



## **OPEN LETTER ON THE NEED OF A SEPARATE PROGRAMME FOR FUNDING SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND CITIZENS' INITIATIVES**

21/06/2018

To:

Prof. Jerzy Buzek, Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Committee for Industry, Research and Energy of the European Parliament

Dr. Heinz Fassmann, Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research - Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, European Commission

CC:

Jean-Eric Paquet, Director-General, European Commission

Christian Ehler, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur on specific programme for Horizon Europe

Dan Nica, Member of the European Parliament, rapporteur on rules for participation for Horizon Europe

Evžen Tošenovský, Member of the European Parliament, shadow-rapporteur for Horizon Europe

Lieve Wierinck, Member of the European Parliament, shadow-rapporteur for Horizon Europe

The international network of National Contact Points (NCPs) for "Science with and for Society" (SWAFS) in "Horizon 2020" (SiS.net) calls on the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, which are responsible for negotiating "Horizon Europe", the new EU Research and Innovation Framework Programme for the years 2021-2027, to set a separate programme line with a sufficient separate budget for the successor of the "Science with and for Society" programme part within "Horizon Europe".

The European Commission's proposal regarding the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation ("Horizon Europe") envisages neither a specific programme line nor a sufficient budget dedicated to Science, Society and Citizens' activities. Most activities of the current "Science with and for Society" programme in "Horizon 2020" are proposed to be integrated in a programme part called "Reforming and Enhancing the EU R&I System", together with many other activities with a designated budget of 400 million euro. This means

a harsh financial reduction, losing visibility and opportunities. The “Science with and for Society” programme will not be continued and no sufficient funding for specific research and supporting actions for cooperation in the field will be possible if the EC’s proposal for “Horizon Europe” is not amended.

Although Commissioner Moedas and the EC’s proposal for “Horizon Europe” reiterate several times the need to bring “Horizon Europe” nearer to society and European citizens, their announcement is not transformed into sufficient action, proposing a dramatic budget reduction of the already limited resources to the only programme line that targets citizen participation and the concerns of society, namely “Science with and for Society” and shuffling its priorities together with other diverse action lines.

We strongly believe that an integration of the “Science with and for Society” activity lines into the programme part “Reforming and Enhancing the EU R&I System“, as foreseen by the “Horizon Europe” proposal, would not strengthen but rather weaken science-society funding with a negative impact on the community that works ambitiously and innovative on improving the science-society relationship and which has been flourishing within the last years.

In the following pages we would like to refer to a number of recent publications and speeches at EU level which all point to the importance, uniqueness and inalienability of a distinct SWAFS programme part and the importance of investing into the development of the relationship of science and society. From our point of view, a number of important arguments which underline the impact of a strong commitment to funding “Science with and for Society” have been made and it is time that they become recognised and acted upon.

1. We would like to refer to the Commission Staff Working Document on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 (SWD(2017) 221 final)<sup>1</sup>:

*"The SWAFS interim evaluation expert group considers that without clear political backing (as evidenced by dedicated funding for SWAFS), there would be a lack of positive signals coming from Europe about the need to increase public engagement in science and promote scientific careers, ensure that R&I is carried out to the highest ethical standards and in a responsible manner, and align the interests of science and society so that the outcomes of R&I are more appropriate and successful. Without SWAFS there would be much less co-ordination and contact between stakeholders across Member States and a reduction in policy developments conducive to bringing R&I closer to society. As the new paradigm of R&I continues to emerge and evolve, SWAFS provides a focal point around which actors can orientate, share good practice and expand their networks across the EU and indeed the world". (p.1131)*

*"The evidence suggests that the consequences of stopping SWAFS would be a divergence of national and regional approaches, the removal of an important source of inspiration and learning for national programmes and research funding, reduced input and evidence for national policy making, a reduction in national-level attention to SWAFS issues, a reduction in the scale of funding available to tackle SWAFS issues, a reduction in the transfer of*

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Staff Working Document on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 (SWD(2017) 221 final): [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020\\_evaluations/swd\(2017\)221-interim\\_evaluation-h2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/h2020_evaluations/swd(2017)221-interim_evaluation-h2020.pdf)

*knowledge on SWAFS issues and mobility of researchers, and ultimately a reduction in the potential of R&I to provide solutions to solving societal challenges". (p. 1161)*

2. Moreover, the Lamy report<sup>2</sup> also recommends creating specific actions to mobilise and involve citizens, in order to stimulate co-design and co-creation through citizen involvement. However, as we have seen over the years this is not straight-forward. Specific efforts should be dedicated in to order to fulfil this important goal, to develop and test methods, to foster cooperation and support researchers in using citizen science methods in planning their research.
3. However, the budget for SWAFS has been traditionally very low to fulfil the ambitious goal, as recognised by the Commission Staff Working Document on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020. It argues that the small budget allocation for the scale of the ambition and the correspondingly broad range of activities is the main reason for the limited overall effectiveness. (p. 1162)

*"The EU added value of SWAFS is very high. SWAFS has become a beacon for all those in Europe dealing with the links between science and society. SWAFS fills a niche in the R&I funding landscape and brings a scale and an international focus that is lacking in similar national-level programmes. SWAFS helps set policy orientations at Member State level, provides evidence and results that inform Member State activities, promotes cross-fertilisation of innovative approaches, and greater coherence in policy responses. Without EC support most funded projects would not go ahead due to the lack of alternative sources of funding, an inability to address pan-European issues at the national level, lack of access to knowledge, skills and expertise outside Horizon 2020, and a level of funding that is not available from national/regional schemes". (p. 1164-65).*

