

Europe unveils \$567 million push to attract researchers as French president decries US ‘mistake’ over science policy

The European Union will spend €500 million (\$567 million) over the next three years “to make Europe a magnet for researchers,” a top official announced Monday in a veiled response to the Trump administration’s cuts to research funding and changes to science policy.

Speaking alongside Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the EU’s executive arm, French President Emmanuel Macron was more direct, criticizing recent actions by “one of the largest democracies in the world,” such as cancellation of hundreds of research grants, and calling them “a mistake.”

The two European leaders spoke at the “Choose Europe for science” event at the prestigious Sorbonne university in Paris.

“Unfortunately, we see today that the role of science in today’s world is questioned. The investment in fundamental, free and open research is questioned. What a gigantic miscalculation,” von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said in a speech, which didn’t mention the United States.

The comments by von der Leyen and Macron follow a string of changes to US science policy since Trump’s return to the White House.

For example, the National Science Foundation, a federal agency charged with advancing discoveries across the scientific spectrum, announced last month that it will

cancel hundreds of grants for programs that include — but are not limited to — research related to diversity, equity and inclusion, “vaccine information integrity,” and misinformation and disinformation.

The NSF said on its website it will stop funding any misinformation research that goes against Trump’s January 20 executive order on “restoring freedom of speech.”

Meanwhile, a budget proposal unveiled by the White House Friday includes a large reduction in funding for the NSF, cuts to climate science research and the elimination of an institute focused on nursing research.

“No one could have imagined a few years ago that one of the largest democracies in the world would cancel research programs simply because the word ‘diversity’ was in the program,” Macron said Monday.

“No one could have thought that one of the largest democracies in the world would erase, with a stroke of the pen, the ability to grant visas to certain researchers,” he continued. “No one could have thought that this great democracy, whose economic model relies so heavily on free science, on innovation and on its ability to innovate more than Europeans and to spread that innovation over the past three decades, would make such a mistake. But here we are.”

In contrast with that assessment, von der Leyen said “open and free” science is Europe’s “calling card.” “We must do everything we can to uphold it — now more than ever before,” she added.

Von der Leyen also said the European Commission wants “to enshrine freedom of scientific research into law” and that EU member states “have to” achieve a target of investing 3% of gross domestic product in research and development by 2030.

