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Social Sciences and Horizon 2020: An Open Letter

On 11 December, the European Commission launched Horizon 2020, the largest European-level programme for research, with a budget of more than €70 billion for the period 2014 – 2020.

Horizon 2020 proposes a further progression towards the structuring of research funding around interdisciplinary challenges. Social scientists are already involved in the intricate discourse of creating knowledge beyond discipline boundaries and have successfully demonstrated the capacity to design and co-ordinate complex research projects in a very inter- and trans-disciplinary manner. Horizon 2020 requires just this type of approach; the social sciences disciplines are well placed to contribute to the design of innovative proposals and projects which combine research from different fields and to ensure that they are grounded in the societal context. All societal challenges included in Horizon 2020 offer an important space to Social Sciences researchers, and not just the most obvious 'challenge 6', on 'Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies.'

In the preparation of the programme, the various social sciences communities joined forces to ensure that their research is well embedded across the research programmes and will continue to benefit from the support of EU funding. Horizon 2020 marks a significant watershed for EU investment in research in these disciplines. Between the introduction of the first social science and humanities programmes in FP4 and FP7, the funding increased from approximately 1% to just over 9% of the overall funding available. The increase reflects the growing participation and successful mobilisation of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) researchers within the different initiatives, platforms and consortia stimulated by the EU Framework Programme. At the same time, the SSH community of researchers has grown over the last ten years so that today it represents a third of the total research community in Europe.

It is important to mention in this context that reviews of previous Framework Programmes have shown that SSH research has produced outputs of the highest academic standards. However, fort this to continue successful participation will be even more necessary in Horizon 2020. At the European Research Council (ERC), for example, which has a bottom-up approach, the figures are clear. Over the period 2009 – 2013, the ERC received over 31,700 applications for the basic schemes (Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants and Advanced Grants). Of these, about 43% were submitted to the Physical and Engineering domain, about 34% to the Life Sciences domain and just about 22% to the Social Science and Humanities panels. Given that the allocation of overall funding is based on the number of applications, and that rates of success have to be comparable, more applications will improve the level of funding allocated to the SSH disciplines, and more high quality awards will encourage others to apply, and invest funding in the long term sustainability of the disciplines.

A growing community needs acknowledgement and support and Horizon 2020 represents the best possible vehicle in Europe to demonstrate not just the potential of our disciplines but also the very significant impact that they can make. European funding amplifies the impact of research on a global scale; it enhances the visibility of emerging research, as well as innovative methods of research collaboration with other disciplines. We strongly encourage scholars in the social sciences to show enthusiasm for these instruments and to respond promptly in order to showcase what can be achieved when researchers look at societal challenges! In particular, we urge the

social sciences communities not only to apply for funding in the calls devoted explicitly to the social sciences (see link below), but to fully exploit all other relevant opportunities and to take the lead where appropriate.

Best regards,

Thomas Risse

(On behalf of the Scientific Committee for the Social Sciences, Science Europe)

Below are some of the opportunities available for SSH:

- Topics relevant for SSH in the other Societal Challenges (see http://www.net4society.eu/_media/NET4SOCIETY_Opportunities_SSHresearchers_2014_2015_final.pdf)
- The European Research Council (see http://erc.europa.eu/funding-and-grants)
- The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions at the Research Executive Agency http://ec.europa.eu/rea/apply_for_funding/index_en.htm
- COST (see http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions)

For further information and comments please contact:

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