4. One may argue that there is no need of a SWAFS programme anymore since citizens may be included everywhere in the next framework programme and then it should be sufficient to implement it as a cross-cutting objective only. However:
  - a. If we really want *"to put citizens in the driving seat"* (Kurt Vandenberghe, DG Research & Innovation, 7/06/2017<sup>3</sup>), **we still have to research, develop and test different methods and experiences to do this successfully**. Different barriers are still hindering the participation of both Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and citizens.
  - b. For CSOs, which can act as an important channel for citizens to be heard, many barriers are still in place for a full development of their potential in Research Framework Programmes. CSOs are marginal players, so they cannot be expected to have a significant impact when participating in research projects. According to a specific study on CSO participation and the Interim Evaluation, the involvement of "true" CSOs in "Horizon 2020" is less than 3% and these project participants receive

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<sup>2</sup> High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU research and innovation programmes of 3 February 2017: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg\\_issue\\_papers.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/hlg_issue_papers.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "Engaging Citizens and Civil Society to maximize Social Impact in EU Research and Innovation" (October 2017)

just 0.7% of total funding. Their role is described as peripheral, often reduced to “hangers on”<sup>4</sup>.

- c. The role of citizens cannot be reduced to participating in public consultations or being passive recipients of information. This is still a much extended perception of what citizen engagement is. We do not only need to ask the research community to engage with citizens, we also need to understand and overcome the barriers towards a full implementation of the Open Science concept, comprehend why some sectors of research are reluctant to this openness, and develop smart strategies against this resistance to foster change.
  - d. Some important areas are still not mature enough to be implemented as a cross-cutting issue only, as for example Citizen Science, public engagement and the connection between R&I and science education, starting in early stages of schooling and continuing throughout the whole educational path<sup>5</sup>.
5. One of the most traditional arguments for the prioritisation of “close to the market” research is their contribution for job creation, where the capacity to deliver seems to be more evident. Moreover, apart from this important objective, “a return on public investment has to be guaranteed – not just through the social benefits of job creation – but also through the introduction of criteria on social responsibility and fairness to ensure the public can benefit from advances to which the public sector has contributed”<sup>6</sup>. This is an area where a SWAFS programme makes a major contribution.
6. Moreover, in the era of fake news and growing uncertainty, it is even more indispensable for research and innovation activities to communicate, connect and engage with European citizens and civil society. In our opinion, SWAFS also plays an important role in this aspect. With reference to this aspect, let us conclude with a fragment of an introductory speech made by Prof. Jerzy Buzek (the Chairman of the ITRE Committee in the European Parliament, former President of the European Parliament) during the STOA Committee meeting which took place on 24th January 2018.

*“(...) In the recent years - or rather months - science and our society more broadly is facing a new challenge. Political in context but fundamental for our societies. Because our societies have started to rely less on facts and more on emotions. In 2016 Oxford dictionary recognised “post-truth” as a word of the year. Last year Collins dictionary named “fake news” as the word of 2017. Honestly, I am afraid even to imagine what will be the word of 2018?”*

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<sup>4</sup> COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, INTERIM EVALUATION of HORIZON 2020 (SWD(2017) 220 final) Annex 1, page 247 and 249, referring to a typology of CSOs and the study “Network Analysis of Civil Society Organisations’ participation in the EU Framework Programmes - European Commission, December 2016”

<sup>5</sup> Report on the assessment of Horizon 2020 implementation in view of its interim Evaluation and the Framework Programme 9 proposal (2016/2147(INI)) Committee on Industry, Research and Energy: “Society’s involvement in research should be promoted and its findings and activities made widely known within the context of science for schools. R&D should be seen as a medium-to-long-term route, with society, and the pre-university educational community in particular, being better informed about the FP. The countries with the best results in science and innovation have flexible education systems that foster creativity, critical thinking and active participation by pupils. Adding the term ‘education’ to the ERA, making it the EERA, should therefore be proposed.”

<sup>6</sup> Idem.

*This new reality is a challenge which science, academia and politics have to face. We have a crucial role in making the truth and facts essential for our citizens again. This might not be the most inspiring mission ahead of us but I believe that this is just as crucial and not only in the field of social science.*

*Why? Allow me to quote Hannah Arendt: 'The ideal subject of the totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between the true and false no longer exist'. Making it clear where lies the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between true and false - without success in this area, there is very little hope for democracy, and for our society".<sup>7</sup>*

7. Finally, it is important to take into account that in the current political context, it is increasingly important to communicate, connect and engage with European citizens and civil society. We are living in Europe where different trends to disenchantment with political level, going towards more extreme positions in some case. The democratization of research policy is highly needed, in line with a very much needed engagement of citizens in European policies. Therefore, a SWAFS programme, as the one creating the base for an improved citizen engagement in research, is a long term investment, not only for European research but also for European construction in general.

As the European Parliament<sup>8</sup> points out, **"science must be understood in order to have a knowledge society at the service of its citizens and in their interests, a sustainable and inclusive society, where the scientific community and industry are means through which to achieve the ultimate aim of science that is by and for society"**.

In this context, a **Science with and for Society programme is key to ensure a smooth transition to more open and inclusive research endeavours.**

On behalf of the SiS.net network,

**Adalheidur Jónsdóttir**  
**SiS.net coordinator**

Head of Communications  
The Icelandic Centre for Research - RANNÍS  
Borgartúni 30  
IS-105 Reykjavík, Iceland

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<sup>7</sup> (Prof. Jerzy Buzek, STOA - Committee meeting, 2018-01-24 14:30 to 17:00:  
<http://web.ep.streamovations.be/index.php/event/stream/180124-1430-special-stoa>

<sup>8</sup> Idem.