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"The future of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon 2020"

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Speech at the British Academy

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today at the British Academy, one of Europe's leading research institutions, and a well-known champion of the Social Sciences and Humanities.

The European economy, and indeed the world economy, are facing threats that have not been seen for several generations. Energy and resources are becoming scarcer and more expensive as we consume more. The internet and social networking are changing the way we work, interact and communicate.

These are just some of the challenges that we face. We need the Social Sciences and Humanities to examine, interpret and understand these challenges and point us to answers.

This has never been more true than today – for example, we look to these disciplines to explain why and how the current economic crisis happened, to identify its social impacts and to discern future trends.

We cannot rise to the challenges facing Europe without deepening and updating our knowledge of the very economy, society and culture we live in, and without understanding Europe and its relationship with the rest of the world.

We have heard the concerns expressed by this Academy and others about the place of the Social Sciences and Humanities in future European funding for research and innovation.

Let me assure you that the European Commission shares the goals of the British Academy to inspire, recognise and support excellence in the social sciences and humanities and to champion their role and value.

Let me also assure you that future funding at the European level will provide significant space for social sciences and humanities research.

When the EU's heads of state and government discussed the Innovation Union initiative at their meeting on 4 February, they called upon the Commission to bring together all EU research and innovation funding under a common strategic framework to make it both more effective and impactful and easier to access for participants. This common framework has been named Horizon 2020, and it will begin in 2014.

In preparation, earlier this year the European Commission produced a Green Paper to launch a wide-ranging public consultation on the future of European financing for research and innovation. We were delighted to receive more than 1,300 responses to the online questionnaire, and around 750 consolidated position papers from stakeholders.

I was very impressed by the active involvement of the Social Sciences and Humanities research community. We received many comments, opinions and suggestions that not only demonstrated this community's interest in the future programme but also showed increasing cooperation and alignment among stakeholders.

The contribution from ALLEA, on behalf of the British Academy and many other European academies, was one of the most important that we received.

In fact, around 14% of all the responses to the Green Paper concerned the Social Sciences and Humanities. Respondents expressed general support for this area of research, with many of them being in favour of a more pronounced and integrated role for Social Sciences and Humanities research in all societal challenges, as well as giving them a distinct role in addressing challenges that cannot be tackled simply through technological development.

The fruitful consultation meetings that we organised before the summer with the Social Sciences and Humanities stakeholder community and with representatives of Member States confirmed these results.

Before the end of this year, the European Commission will publish its proposals for Horizon 2020, which will then be discussed by the Member States and the European Parliament.

While we are still working on some of the details, I can already give you an idea of some of the likely features of the proposed programme. Horizon 2020 will be structured around three distinct, but mutually reinforcing pillars, in line with Europe 2020 priorities.

Excellent research is the foundation on which Innovation Union, and our push for growth and jobs, is based. So, the first pillar, 'Excellence in the science base', will strengthen the EU's excellence in science, through actions supporting frontier research (through the very successful European Research Council); future and emerging technologies; the Marie Curie actions and priority research infrastructures.

The second pillar, 'Creating industrial leadership and competitive frameworks,' will support business research and innovation. Actions will cover: increasing investment in enabling and industrial technologies; facilitating access to finance, and providing EU-wide support for innovation in SMEs.

The third pillar, 'Tackling societal challenges', will respond directly to the challenges identified in Europe 2020. Its focus will be on the challenges of: health, demographic change and well-being; food security and the bio-based economy; secure, clean and efficient energy; smart, green and integrated transport; resource efficiency and climate action, including raw materials; and inclusive, innovative and secure societies.

This last challenge was not included in the public consultation Green Paper that I mentioned earlier, and is now being considered on the basis of the proposals received during the consultation. While 'Understanding Europe' is not part of the title – as suggested in the Open Letter addressed to me - I think the substance is reflected in the content.

As ALLEA argued in its contribution on behalf of this and other Academies to the Horizon 2020 consultation process, understanding Europe is a vital task - a point that is also stressed in the Open Letter. Indeed, I think that this is a task that underlies all our efforts to have a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Europe by 2020 and beyond; a Europe that can face a changing global context where new powers are emerging and interdependence is increasing.

I think that we agree on substance and that the difference between the approach suggested in the Open Letter and the approach currently proposed for Horizon 2020 is whether "Understanding Europe" should be a stand alone Challenge or have a prominent role in the challenge on 'Inclusive, innovative and secure societies' and, at the same time, be part of the contribution that the Social Sciences and Humanities will make to all the other societal challenges tackled in Horizon 2020.

