

December 2024

## Prosperous and Competitive Europe: A truly interdisciplinary FP10

### In a Nutshell

At this critical moment in history, the EU needs to fully endorse research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), the European comparative advantage in global science.<sup>1</sup> In 2025, Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe, Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, is already showing commitment by increasing the budget for research areas within democratic governance, cultural heritage and social inclusion. Knowledge generation from the SSH is essential to effectively feed the ongoing public debate from governance to ethical and sustainable technological development. FP10, the next EU Research & Innovation Framework Programme, has promising opportunities to build on the SSH integration from the former programmes to strengthen the backbone of an innovative and competitive Europe.

With this joint statement, our associations as key stakeholders of research and innovation urge the European Commission, European Parliament and EU Member States to lay the groundwork for a value-driven Europe. We strongly believe that this will be achieved by endorsing the crucial role of SSH in FP10.

Therefore, we call for:

1. A European funding programme for research and innovation that: (a) places researchers representing all disciplines at the heart of all aspects of its decision-making processes; (b) is inclusive of all disciplines; and (c) invests more in SSH research that encourages innovation, shapes markets and environments for sustainable transformation and societal well-being.
2. Strengthening the full integration of SSH disciplines in the implementation of EU R&I investments.
3. Dedicated funding for SSH in FP10 to address the major threats and opportunities of Europe, from innovation to sustainable and inclusive growth.

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<sup>1</sup> The EC report [Science, Research and Innovation performance of the EU 2022](#) states that: "The EU is leading globally in the domains of economics and social sciences, arts and humanities".

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A programme for research and innovation requires researchers in the driving seat. The European Research Council (ERC) is a success story due to strong steering of the independent scientific council and must be strengthened. However, active researchers have had a limited role in defining the challenges and directions of more policy-focused parts of Horizon Europe, such as pillar 2. This has restricted the potential for innovative contributions to public debate and to policy itself.<sup>2</sup>

In order to identify and reap the potential benefits of emerging fields and collaborations, research investment must engage researchers from all disciplines. This can be done directly or via their disciplinary associations and networks, and at all stages of the decision-making process, from the initial design of the programme, through to call drafting and project evaluation and monitoring.

It is also crucial to recognise how disciplines providing critical insights into human behaviour, societal dynamics, and cultural contexts, have the capacity to shape critical innovative processes and effective policies. These policies foster social cohesion, democracy and innovation, including economic innovation.

A narrative dominated by European competitiveness must ensure that relevant attention is given to innovation in public administration, legal frameworks, and strong institutions driven by the rule of law.

Social science research provides the background analysis to shape markets and the environment for social well-being; research in the humanities has an acknowledged role in innovation in cultural heritage, tourism, design, and digital spheres, including disinformation. For example, one of the most important challenges of our time is addressing climate change. Only a deep understanding of the roots of climate scepticism and the effect of climate change policies on societies can secure policies' long-term impact.<sup>3</sup>

**2. Strengthening the full integration of SSH disciplines in the implementation of EU R&I investments.**

The recently published report *Align, Act, Accelerate*<sup>4</sup> proposes a societal challenges council<sup>5</sup> where SSH plays a more central role in research on both the development and implementation of solutions to today's major threats and opportunities.<sup>6</sup> This space

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<sup>2</sup> Other organisations are calling for this approach. See ALLEA Nosch M.L. and Rowinski, P. (2024) [FP10 must look for innovation in every discipline](#) Research Professionals News, 7 November 2024.

<sup>3</sup> [Engagement methods for climate, energy and mobility transitions](#). April 2023. See also impact of SSH research on energy debate for example Genus, A., Iskandarova, M. Goggins, G., Fahy, F., Laakso, S. (2021) [Alternative energy imaginaries: Implications for energy research, policy integration and the transformation of energy systems](#), in Energy Research & Social Science, Vol. 73, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Align, act, accelerate : research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236>

<sup>5</sup> Idem, p.69.

