

## EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES AD-INTERIM EVALUATION OF HORIZON 2020

\*This paper has been endorsed by the Academia Europaea

The **European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH)** welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Ad-interim Review of Horizon 2020. EASSH represents 28 European scientific and scholarly associations with a combined membership of tens of thousands of researchers across the spectrum of SSH disciplines. Our submission focuses on those aspects that we feel are most likely to have an impact on the outcomes for Horizon 2020 and that we believe need to be considered by the High Level Working Group (HLG) also in view of current preparations for FP9.

### **Is Horizon 2020 delivering on its principal aims?**

In 2010, the Commission published its Europe 2020 Strategy; a 10-year blue print for the development of the European project. The strategy set out the key policy areas, which the EU had prioritised for collective action: employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy. Horizon 2020 was intended to provide the research and support innovation to help the EU achieve the goals set in the 10-year strategy. The challenges faced were substantial and from the outset it was obvious that expertise from across all scientific fields would need to be harnessed. Horizon 2020 articulated this through the three-pillar structure: excellent science, industrial leadership and societal challenges.

EASSH would like to draw attention to the areas where we believe that Horizon 2020 may not deliver on its high ambitions. We look at the implementation of each pillar and raise issues which deserve further consideration in order to promote scientific approaches to the broader societal challenges faced by Europe.

**Pillar One on Excellent Research** supports world-class research in Europe by an excellence-driven, bottom-up approach, led by the European Research Council. The guiding principle is the simple criterion of quality and originality of the research proposed, irrespective of geographic location or academic discipline. As a result, the researchers and scholars working in the social sciences and humanities are able to benefit fully and in fair proportion to other research fields. SSH projects win 24% of the total funding awarded by the ERC. This demonstrates both that the demand in the SSH community for the kind of support provided by the ERC is high and that SSH researchers in Europe are highly regarded in many fields. Nearly half of the world's top 100 institutions undertaking scholarship in the humanities are based in the EU. 40% of leading centres of excellence for research in the social and economic sciences are in institutions based in the EU. The ERC programme has been a major contributor to the continued success of European SSH scholarship.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme is similarly an excellent support mechanism and increasingly vital to European research innovation and collaboration. The programme allows for training and mobility, in particular of young researchers. The five SSH Research Infrastructures have also proven to be extremely important instruments for helping European SSH institutions and scholars to deliver world class research.

EASSH strongly supports the continuation of the ERC and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes in Horizon 2020 and beyond. We recommend that the HLG gives consideration to ways in which world class research teams supported in Pillar One can contribute to the key EU policy areas
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without undermining the principle of support for 'excellent' research. In particular, EASSH encourages that the ERC Proof of Concept scheme be promoted among SSH awardees. It would also be useful to provide Marie Skłodowska-Curie awardees access to a similar scheme.

**Pillar Two on Emerging Industrial Leadership** has been disappointing in the extent to which it has failed to engage with some of Europe's newer emerging industries; such as those allied to the creative industries, innovation in design, and even less with social entrepreneurial innovations. EASSH considers that the low participation of entities from these knowledge and innovation industries in H2020 is related to the use of a support mode which is more suited to traditional large-scale industries (for example, the use of loans in the funding of actions). Thus, some of the fastest growing and globally most competitive business sectors in Europe receive almost no support in H2020. EASSH believes that there is a need to consider social innovation seriously in this Pillar in order to make industrial leadership more than a technological concern, through the cooperation between all sciences. Such cooperation should be seen as open-ended schemes for the development of societally responsible services and products.

EASSH encourages the HLG to examine closely why the level of engagement of the programmes with new and emerging creative industries sectors is so low. We also encourage the HLG to advise on the development of new modes of support which will help to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation in non-traditional industries, in particular given the prevalence of SME's in these fields. With more "traditional" sectors, we also encourage forms of cooperation which include contributions from SSH in order to link much better technological and social innovations that foster European creativity.

**Pillar Three on Societal Challenges** is intended to support actions which help to address the most significant challenges we face in Europe and to support the design and implementation of effective policies. The programme was intended to harness contributions from across all scientific fields. The first two years of the implementation have demonstrated some critical weaknesses with respect to the overall aims of this pillar and an imbalance in outcomes assessed against original intentions.

