European Parliament's ITRE Committee Working Group Meeting Horizon 2020 on 8th September 2016 from 9 – 11h

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Good morning! I am very grateful for the opportunity to be here and to share some thoughts with you. Horizon 2020 has been a big issue and I have been discussing it with colleagues, particularly from my subject area [which is media and communication] but also with colleagues from sociology, anthropology, history, geography, education, economy…

I must say that the general feeling is unfortunately quite negative. There is this widespread idea that one should not waist too much time on it as Horizon 2020 was not designed for social sciences and humanities (despite initial hopes) and its implementation just made things even worse.

I will try to address some of the perceived difficulties…hoping to move towards a more positive note as I am an optimistic person…even when I have reasons to be pessimistic.

As a starting point, I would like to state clearly that there is no such a thing as a neutral policy initiative or a neutral scientific policy. Policies are based on visions of society and there is no such a thing as a neutral vision of society. Others might say that policies are based on interests (and they are, of course) but you still need to say something about the reasons for this or that programme.

These visions (either more explicit or covert) establish the ground for decisions. When the values that sustain policies are easily accepted, these values tend to be more openly expressed. When these values are more difficult to articulate as public interest or common goods, then these values tend to be concealed in more opaque and inexplicit notions such as 'innovation' or 'excellence'.

Who could ever possibly disagree with these over-hyped keywords even if we are all equally aware that they can be used of by proponents of quite divergent objectives?

So, when I look at Horizon 2020, when I move around documents and political discourses I find these buzz words or expressions…Innovation, excellence, market, and a sense of urgency…the idea that we are lagging behind. We are always behind…so, the argument goes, if we are behind, we should run, run as fast as we can…faster and faster to catch up. Catching up is a big idea in Horizon 2020.

When I did my PhD, 20 years ago, I studied in detail hundreds of EU documents on broadcasting and telecommunications policy. We were so behind then…catching up was already a big thing! The train was moving really fast…and we, Europeans, were not being able to keep up, were not strong enough to match our competitors - at the time, the US and Japan.

Now, globalization has complexified things even further and new adversaries justify the need to run even faster, produce more and more, export, sell, more products, consume more energy (cleaner, sure, but still…), more innovation, more and more and faster and faster…

Science in general and Horizon 2020 in particular became part of this movement, of this cycle, from concept to market. If we can sell more products and services, salvation should be just around the corner…!

(…)

Well, I was invited as social scientist so don't expect me to take this for granted. Social scientists study the ideas we have in our heads, the reasons why we have the ideas we do…and not others. We study the interests behind ideas, we study who benefits from them, who gains and who loses. We study power relations, forces, logics and social dynamics.

We are supposed to read, examine and analyse social reality in its profound complexity. Social reality has many layers and it is difficult to read. Its transparency is deceptive…everybody reads the world somehow but common sense is not science…social scientists have the theoretical and methodological tools to apprehend reality or at least to develop possibilities of understanding it in ways that are critical, accountable, scrutinized and validated by peers.

When we do our job, better policies can be developed and citizenship (not just businesses) benefit from them.

Indeed, reading the world is a complex task and we take a special interest in space and time. These are two critical dimensions for social scientists. We care about **space** because we have learned the importance of social and cultural contexts, the specificities of places and communities…and we know that the same recipe will not work in the same way for people with different cultures living in different places. We care about contexts, about details…our scientific production is contextual and gradualist. We don't produce universal laws or global recipes…we don't own the truth, we don't have certainties but we study and struggle to understand the social, cultural and economic phenomena that need to be addressed both in the short and in the long term.

So, we also care about **time**. We do it because we have learned that social change has different rhythms. Historians, in particular, have been working on different durations of social time. If we are talking about technological platforms, gadgets, of course, change can be fast. But long term change is far more subtle and difficult to apprehend …how and when did we change our minds about social inequalities, about poverty, migrations, democracy, environmental sustainably?

It simply doesn't change from one day to the other. What is important takes time. It takes time to comprehend the world and to change our views about it. Processes are special research objects and require special attention. Results might not be immediate. Reality can be surprising but it can be studied and understood. It can be done and we should do it!

(….)

It is however more and more difficult to do this, particularly in some European countries. Universities are dramatically under-funded and programmes such as Horizon 2020 are not responding to this fundamental challenge.

Social sciences were not properly inscribed in the design of Horizon2020 (despite the Excellence and Societal Challenges pillars) and its implementation shows how residual it is…several disciplines such as media and communication, history, anthropology are practically ignored. A few disciplines (such as economics or business) have some instrumental relevance to the programme's objectives.

Social Sciences and Humanities are generally marginal in the overall programme because they were not perceived as relevant neither for the industrial pillar nor for the societal one. At best, they have a secondary role….Maybe not 'innovative' enough…not really 'ground-breaking'.

Why is it so? Why did this happen and it is still happening? Why can't this be changed? Why should we have excellent social science and humanities scholars (both in core and peripheral countries), networks and communities and they are not being properly supported by this massive programme? Why develop a programme that reinforces pre-existing research asymmetries in terms of disciplines and geographies?

Why cannot European citizens transversally benefit from social sciences and humanities through the enrichment of their lives, through deeper understanding of societal matters, through better communication tools and contents, through the complexification of their analysis and, last but certainly not least, through better public policies?

Why are social sciences and humanities devalued when we need them the most?