<sup>6</sup> Recent key reports for the future of the Union highlighted the importance of understanding socio-economic phenomena as main triggers for change and why research in SSH is essential to address the

promotes transborder cooperation, much like in pillar 2, and shows that interdisciplinarity is crucial. However, evidence from the last two framework programmes shows that interdisciplinarity remains a challenge, as exemplified by the low rate of SSH integration.<sup>7</sup>

The high-level expert group (“Heitor”) report calls for “a need to provide further information and guidance on integrating SSH to better valorise SSH's potential”.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, the understanding of interdisciplinary issues must be entrusted to researchers from all disciplines. This could be achieved, for example, through advisory boards coordinated by a strong team that claims ownership for an efficient and balanced drafting of programmes and instruments.

An integrated and human-centred approach is essential to successfully encourage a stronger role of SSH in advancing sustainable technological innovation. Such an approach would also boost social entrepreneurship going beyond the concept of revenue generation.

SSH research can do more than merely put technology within the societal context. Therefore, it is important to support both social and technological innovations. Together, they are the comparative advantage of European societies, something that makes Europe unique and competitive. Any effort to compete with the US or China must take into account that our societies’ values are vastly different. A European industrial strategy and our innovation policies must be fit for our specific institutions, markets, ecosystems, and companies.

### **3. Dedicated funding for SSH in FP10 to address the major threats and opportunities of Europe, from innovation to sustainable and inclusive growth.**

FP10 must address research needs and the priorities of the European agenda<sup>9</sup> and address global political shifts with the changing nature and the challenges to citizenship and democracy that they present. This is not in contradiction with an independent, ring-fenced and self-standing programme.

The future direction of the EU itself, including the direction towards an “ever closer Union” is increasingly at the centre of public debate. We are confronted by critical questions concerning Europe’s role in a rapidly changing world, and the erosion of our democracies, social values and peaceful living.

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complex challenges of our time and identify opportunities for the future, including those provided by new technologies and AI. Drahi M. (2024) [Europe competitiveness: Looking ahead](#) and Letta, E. (2024) [Much more than a Market](#).

<sup>7</sup> EASSH [SSH integration analysis: A research-on-research approach to EU framework programmes](#), 9 October 2024.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Align, act, accelerate : research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236>, p.72.

<sup>9</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, (2024) [Europe’s choice, Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029](#)

FP10 must invest in research that will provide the evidence base to design policies to encourage a union of people, cohesion, mutual respect, innovation and understanding, and social progress and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, SSH plays an important role in AI and robotics, particularly in the subfields of cognitive science (for example psychology, linguistics, philosophy, art, social anthropology), alongside informatics and statistics. SSH plays a pivotal role in integrating sustainability and ecological considerations into the development and deployment of new technologies.

Funding SSH programmes is an investment in the social and ethical frameworks needed to guide Europe's technological future. By supporting SSH research, policymakers can promote a more inclusive, responsible, and environmentally sustainable innovation ecosystem. Thus, ensuring that AI and other emerging technologies contribute to equitable growth and the achievement of the EU's long-term sustainability goals.

Understanding the behaviour of citizens and institutions, social transitions knowledge of markets drivers, or employment conditions can provide the insights necessary to increase competitiveness. Grasping cultural and socio-economic contexts can encourage investment from the private sector and citizens' commitment to the European project, delivering prosperity.<sup>11</sup>

Research in the humanities and social sciences is foundational for strong institutions, driven by governance based on the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. To maintain European leadership, we need an ambitious research funding programme for SSH.

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<sup>10</sup> As a recent ERC report shows, SSH projects have “influenced international debates on social and economic inequality, immigration’s impact on job markets, food poverty, fertility trends and climate change. They have also had an impact on major policymaking institutions by generating knowledge on topics such as the financial crises, economic bubbles, regulation policies, payment cards and the social impact of economic depression.” ERCEA [The ERC pioneering years Scientific assessment of completed ERC projects FP7 review \(2015-2022\)](#), 24 October 2024.

<sup>11</sup> ESDE (2024) [Upward social convergence and the role of social investment](#). This report shows how critical evidence from SSH research has informed social provisions and also “considers social investment as public spending related to investments and reforms that, on top of pursuing social objectives and thereby fostering upward social convergence, are expected to produce returns in terms of economic growth through their impact on human capital and productivity, including via stronger innovative capacity and absorption of new technologies, and/or labour supply”.