

Dear Robert-Jan Smits

Dear Jean Michel Baer

Several ESA members and colleagues around Europe have been addressing ESA to take a stand regarding what has been considered a trend to downsize the social sciences within European Commission's DG Research.

Indicators of this trend have been indicated to us:

1. The downgrading of socio-economic and humanities in DG Research losing its status of Directorate.
2. The perspective of reduction of the budget for social sciences and humanities.
3. The insistence on the drawing of programs that very difficultly fit social sciences. Regarding the preparation of FP 8, researchers are concerned with what seems clearly the reinforcing of a trend, already in action in FP7, to focus on "grand challenges" with topics that seem to exclude basic research and that tend to consider social sciences only as an 'auxiliary' discipline to be mainstreamed into the other sciences.
4. The fact that 'Grand Challenges' have also too narrow a focus. For example, we are concerned that there seems to be no strong commitment to issues of social and cultural cohesion in Europe. Partnership with industry and policy-makers receives rather more emphasis than the concern with civil society actors.
5. The design of these Grand Challenges seem also to be unsuitable for social sciences as they tend to be too big, requiring the building of teams that only very few, not to say none, research centers in Europe are able to prepare. The negative consequences can be clearly foreseen: researchers from smaller countries finding very hard to be included or to propose projects. The fact that it is foreseen the approval of just one project makes the effort to prepare them completely lost for almost everyone running.

Discussing these questions with other colleagues within Initiative for Science in Europe we found out that the same problems affect also other scientific fields besides social sciences.

Thus, for us it is very important that these issues are taken into consideration in FP 8 and we propose also:

1. The continuation of integrated projects and networks on both smaller scale (1-3 Mio Euro) and larger scale (5-12 Mio Euro);
2. The strengthening of social sciences in the Marie Curie Program;
3. The persistence of research programs that focus social and cultural Cohesion of Europe and not only on innovation; and giving the same focus on partnering with industry as on focusing on public sector and civil society.

ESA represents thousands of sociologists and other social scientists in Europe. Several of them have had direct involvement in Framework Programs giving their best contribution to European Research Area.

Social sciences have been contributing to build societies and social relations in Europe. In a so deep and challenging period of economical and social crisis any attempt to cut or reduce that contribution of the social sciences and humanities to represents a step further in the deepening of the same economical and social crisis. As the tool box to understand it and to fight it can be found exactly among our scientific researches and findings.

Addressing now directly to you, Jean Michel Baer, I am sure you do remember that in a meeting in Paris, on the 28 October 2010, where you were invited to speak and you kindly addressed us, these issues were raised by several colleagues. The meeting, as you might recall gathered representatives of 25 National Sociological Associations from different parts of Europe.

We truly hope that our concerns will be attended and look forward to hearing from you,

Best wishes,

Anália Torres

President, ESA, European Sociological Association