We are concerned that individual challenges and their associated work-programmes are not as well aligned to the key needs of European policy making as could have been hoped. In particular, we are concerned that despite the underlying social influences on many of the identified challenges there is precious little integration of high quality SSH research across the programme. We hope that the HLG will examine not only how the challenges in the work programme are defined but also take a more fundamental look at the 'architecture' of the programme cycle. How well is SSH expertise applied to the identification and framing of 'societal challenges', to what extent are social researchers contributing to the creation of work-programmes and topics and what role is played by them in the proposal evaluation process?

We are concerned that the Commission's policy to ensure that humanities and social research is integrated across the work programme is being undermined by the very architecture of Pillar Three. Definition or framing of the underlying social or cultural or political causes requires examination by scholars from the social sciences and humanities. Yet the work programme definition of challenges and collaborative research instruments often leave little space for original approaches and in-depth understanding of these issues. **EASSH is concerned that, as a direct consequence of the failure to fully harness the contributions by all relevant research domains, the key objectives of the societal challenges pillar are not being achieved.**

In this regard, Societal Challenge 6 (SC6) is a disappointment and **the budget for collaborative policy relevant research in fundamental social, economic, cultural and political issues is down from FP7**. SC6 is also a mix of many programmes, including ICT, COST, innovation policies, international cooperation and “other actions” that divert from a consistent focus on research contributions. **Coherence on European research policy on Europe’s major social problems has to become a priority.**

Beyond SC6, EASSH is concerned that other Societal Challenges and their associated work-programmes are not well aligned to the key needs of European policy making. In particular we are concerned that despite the underlying social influences on many of the identified challenges, there is insufficient integration of high quality SSH research across the programme. EASSH hopes that the HLG will examine not only how the Societal Challenges in the work programme are defined but also take a more fundamental look at the ‘architecture’ of the programme cycle. How well is SSH expertise applied to the identification and framing of ‘societal challenges’, to what extent are social researchers contributing to the creation of work-programmes and topics and what role is played by them in the proposal evaluation process? Current evidence shows that the development of topics in Pillar 3 is mostly driven by technological concerns which ignore essential issues also analysed by the SSH communities.

#### Box 1: Assessment of SSH Contribution to Societal Challenges

DG Research and Innovation published its first report on the integration of SSH research across the projects supported by societal challenges for the 2014 calls, which showed a very disappointing level of integration. A second report on the 2015 calls is due to be published soon. EASSH has analysed some of the results of the 2015 awards. According to its analysis, the topics in the Work Programme that had been identified as requiring a SSH contribution were reduced by 15% (from 98 to 83) which means that although the share of projects with at least one SSH partner may have grown (although in our sample the growth is very marginal), in real terms the absolute number of projects with some SSH research contribution fell in 2015. Most worrying is that in 2014 nearly a third of the topics flagged as likely to benefit from a SSH contribution had no SSH researchers participating. In our analysis of 2015 results, it does not seem that this data changed substantially. The question about why these projects were awarded even if they missed a substantial requirement is standing. Our analysis also shows that the research in the humanities is worryingly underfunded.

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Horizon 2020 set some ambitious targets, including the aim to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration at a scale not seen in previous Framework Programmes. Indeed this has been lauded as one of the major innovations of Horizon 2020. However, **EASSH is concerned that truly interdisciplinary programmes in Pillar Three have made little progress. It believes that genuine interdisciplinarity between SSH and STEM disciplines is essential and should become a strong part of European research policy.**

EASSH calls on the HLG to consider whether the current design and structure of Horizon 2020 is

able to deliver in terms of responsiveness to dynamic social changes and of providing a broad-based platform of world-class research. This is crucial for policy makers as they turn to address the Juncker Plan and European citizens' most relevant issues.

SSH disciplines in Europe are world class and need to be supported in view of the need to develop social innovation and democracy. EASSH proposes an overreaching "Societal Challenge" which would be SSH-driven and allow many of its research fields to take the leadership in topics such as unemployment, deindustrialisation, radicalisation, democracy, stability and security in Europe and at its borders migration, cultural heritage, new technologies adoption – each of which is referenced in the key strategies of the EU.