Isn't it obvious by now for all of us that Europe is not working and that we are not properly dealing with the real problems? Isn't this the time to think disruptively? Critical and alternative thinking are at the core of social sciences…that's the main reason for its urgency and certainly not for a secondary or subordinate role!

Social sciences and all other so-called exact sciences must collaborate, side by side, not compete for the same funds or status. The worth and the complementary nature of different disciplines is highly valuable and should be cherished. And we can and we do work together. We have been doing this for decades…In my media and communication centre we work with doctors and they work with us; we work with engineers and they work with us. Why develop a research programme which allows scholars without expertise in social sciences to face societal challenges on their own, without the needed contribution of social sciences? This simply should not happen and it represents a serious setback.

I believe that Horizon 2020 is a lost opportunity to rethink our most fundamental problems. The non-financing of social sciences and humanities and the reinforcement of some areas and professions widens the gap between so-called 'hard' and 'soft' disciplines and between core and peripheral countries.

So it is time to re-examine our choices, it is time to think carefully how socially relevant scientific questions can be identified. This is why we need to problematize Horizon 2020.

We cannot have a major research programme that ignores the fundamental problems we face in Europe…these problems didn't just pop up…they have been with us for some time but we didn't pay attention to them or were unable to detect them.

Horizon 2020 is a programme based on a technologically oriented imaginary, which attempts to speed up change without proper consideration for the direction we are taking. It is based on the notion that more technologies are always a good thing *per se*. There is nothing good or bad about technologies…it all depends on the reasons for their development and especially on their social usage and appropriation.

Of course technologies can create jobs and can make our lives simpler and better but they can also do just the opposite. Robotization, for example, can increase unemployment (creating new social problems) and communication technologies, to give you another example, can be used to promote peace or be used to promote fear, hatred, and terrorism.

Europe is imploding with political and social fragmentation, embarrassing poverty and inequalities, fear of human beings fledging from wars and starvation, racism, xenophobia, violence against women and children, populism, indifference, religious intolerance, democratic deficit, stereotyping, radicalisms, disrespect for fundamental human rights, including the most fundamental one (freedom of speech)….and still we don't take these problems seriously and we design a research programme basically to sell more products and services. Of course, this is important… but not enough! Not anymore!

Actually, we might all live well with less. If poverty and inequalities are properly addressed, we might find out that most of us can live fulfilling lives with less. But we cannot live fulling lives if we are not at peace with different others and with nature.

So, if someone in this room has a special responsibility regarding the design and implementation of Horizon 2020, I would like to say that the programme might be running according to your expectations but it is not addressing Europe's most pressing problems.

EU research programmes should be about solving problems that are relevant for European citizens, for newcomers (the human beings we often call refugees) and for generations to come.

Any EU research programme, just like all EU policies, should be based on fundamental European values. And this is why this is a very good moment to examine – in more detail – how can a programme like Horizon 2020 be challenged by fundamental EU values such as solidarity, democracy and human rights. We need value based science and we need a constructive debate about this. Thank you!

(…)

I have some additional contributions for the debate. My 10 minutes are gone but I would like to get back with some more pragmatic considerations. Specific problems of Horizon 2020:

1. The EU has an utilitarian and short-term view of scientific knowledge. The programme is conceived to have short-term impact in the economy/jobs which means that it focuses on immediate results, applied sciences, relation between research centres and companies aiming at 'fast and furious' results, instant profit… Impact should always be considered in short, medium and long term…

2. The programme design and its evaluation mechanisms reinforce pre-existing asymmetries between more professionalized research centres in more affluent/higher ranking institutions and research centres lacking resources to face complex bureaucratic and administrative processes.

3. The programme reinforces pre-existing asymmetries regarding countries and scientific disciplines with different linguistic traditions. Moreover, so-called 'exact sciences' tend to use English as lingua franca whilst social sciences and humanities tend to work closer to their linguistic traditions. Some topics are relevant for particular linguistic communities. Linguistic diversity is good, it should be protected and promoted…not used against scholars who publish quality research outside 'standard' science with its narrow metrics.

4. Absence of mutual recognition between research fields. If projects in pillar 3 (societal challenges) can succeed without the contribution of social sciences, the message couldn't be clearer. It can be done

without specific know how. This would be unthinkable for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). No project in these areas would be successful without expertise in the respective fields.

5. Non-recognition of more fragile or recent disciplines in less mature democracies. History of the fields and contexts should be taken into consideration…Good research questions are contextual. They result from theoretical competence and empirical research. The media and communication field in Portugal is a good example (…)

6. Financial support – what justifies the scale? Why not multiply projects rather than financing just a few large scale ones – why accept the inevitability of the absurd rejection rates? What are the benefits of making so many researchers waste their time and energy in unsuccessful candidacies? One project of 1,5m € could be divided by 15 of 100,000 €? What are the reasons for this option in social sciences and humanities? ERC projects, for example, can be like small companies…and they move to more central universities, reinforcing once again pre-existing asymmetries.

«What is Horizon 2020?
Horizon 2020 is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020) – in addition to the private investment that this money will attract. It promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market.»
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020 (access: 06.09.2016)

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Agriculture & Forestry
Aquatic Resources
Bio-based Industries
Biotechnology
Energy
Environment & Climate Action
Food & Healthy Diet
Funding Researchers
Health
ICT Research & Innovation
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Key Enabling Technologies
Partnerships with Industry and Member States
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