



European Research Council

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Highlight:

European Research Council, a fervent defender of Social Sciences and Humanities at Vilnius conference, Lithuania

23 September 2013

What are the main factors determining consumer choice when purchasing goods? Why invest in energy production in the Sahara? How to design buildings that take into account the needs of people with disabilities? These are just some of the many questions explored by top researchers funded by the European Research Council (ERC) in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). In a conference organised under the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council, the ERC, together with a number of universities and research institutes, will address the benefits that can be expected from investing in SSH in Europe. ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny along with several members of the ERC Scientific Council will participate in this event taking place at the Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius on 23 and 24 September. The results of the discussions will be analysed and compiled into an EU Presidency Conference Declaration to be handed over to the European Commission and to the EU Council of Ministers.

ERC President Helga Nowotny states: *“The image of social sciences and humanities is often obscured in public discourse, compared to the natural sciences. However, disciplines such as archaeology, sociology, literature, linguistics, demography or economics produce knowledge that explores our past, anchors our identities in the present and provides orientation for the future. They are thus crucial to prepare us for Europe’s challenges in a fragile future”*. She continues: *“Their integration under the “Societal Challenges” pillar of the new EU research programme Horizon 2020 will result in more funding. In addition, the SH domain currently holds 17% of the overall ERC funding budget, and it will continue under Horizon 2020. This reflects the conviction of the ERC Scientific Council that Europe will greatly benefit from the insights, empirical discoveries and social innovations that will emerge from these vibrant research fields”*.

Prof. Dainius Pavalkis, Minister for Education and Science in Lithuania, says: *“Facing the challenges of the 21st century and intensive global competition, Europe needs not only technological edge, but also innovative ideas and approaches that bring forward strategic outside the box thinking. Aiming to achieve an innovation breakthrough, we have to encourage the forging of multidisciplinary ties and collaborations by making full use of the insights that SSH research could offer”*. He concludes: *“The Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council is proud to host the conference on the role of SSH in Horizon 2020. We seek to provide a forum for fruitful discussions on how to better promote research exchange across scientific fields and disciplines in order to build an open and growing Europe”*.

A step change in the EU debate on SSH

The meeting, which gathers around 400 participants from all over Europe, marks a step change in the EU debate on SSH. It recognises the inevitable influence of SSH in addressing today’s most pressing global challenges. It also coincides with efforts made at EU level to put SSH on an equal footing with natural sciences. Considered as a core building block of the



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new EU research programme *Horizon 2020*, the SSH are now fully integrated in the six “[societal challenges](#)” defined by the European Commission.

In Vilnius, the participants are expected to discuss this unprecedented role of SSH, and in particular how this field can potentially be exploited to respond to issues as crucial as migration, poverty, financial crises or health and welfare systems under *Horizon 2020*.

The steering committee of the conference, led by ERC President Helga Nowotny and composed of high-level personalities in the field, launched a public [consultation](#) between April and July 2013 on how to shape the roles of SSH under *Horizon 2020*. A list of questions was set up to learn more about the current situation and the ambitions of the research community. Researchers could express their views on the benefits of multi-disciplinary SSH projects, the importance of research agendas, the obstacles or the likely contribution of SSH to the “societal challenges”.

In total, over 300 researchers, academics and experts shared their views in this consultation. The contributions, which will be made publicly available during the fall/winter, serve as a basis for the Vilnius declaration.

ERC participation in the Horizons for Social Sciences and Humanities conference

The ERC will bring its perspectives about the future of the SSH in several sessions. President [Helga Nowotny](#) will be a moderator for the session presenting the Vilnius declaration (24 September, 16:00 – 17:30, Conference Hall I-201). ERC Scientific Council members Professors [Nicholas Canny](#) and [Núria Sebastián Galles](#) will present the main features of ERC grants and offer clues to participants on how to widen the participation of SSH researchers in both the ERC calls and panels. The session will be moderated by ERC Scientific Council member Prof. Alain Peyraube and three ERC grantees, Natalia Letki, Kenneth Hugdahl and Vladimir Canudas-Romo will share their own experience of ERC funding (24 September, 16:00 – 17:30, Room I-417). Other ERC representatives will also participate in the conference, such as ERC Scientific Council member Prof. [Reinhilde Veugelers](#) and several ERC panel chairs and panel members.

ERC budget for the SSH

The ERC which funds frontier research in all fields – including Physical Sciences and Engineering and Life Sciences – has supported over 600 projects in the SSH domain with a total budget of around €1 billion so far under the current research programme. This represents 17% of the ERC budget share, a figure which is higher or equivalent to the budget of several national research agencies in Europe (e.g. Czech Science Foundation, GACR with 16%; the German Research Foundation, DFG with 15% and the Austrian Science Fund, FWF with 17%) behind the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF, 25%) or the French National Research Agency (ANR, 21%). Under *Horizon 2020*, over €2 billion are foreseen for excellent ERC SSH projects.



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The President of the Republic of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė and EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn will respectively open the conference and the sessions on both days.

For more information, see the conference book [here](#).

Read also recent ERC features on Kenneth Hugdahl's and Natalia Letki's research:
[Silencing your inner voices](#)
[Can public mean different things in different countries?](#)

A collection of SSH projects funded by the ERC is available [here](#).

Note to the editors

The European Research Council ([ERC](#))

Set up in 2007 by the European Union, the ERC aims to stimulate scientific excellence in Europe by encouraging competition for funding between the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age based in Europe. Since its launch, the ERC has selected some 3,860 researchers and their frontier research projects for funding. The ERC operates according to an "investigator-driven", or "bottom-up", approach, allowing researchers to identify new opportunities in all fields of research (Physical Sciences and Engineering, Life Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities), without predetermined priorities. It has also become a benchmark of the competitiveness of national research systems and it complements existing funding schemes at national and European levels.

The ERC, which is currently funded under the EU's Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7), has a total budget of €7.5 billion from 2007 to 2013. In November 2011, the European Commission proposed a substantial increase of the ERC budget to over €13 billion under *Horizon 2020*.

The ERC is composed of an Executive Agency and a Scientific Council. The Scientific Council is made up of 22 top researchers and sets the ERC's scientific strategy. The ERC is led by President Prof. Helga Nowotny and the Scientific Council is represented in Brussels by Secretary General Prof. Donald Dingwell. The ERC Executive Agency implements the "Ideas" programme and is led by Director Pablo Amor.

Links

ERC website

<http://erc.europa.eu>

Conference website

<http://horizons.mruni.eu/>

Conference declaration (*the text will only be available in the afternoon of 24 September 2013*)

http://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/content/pages/pdf/Vilnius_SSH_declaration_2013.pdf



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