

**EASSH assesses the DG RI analysis of SSH research contribution in the
“Issue Papers” for the High Level Lamy Group
It is time to meet citizens’ concerns for the future of democracies and societies**

DG RI recently published the series of papers it had prepared for the High Level Group lead by Pascal Lamy conducting the mid-term review of Horizon 2020¹. While the work of the Lamy group, will review the implementation of Horizon 2020 it is also expected to give advice, which will set the direction for the preparation of the Commission’s proposal on FP9 due in spring 2018.

In this context, EASSH has prepared this review of the Commission’s own views on the place of social and humanistic research across the Pillars of Horizon 2020 and the framing of the current policy in its submission to the Lamy group. We encourage colleagues to read the full set of papers but we have chosen to focus EASSH comments on the following four observations:

1 - Addressing societal issues: a specific policy focus

The DGRI papers, which oddly address social and humanistic research with Responsible Research and Innovation, recognise the ambiguity of the expression “SSH” used alternatively as a research programme or several scientific disciplines: *“There is some confusion about the use of the title of ‘SSH’. The use of SSH is very misleading since the research which was funded between 1994 and 2013 from FP4 to FP7 was not meant to support SSH communities (the FP is not meant to support any specific disciplines like biology or physics). It was meant to support research on important societal issues such as social exclusion, economic growth, employment, governance of the EU and so on. The title of the research programme under FP6 “Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society” was a much better capture of the purpose of this research than the often-used “SSH” shorthand in FP7 for instance”.*

EASSH agrees with this statement and supports the view that research funded by the framework programmes should not support ‘disciplines’ but should support research, which is most able to help understand and address the issues we are faced with (like, for example, the future of European democracies and societies). However, the lesson of implementing Horizon 2020 has shown that socially driven issues such as those identified by DGRI in its own paper have not been prioritized.

2 - The urgency of societal challenges

The papers clearly acknowledge that the share of research budget on key issues with a strong social dimension like democracy, governance, growth, jobs, employment and fairness has diminished compared to FP7. During the first two years of implementation of H2020, Societal Challenge 6 devoted less than 40% of its budget to research on such issues; an estimated total of less than 127 Meuro. Extrapolated to the seven years of H2020, it makes for a estimated investment of just 450 Meuros in understanding such significant problems; as

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

little as 0.6% of the overall budget. This represents a sharp decline from FP7 Theme 8 “Socio-Economic Sciences and the Humanities” both in terms of the gross funding (580 Meuros) and the overall proportion (1.3% of the total FP7 budget).

EASSH applauds DGRI for ensuring that such data is more readily available. At the same time, the data confirm that there has been serious under-investment in understanding and addressing the social dimension to so many of the issues and challenges that Europe faces. EASSH is concerned that this highlights a trend towards the marginalization of socially focused challenges, even though these are at the heart of the Juncker agenda, like growth, jobs, fairness and democratic deficit.

3 - The strategic challenge: sustainable research with policy impact

The DGRI issue papers presented to the Lamy Group note also that *“Europe is currently confronted with a series of major socio-economic challenges. These include growing economic and cultural interdependencies, an ageing population and demographic change, social exclusion, inequalities and poverty, increased migration flows... and a decreasing sense of trust in institutions and the political establishment as well as among citizens within and across borders”*. They also stress that *“an important and distinctive aspect of this research (SSH research) is its policy relevance”*, meaning that many of the EU institutions, including the Directorates General of the European Commission, the European External Action Service and European Parliament, are active users of the results generated with framework programme funding

EASSH commends the Commission for recognising the relevance and contribution made by social scientists and humanities researchers to the development of policy. But we are also concerned that work of such relevance and value continues to be under-supported in successive research framework programmes. We hope that the Lamy Group will take the opportunity to address this strategic contradiction in Horizon 2020 and will seek address this in recommendations for the design and development of the 9th framework programme. EASSH will be happy to support the Lamy Group and the Commission in its deliberations and in subsequent consultations.

4 - Achieving true multidisciplinary: a scientific and policy challenge

The DGRI papers stress the importance of the policy of SSH integration in H2020 but acknowledge in a commendably transparent manner that *“opening the research topics to a wider contribution from all SSH disciplines [...] remains a challenge in the years ahead”*.

EASSH would like to draw the attention of the Commission and of the Lamy Group to its own studies and the position papers published addressing this specific issue. We reiterate the position EASSH has developed in these papers on the necessity to adopt a fully-fledged policy of interdisciplinarity across H2020 and FP9. The shortcomings acknowledged in the DGRI

papers extend across areas of process, from definition of research topics to the drafting of work programmes, and in turn the evaluation of proposals. Genuine multidisciplinary is difficult to achieve in research, but we believe the rewards could be high. We therefore encourage all concerned to give careful consideration to the appropriate research programme architectures to ensure that challenges with social dimensions are examined by those with the relevant research perspectives. It is critical to bring the right scientific expertise to bear on all stages of the research process in the framework programmes.

In the following section we have collated views expressed in other reviews and policy publications which we feel are relevant to this discussion around the mid-term review of Horizon 2020. In particular where comments raised on previous framework programmes continue to be relevant.

The salience of social challenges: an urgent policy priority

In late 2015, the FP7 ex-post High Level Group had concluded: *“highly important concerns of European citizens are only marginally addressed (e.g. social cohesion, European integration and combating unemployment). In addition, themes and topics often follow a technological fixing - the problem approach instead of addressing societal causes and major transformation processes”*. **EASSH believes that this double criticism remains valid at the mid-point H2020 and with FP9 in prospect.**

According to the Eurobarometer special survey 451 of December 2016 on the future of Europe, European citizens put “social equality and solidarity” very clearly as the paramount issue to address in facing global challenges. And for citizens the five main challenges of the EU are, in order of priority: 1) unemployment (45%), 2) social inequalities (36%), 3) migration (31%), 4) terrorism and security (31%), 5) the public debt of EU member states (26%)². All these five challenges are core research focuses of expert researchers in key disciplinary areas, who are well placed to give policy relevant research results to address these concerns.

EASSH urges the Commission not to turn its back on the concerns of European citizens in designing its research policy and its research programmes. Incorporating societal concerns into technological development is important in itself. But it is now even more important to address European citizens’ most acute concerns in areas which cannot be the exclusive focus of technological solutions, such as migration, terrorism, democracy, inequalities and employment. EASSH thus requests the development in the next FP of an ambitious collaborative research programme on the future of European democracies and societies.

²<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2131>