an opportunity. The current crisis forces us to make choices, and one of those choices is about science and its support. Back in the year 2000, you and your predecessors set yourselves the target of becoming the “world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010”. The intention was ambitious and noble, but the goal has yet to be achieved.

Science can help us find answers to many of the pressing problems facing us at this time: new ways to harness energy, new forms of production and products, improved ways to understand how societies function and how we might order them better. We are just at the start of a revolutionary new understanding of how our own bodies work with incalculable consequences for our future health and longevity.

Europe is at the forefront of science in many areas. Transforming this knowledge into innovative new products, services and industries is the only way to provide Europe with a competitive edge in today's rapidly changing global landscape and to ensure Europe’s long-term future prosperity.

Knowledge knows no boundaries. The global market for outstanding talent is highly competitive. Europe can ill afford to lose its best researchers and teachers, and would gain greatly by attracting foreign talent. Reducing the funding available for excellent research means a smaller number of trained researchers. In case of a severe reduction in the EU research and innovation budget we risk losing a generation of talented scientists just when Europe needs them most.

In this regard, the European Research Council has achieved global recognition in a remarkably short time. It funds the best researchers anywhere in Europe regardless of nationality: Excellent people, excellent projects. It valuably complements national funding of fundamental research.

Funding research at EU level is a catalyst to make better use of the resources we have and make national budgets more efficient and effective. These EU resources are extremely precious. They have proven to be capable of achieving
essential benefits for European science as well as increasing returns to society and increasing international competitiveness.

It is essential that we support, and even more importantly, inspire in a pan-European way the extraordinary wealth of research and innovation potential that exists all over Europe. We are convinced that the younger generation of researchers will also make its voice heard – and you should listen to what they have to say.

Our question to you, the Heads of State or Government and Presidents meeting in Brussels on 22-23 November to discuss the EU budget for 2014-2020, is a simple one: when the deal for Europe’s future budget is announced, what will be the role of science in Europe’s future?

Signed by Nobel Prize and Fields Medal winners

SIDNEY ALTMAN, WERNER ARBER, ROBERT J. AUMANN, FRANCOISE BARRÉ-SINOUSI, GÜNTER BLOBEL, MARIO CAPECCHI, AARON CIECHANOWER, CLAUDE COHEN-TANNOUDJI, JOHANN DEISENHOFER, RICHARD R.ERNST, GERHART ERTL, SIR MARTIN EVANS, ALBERT FERT, ANDRE GEIM, SERGE HAROCHE, AVRAM HERSHKO, JULES A. HOFFMANN, ROALD HOFFMANN, ROBERT HUBER, SIR TIM HUNT, ERIC R. KANDEL, KLAUS VON KLITZING, SIR HAROLD KROTO, FINN KYDLAND, JEAN-MARIE LEHN, ERIC S. MASKIN, DALE T. MORTENSEN, ERWIN NEHER, KONSTANTIN NOVOSELOV, SIR PAUL NURSE, CHRISTIANE NÜSSLIN-VOLHARD, VENKATRAMAN RAMAKRISHNAN, SIR RICHARD J. ROBERTS, HEINRICH ROHRER, BERT SAKMANN, BENGT I. SAMUELSSON, JOHN E. SULSTON, JACK W. SZOSTAK, SIR JOHN E. WALKER, ADA E. YONATH, ROLF ZINKERNAGEL, HARALD ZUR HAUSEN; PIERRE DELIGNE, TIMOTHY GOWERS, MAXIM KONTSEVICH, STANISLAV SMIRNOV, CEDRIC VILLANI