The challenge on "Inclusive, innovative and secure societies" will be firmly aimed at boosting our knowledge of the factors that foster an inclusive Europe, help overcome the current economic crisis and the very real concerns that people have; that identify the links between the European and global context, and that encourage social innovation.

This challenge will also bring security and socio-economic research together with the aim of understanding the many forms of 'insecurity' - whether crime, violence, terrorism, cyber attacks, privacy abuses, or other forms of social and economic insecurity - that increasingly affect people in Europe.

We need a strong evidence base for policy making on these issues and the Social Sciences and Humanities have the appropriate tools and methods to address the intricacy of these challenges, including enhancing the societal dimension of security policy and research.

Of course, the Social Sciences and Humanities will, at the same time, play an important part in addressing all of the societal challenges to be targeted by Horizon 2020.

Overall, the social sciences and humanities will be embedded throughout the three pillars of Horizon 2020. We need to understand how new technologies and innovation arise and how they are used in the economy and in our wider society. Indeed, the Social Sciences and Humanities can shed light on the process of research itself and how innovation works.

There will be a strong accent on inter-disciplinarity in Horizon 2020. To solve the complex challenges we face today, we have to work beyond the "silos" of different disciplines, stimulating the exchanges of different perspectives to develop innovative solutions.

The newer generation of scientists, engineers and social scientists are increasingly willing and able to perform highly interdisciplinary work.

They know that they need each other's skills and knowledge to solve challenges such as promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; building resilient and inclusive societies; strengthening Europe's role as a global actor, supporting new forms of innovation as well as studying the social dimension of security.

We are building our future plans on a very solid foundation. The EU is a world player in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities, and I am determined to help us maintain that leading role.

The internationalisation of research and innovation, the globalisation of our economies and the interconnectedness of our societies make it imperative to pool resources and 'brain power' in the research and innovation sector.

The EU's collaborative research programme in the Social Sciences and Humanities is the world's largest in this field.

Under the 6th Framework Programme, which ended in 2006, around 2,000 universities and research organisations – as well as many SMEs and civil society organisations – took part in 146 collaborative projects, receiving European Union financing of 247 Million Euro.

So far, under the 7th Framework Programme more than 1,500 institutions are participating in 142 projects with an EU contribution of 285 Million Euro.

And we estimate that this investment in SSH will have increased to 623 million Euro by the end of the 7th Framework Programme in 2013. This means that many more researchers and projects will be supported through collaborative research on a wide range of policy-relevant issues.

In addition to this huge investment in collaborative research, 15% of the budget of the European Research Council – which supports individual researchers wishing to carry out cutting-edge and blue sky research - is being spent on Social Sciences and Humanities' "curiosity driven" research.

The share of Social Sciences and Humanities has been steadily increasing for the Marie Curie actions and we hope that this trend will continue.

In addition, a number of Social Sciences and Humanities research infrastructures are being supported under FP7, such as the European Social Survey and the Survey on Healthy Ageing and Retirement in Europe.

Given the importance of developing and providing better access to social sciences data to increase knowledge, innovation and evidence-based policy making, we are planning to launch by 2015 a number of European Research Infrastructure Consortia - commonly called "ERICs" - in the social sciences and humanities. They will play a significant role in reinforcing cooperation between national and EU-level research and innovation policies.

ERICs work to establish and operate research infrastructures to promote innovation, research and technology transfer in areas that are often beyond the reach of a single research group, nation or region.

While one normally thinks of such infrastructures in terms of particle accelerators or large-scale laser systems, SSH infrastructures are also very important, and these range from the digitalisation of data archives in the fields of history or arts, to open access datasets in areas ranging from ageing to voting behaviours.

Infrastructures are one of the important elements of the European Research Area – better known as ERA. As you know, in addition to Horizon 2020, the Commission's intention is to come forward with proposals for an ERA Framework in 2012, as announced in the Innovation Union.

We need a European Research Area that is interconnected, structured, mobile and efficient; a research area that brings together people and ideas in a way that catalyses excellent science and world-leading innovation. The Commission has launched a consultation on the ERA Framework and I am very pleased to hear that the Academies are discussing their contribution.

One of the success stories that I would like to highlight as regards collaborative research – and that also links to ERA - is HERA, which stands for Humanities in the European Research Area. This project has received 4 Million Euro of European Union funding.

As you may know, this is a partnership between 21 Humanities Research Councils across Europe, linking national programmes and launching joint research initiatives to tackle social, cultural, political and ethical developments.

HERA's focus on coordinating research activities has borne fruit, particularly through the creation of two Joint Research Programmes.

