

## Letter to European Commission ITRE Committee

On behalf of the Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Forschung & Entwicklung im Bildungswesen, ÖFEB) representing over 400 Austrian educational researchers and their national associations we want to raise important concerns about the development and management of Horizon 2020 ahead of the appointment of the new Commissioner. We think it is pivotal to explore and make sure that Mr Moedas is aware of the actual situation of educational research and more broadly the Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) in Europe. We therefore hope that the ITRE Committee will investigate the questions below at the Parliament hearing.

ÖFEB represents educational researchers in Austria and has continuously monitored and responded to the development of Horizon 2020. We have been very disappointed by the actions of the Commission regarding educational research and the social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020. We have two major concerns: the large decrease of budget for SSH in societal challenge 6 and the lack of effectiveness of the so-called “SSH embedding policy”. Educational research is key to educating young European citizens for responsible participation in inclusive innovative and reflective societies.

Unfortunately, on the one hand, we have seen how the budget of Social Challenge 6, ‘Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective societies’ has been effectively hollowed out by other programmes being folded into the challenge. **At a time when Europe meets demanding economic, political, cultural and human challenges, it is paradoxical that the previous Commission decided to downsize the SSH budget from 623 Meuros in FP7 to around 350 Meuros in Horizon 2020 (Societal Challenge 6).** While the total budget of SC6 is 1300 Meuros, it is unacceptable that only 350 Meuros are dedicated to SSH research on inclusive, innovative and reflective societies. The budget for SSH under SC6 should be restored to at least its previous levels under FP7 in order to enable serious comparative and policy relevant European research on education, employment, identities, migration, crime, youth, fiscal evasion and so on which remain acute problems in the EU.

**An important concern to raise with Mr Moedas is therefore:**

**The budget for SSH under Societal Challenge 6 must be increased to at least its Former absolute levels under FP7, i.e. 623 Meuros (this would still represent a relative decrease for SSH from 1.2% of FP7 to 0.8% of Horizon 2020)**

On the other hand, the “SSH embedding policy” promised by the Commission has not worked properly. Net4Society demonstrates in the document ‘Opportunities for Researchers from the Socio-economic Science and Humanities’ that not more than 25% of the calls are SSH-relevant; the ‘Humanities Scientific Committee Opinion Paper,’ from Science Europe, September 2014, argues and proves that only 10% of the calls in the Horizon 2020 Working Paper mentions the humanities.

**Thus, the SSH have not been fully and adequately embedded in the Work Programme for 2014-15 and there are justified fears that the situation will not improve in the Work Programme 2016-17.**

We know that the European Parliament has always expressed support to SSH in the Framework Programme, including during the Horizon2020 negotiations. This support must continue and be expressed in the actual decisions and actions of the Commission according to the inter-institutional rules, and the incoming Commissioner must pledge to follow up accordingly. We would therefore like to suggest a number of actions for change, needed **to ensure the full inclusion of SSH in the Horizon 2020** (building on Science Europe Opinion Paper):

1. SSH-scholars, among which educational researchers, should be integrated into the **Advisory Groups** for all challenges.
2. **Topic descriptions** should harness all possible resources like social, cultural, historical and educational dimensions.
3. SSH should be **fully integrated into research projects** because the interpersonal sense-making are integral to all research and therefore in all research questions.
4. **'Integrative Platforms'**/web based platforms for networking, capacity building and preparation of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects should be formed for the Social Challenges.
5. 'Integrative Platforms' should be developed with **governance structures** that allow for a broad range of actors (researchers, practitioners, policy makers etc.).
6. The integration of SSH and thus the human factor should be a criterion in the **ex-ante project assessment**.
7. SSH-relevant topics should have **SSH panellists** in order to be able to evaluate proposals properly.
8. SSH embedding should be part of the **ex-post evaluation**.

We do hope that the Honourable Members of ITRE will agree with these sensible suggestions for educational and SSH research in Europe. We would be happy to follow up on this letter by meeting Committee members in person.

Yours sincerely



Mag. Dr. Andrea Seel  
President  
andrea.seel@kphgraz.at