

FP9 must invest in Research for a Democratic Union and the European Social Dimension

The 9th Framework Programme for European research 2021-2027 must address the changing nature of citizenship and democracy. The future direction of the EU itself is under discussion and the ideological basis for an “ever closer Union” is increasingly being debated. We are confronted by critical questions concerning Europe’s role in a rapidly changing world, and the European Union as a democratic project based in the rule of law. The way in which the EU sees its role and place in the world is being changed by the same influences. EASSH calls on the EU to recognise the critical importance of economic, social and democratic dimensions of the challenges we face.

These questions relate to concerns that preoccupy European citizens just as much as their elected representatives. Eurobarometer surveys consistently put worries about **jobs, rising social inequalities and secure societies** at the top. Similarly half of the priorities in President Juncker’s agenda focus on **democratic change, justice and fundamental rights, migration and human development**. Whether identified by citizens or by political leaders, the major issues we face all have strong social and human dimensions. Europe’s response to these issues demands a shared and renewed understanding of the democratic basis of the Union, and of the kinds of consent that political actors need to re-establish with citizens. It is vital that research is mobilized to shape engagement in these questions on the part of all relevant actors, and to mobilize civil society in a project that more than anything demands active and informed engagement on the part of citizens.

Therefore, FP9 should

- make a significant investment to help understand how our societies can deal with issues of social justice and economic empowerment, while supporting environmentally sustainable innovation,
- be a step-change in bringing to bear on society the depth and quality of insights provided by social, economic and humanistic research in close collaboration with civil society,
- recognise that Europe and the values which shaped it are based on openness and partnership on a global scale. The new programme must acknowledge that Europe’s challenges are shared with other nations across the globe.

This paper calls for **protecting and reshaping Europe’s global role as a union of democracy, citizenship, innovation and social progress**. In order to achieve this goal it is essential to mobilize Europe’s world class research base in social sciences and humanities.

The European Alliance for SSH calls on the EU to make an ambitious investment in Democracy and the Social Dimension.

Horizon 2020 was primarily designed to support economic growth in Europe through research and innovation. By and large Horizon 2020 has not, however, invested in gaining insight into the powerful economic and social processes which are changing European societies and the EU in more profound ways. Nevertheless, European social science and humanities research is already having important social impact. The latest research assessment exercises have provided evidence of social improvements of citizens’ living conditions as a result of implementing results from EU funded research projects or the

policies influenced by their results. It is vital that FP9 brings out the full potential of social science and humanities research for Europe.

In May 2017 Commissioner **Thyssen** and Vice-President **Dombrovskis** published their reflection paper “The Social Dimension of Europe”, in which they observe that “European societies are prosperous and affluent places to live. They have the highest levels of social protection in the world and rank highly in terms of wellbeing, human development and quality of life.” However, the report also notes that “when [Europeans are] asked about the future, many express anxiety and concern, in particular for future generations”. **EASSH believes that this paradox of high levels of prosperity accompanied by growing social inequalities and anxiety is at the heart of the democratic challenge facing the EU.**¹

FP9 must invest in research that will provide the evidence base to design norms and policies to foster a union of people, cohesion, mutual respect, innovation and understanding, and social progress and wellbeing.

It is of paramount importance to developing responses to a major challenge that addresses the complex relationships between economic and political democracy, humanity and society. Europeans want to be active participants in and not mere observers of “democracy”. European citizens are educated to higher levels than in the past, and are highly capable of engaging with policy making, provided that their right to access and use information and knowledge are secured and enhanced. **Individuals and communities are rightly seeking to participate in co-designing the economic, social and political environment they want to live in.**

Deep changes in economic organisations, families, labour markets and social welfare are transforming our societies. They affect all generations; at the same time, their impact at different points of the life-course vary sharply and will demand informed and reflective thinking on the part of citizens and political actors alike. We need longitudinal studies to understand how we are changing, at what speed and whether change is universal or in response to local conditions. Research into these social and economic changes will help to equip European societies to meet these key challenges and will help to ensure that European democracy will be strengthened in the process.

Societal changes are closely intertwined with technological advances. The long-anticipated impacts of artificial intelligence are now on the cusp of being realized. Artificial Intelligence-driven automation will create wealth and expand the European economy in coming years, and we must ensure the majority will benefit. We must ensure that new technology generates improved quality of life and ensures environmental preservation. Above all we must work to ensure that it does not become a cause of greater inequality. We need to prepare for how the changes in technology will be accompanied by changes in the skills that

¹ There are several other examples in EU policy papers which demonstrates how such a demand is intrinsically embedded in the design of future policies for the Union: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-social-dimension-europe_en.pdf DGEAC *Communication strengthening European identity through education and culture* (Nov 2017); *Rome Declaration* (March 2017); European Parliament ITRE *On the assessment of Horizon 2020 implementation in view of its interim evaluation and the Framework Programme 9 proposal* (2016/2147(INI)) (March 2017); Bratislava declaration *Social Economy as a key player in providing effective world answers to current societal challenges in the EU and the world* (Dec 2016).



workers need in order to succeed. Rapid and sometimes disruptive social change may be a challenge not only to social acceptance of innovation but also threaten the very cultural foundations that are key to European lifestyles. FP9 must ensure that we bring cultural and democratic heritage into the future. Proactive policy making will be needed to help Europeans, who may be disadvantaged by these changes, ensure that the benefits of AI and automation are developed by and available to all. These are fundamentally economic, social, cultural, and political challenges, and demand that the Union draws on Europe's world-class research base in the social sciences and humanities in responding to them.

Europe is increasingly a knowledge-based society. Within a generation, more than half of the European population will have completed a tertiary level education, and that will continue to grow. **Knowledge is no longer just the driver of the economy, but it shapes social and political processes in Europe, and equips citizens to become more informed and more engaged stakeholders.** There has never been a more important time to invest in research which promotes this self-awareness, shapes an empowering context for our potential, and sustains a commitment to a just society. There has never been a more important time to invest in research and knowledge creation for Europe's citizens.

EASSH will be launching a consultation among its members and stakeholders to support and design a many-sided, ambitious and pioneering investment in a collaborative programme on economic and political Democracy to achieve the European Social Dimension in the next Framework Programme. EASSH calls on all other relevant knowledge, policy organisations and civil society in Europe to support this initiative.

EASSH next paper will respond to the EC request of feedback to address four technical areas of improvement for the European Funding Framework, namely Research funding instruments: integrative platforms; Social Impact; key performance indicators; and evaluation in interdisciplinary projects.