EASSH calls for a genuine integration of SSH in Horizon 2020 and beyond. The current policy, despite early encouraging steps in 2014-2015, is far from being satisfactory. The Commission should give its objectives of interdisciplinarity enough resources, in particular by giving sufficient attention to the drafting of topics and the quality of evaluations.

### **Broader observations on the architecture of Horizon 2020**

In addition to the above substantive issues, EASSH calls attention to two areas in the design of Horizon 2020 that the mid-term evaluation needs to address.

The **coordination of research** is not supported by the institutional structures in the Commission. Given the earlier observation that the programme has failed to identify the appropriate contributions from across the scientific fields we invite the HLG to look at the institutional structure and whether it is appropriate to ensure coordination of SSH findings and approaches across the EU institutions. In particular whether DG Research has the coordinating capacity between key scientific networks and EU institutions on the most pressing societal issues and to ensure the inclusion of 'the social' where it is needed. We are concerned that the lack of an internal coordinating hub in DG RI has reduced the chances to draw together high impact research funded by other DGs, such as DG Home or EEAS. **EASSH strongly encourages the HLG to examine the processes, which connect research and policy making in the EU's institutions, and thereby make recommendations for improving the access to and the use of evidence provided by Horizon 2020 research in policy making.**

Perhaps the greatest challenge for Horizon 2020 is to ensure that research investment provides a return via identifiable influence and impact. We are concerned that the understanding of how research influences and impacts upon the real world has not been fully developed. Too often the debate is anchored in simplistic linear models that have grown out of technical-science relations to industrial exploitation. SSH research often brings **tangible and measurable impact** but just as important is the non-linear nature of much of the influence of SSH research that operates by influencing idea. EASSH calls on the HLG to shift the focus of H2020 to more appropriate schemes that encourage multiple approaches to impact.

### **Addressing the problem of oversubscription and low success rates**

Scientific communities – and not just SSH researchers – across Europe are revisiting their approach to EU funding. Universities, in particular, are reconsidering the opportunity costs of engaging with some parts of the Framework Programme. The instrument of the challenges has calls which are

open to too many variables: interdisciplinarity/multidisciplinarity; technical solutions; indistinct impact for calls for Research and Innovation Action or for calls for Coordination and Support Action; wider participation from NGOs, SMEs, consultancies etc. A lack of trust in the evaluation process to identify high quality projects and the introduction of financial instruments, which are not suited to the needs of publicly-funded institutions, may become serious questions for a successful European funding programme.

## Box 2: Adverse effects of oversubscription

The Societal Challenges attract applications from all sort of different constituencies. In some cases less than half of the projects submitted pass the minimum threshold for evaluation. Whereas ERC is good value for money, the Challenges deliver very uncertain results for academic efforts. The risk of polarizing the top SSH scholars on schemes funding individual research at the expense of their involvement in collaborative research initiatives is high and this would bring adverse results in terms of resource allocation to the best teams in Europe. The two-stage process is unlikely to improve oversubscription and selection problems.

[http://www.eassh.eu/PDF/EASSH%20POSITION\\_Two-Stage%20Application\\_300516.pdf](http://www.eassh.eu/PDF/EASSH%20POSITION_Two-Stage%20Application_300516.pdf)

### Recommendations

In summary, EASSH recommends the following:

- Strong support to the continuation of the ERC and Marie Skłodowska-Curie programmes in Horizon 2020 and beyond as well as review the potential of world class research teams supported in Pillar One to contribute to key EU policy areas.
- Consider social innovation seriously in Pillar Two in order to make industrial leadership more than a technological concern, through the cooperation between all sciences. Such cooperation should be seen as open-ended schemes for the development of societally responsible services and products.
- Streamline the Societal Challenges process and design a more coherent work programme definition, from the design of the challenges by the experts advisory board all the way to establishing interdisciplinary panels with mixed expertise working together over time (including more SSH experts in the advisory boards and in the evaluation panels to better take into account the value added of a wide range of approaches).
- Review Societal Challenge 6 to make it more research focussed and responsive to the current and emerging issues that need action to ensure the successful delivery of Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Create an SSH-driven Societal Challenge in FP9 and allocate significant budget so as to mobilise all SSH European research communities to collaborate to the best benefit of our societies.
- Consider whether the investment in research to address current problems is appropriately balanced to ensure that Europe maintains a broad base of research capable of responding to future challenges.