The first of these explores cultural dynamics, focusing on the processes involved in the development of culture, rather than simply its end products. The second joint research programme examines the value of the humanities as a source of creativity and innovation at a cultural, social and economic level.

HERA is, in my view, a success both as an instrument for research coordination and cooperation, and as a catalyst of innovative research.

HERA and other ongoing research endeavours also help us to be innovative about innovation itself!

This fits very neatly with the approach taken by the Innovation Union initiative launched by me in October 2010. Innovation Union takes the broadest possible definition of innovation, going beyond technological innovation to promote innovation in the public sector, in education, in marketing and design, and especially social innovation.

Innovation Union makes two specific commitments on social innovation. First, we will launch substantial research activities on social innovation, and second, we have established a European Social Innovation Pilot that networks social innovation actors at all levels in Europe.

The EU has already funded a range of collaborative research projects on social innovation, mainly through the Social Sciences and Humanities theme of FP7.

In the coming months, further research will be undertaken that is expected to advance our understanding of the key issues of social innovation itself: the way it is measured; the regulatory and recognition barriers; the monitoring and design of appropriate financial instruments; the role of private-public partnerships and of creativity and learning.

The European Commission also wants to support the capacity-building and networking of social innovators and social entrepreneurs, as well as social innovation demonstration projects and experimentation.

That's why we launched the "Social Innovation Europe" initiative last March. It has the ambitious aim to spur action across Europe, provide expertise and promote the networking of social innovation actors, policies and programmes at all levels, be it European, national or regional.

In times of major budgetary constraints, social innovation can be an effective way of responding to societal challenges by mobilising people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources.

We need to remove obstacles and barriers to social innovation and accelerate the take-up and the scaling-up of the best ideas in social innovation.

The "Vienna Declaration" is a major contribution to a future research agenda on social innovation, so I would like to congratulate the organisers of the Vienna Conference that took place in September for their work. I look forward to further discussions on scaling up social innovation – from research funding to practical support of social innovators.

The Commission is fully committed to further promoting social innovation. Social innovation involves people, it empowers people, and it contributes to the common good.

This is terribly important in times of uncertainty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the current context of the deep economic crisis and of constant transformation in our economy and society, the Social Sciences and Humanities help us to address the most fundamental economic, social, political and cultural issues.

The challenges we face are fundamentally social and human in nature - they are the result of individual and collective human behaviour. They are intrinsically linked to how we behave.

The Social Sciences and Humanities must, therefore, play a central role in understanding and tackling the problems we face. They help us deal with change and since change is constant, the Social Sciences and Humanities will always be an important part of the research landscape.

Research at the EU level is indispensable as EU policies require comparative knowledge on the dynamics of our society, on the people and institutions involved in these dynamics, and on the global contexts that influence developments in Europe.

In this respect I would like to highlight another element of convergence between the work of this Academy and the Social Sciences and Humanities research currently being supported by the 7th Framework Programme. I refer to our relationship with other societies and cultures – for example, as in the IDEAS project on "Integrating and Developing Asian Studies" in which the British Academy is a partner. The project receives over 1.2 million Euro of EU funding.

Indeed, while of course we need to understand Europe, we also need to understand other cultures and societies as well so that we can improve our relationships and interactions with them. This can only be achieved with proper knowledge of their languages, history, values and cultural heritage – all these aspects are at the core of 'area studies' and they are ripe for further research.

Evidence-based policy-making is indispensable to finding sustainable solutions to pressing societal challenges.

The Social Sciences and Humanities are essential in providing the evidence and analysis needed to put our policymaking on a sound footing.

They are also essential because they challenge us to consider whether our assumptions, and accepted knowledge are actually true!

And to take a broader, less technocratic view, the social sciences and humanities are essential because they help us understand ourselves and why we do what we do.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Professor Paul Boyle, the Chief Executive of the UK Economic and Social Research Council, on his appointment as the first President of Science Europe, the new association of European research performing and funding organisations. I was delighted to be present at the official launch of Science Europe in Berlin last month.

Professor Boyle will do an outstanding job in this newly formed organisation working at EU level. And I feel sure that the British Academy and its colleagues in the Social Sciences and Humanities throughout Europe, will continue to play a key role in ensuring that European research meets the needs and the expectations of European society.

I want your research and your contribution to be ambitious and focused. I am ambitious for your sector. I am confident that you will provide the excellent research and help foster the various forms of social innovation that we need.

We are depending on you to give us the knowledge and understanding needed to keep the diverse threads of our society together in times of fundamental change. We are depending on you to help our society prepare for the profound changes that we will continue to face in the coming decades.

Thank you.