

17 October 2016

Summary of the lunch event on Horizon 2020 – Challenges, Solutions and Food for Thought for FP9

The 11 October 2016 creoDK organized a lunch event on the evaluation of Horizon 2020. More than 50 people participated in the event with Alan Cross, Deputy Head of Unit at DG Research and Innovation, and Kim Brinckmann, Director for Research at University of Copenhagen, as key note speakers.

Mrs. Wederking, Director of creoDK and Copenhagen EU Office, made the welcoming remarks and opened the discussion on Horizon 2020 and the next Framework Programme, FP9.

The aim of the event was to address the challenges Horizon 2020 faces and, at same time, look forward to the next framework programme, FP9. Furthermore, the event sought to find possible solutions that can inspire the Commission when it begins to design the next framework programme for research and innovation.

Alan Cross explained that the European Commission has so far evaluated 110,000 proposals and has given 10,000 grants under Horizon 2020. The interim evaluation of Horizon is soon to begin and in this regard it should be noticed that the evaluation takes place in parallel with the last work programme of Horizon 2020.



Public consultation on the evaluation of Horizon 2020 will be open from October 2016 until January 2017. It will have an impact on future research programmes. Furthermore, over the next year the Commission will publish various reports about the evaluation of Horizon 2020:

- December 2016: start of the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 by the High Level Group chaired by Pascal Lamy
- May 2017: publication of the Staff Working Document on Horizon 2020
- June 2017: publication of the report by the High Level Group
- October 2017: publication of the Commission Communication on Horizon 2020 interim evaluation

Mr. Cross stated that future work programmes will be made simpler and include fewer calls, which should lead to calls with very clear objectives. The Commission will try to include various TRL in one call.

The calls for 2018-2019 which are published in the work programme 2018-2020 will be rather detailed, whereas the calls for 2020 will be described in broad terms. In sum, the Commission seeks to do more of the same, but better. Moreover, the Commission seeks input to FP9 because they have not started to design it yet. Cross argued that the actual political agenda is important because it will guide the research programme. Therefore the next Multiannual Financial Framework will be very important for the research and innovation funds. It is possible that the focus on European added value will be greater. Moreover, the three O's (open innovation, open science and open to the World), launched in June 2015 by the Commissioner for research and innovation Carlos Moedas, will underpin all initiatives in the future.



Kim Brinckmann, Director for Research at University of Copenhagen, said that the University of Copenhagen receives the fifth highest amount of money under Horizon 2020. He recommended the Commission to spend more money on research at lower levels of the TRL scale and at the same time integrate social sciences and humanities (SSH) at all TRL levels. Mr. Brinckmann was very much aware that the Commission has to prioritize its resources and recommended that the Commission should help universities and SMEs over large companies. Large companies have the possibility to participate in projects without an EU contribution. Secondly, the success rates have to be improved. Lower success rates means less interest in participating in the programme. One of the problems with low success rates is that many resources are wasted. In order to reduce the number of proposals and elevate the success rates, Mr. Brinckmann recommended the Commission to make better defined requirements in the call text. His final remark was a recommendation to the Commission to use independent experts with adequate in-depth knowledge in the evaluation process and maintain physical meetings to ensure quality and coherence in the evaluation report summaries. Finally, only proposals above the threshold should receive substantial feedback.

A lively discussion was moderated by Lasse Holm Grønning from creoDK. The main questions included:

Q: Will the macroeconomic case prepared by the Commission also seek to compare impacts of different EU-programmes, e.g. agriculture and structural funds.

A: Cross: Structural funds and the Common Agricultural Policy have different goals than Horizon 2020. In this case, the Commission will stick to the research sector when making the case for research and innovation.

Q: The different research programmes (FP7 and Horizon 2020) have had different focuses. What will be the focus in the FP9? Over the years, there has come more cooperation. Will we still see this?

A: Cross: Bringing together different people is really good. This creates European added value so cooperation between actors is really important. And maybe we should have more cooperation.

Q: One question related to excellence in regions. Are you proposing any measures to bring small actors together that may create a greater impact than one big actor?

A: Cross: Every region has access to funding and regional actors can work together. Furthermore, the Commission has introduced the seal of excellence. However, the participation of new Member States is tiny. But he will not call into question the principle of excellence. "*Excellence cannot be everywhere but it can be anywhere*" (former commissioner quote).

Q: More flexible programmes and fewer calls. Will there still be open and continuous calls? To Mr. Brinckmann; could you elaborate on the idea of not giving feedback to everybody?

A: Cross: In some cases topics may be open for two or even three years. Feedback should be proportionate, which means that short proposals will receive less feedback.

A: Brinckmann: Proposals under threshold should not get substantial feedback because the Commission has to prioritize its resources.

Q: More and more proposals are on the reserve lists (at least in the energy sector). Is this a conscious decision?

A: Cross: success rates are down 1 to 10. This is not a policy, but a fact of life.

Q: Fewer calls and strategic approach. Do you step up on alignment between strategic agendas in Members States and grant challenges? Could we address challenges more strategically rather than focusing on e.g. TRL levels, concrete outcomes etc.?

A: Cross: We try to become more strategic. We are also strategic in the sense that we follow the political priorities. However, in the current work programme there are still too many narrowly defined topics, which we will try to move away from.

Q: Opportunities for universities are everywhere in H2020 but they might need to be more active in identifying them. What are the Commission's expectations, should they still be add-on to projects or is the ambition to integrate SSH. Should we just move on and realize that it take time to integrate the SSHs?

A: Social sciences and humanities need to be involved in solving societal challenges. The Commission carried out a thorough analysis of SSH involvement showing that much more work needs to be done. We also need contributions from SSH communities to see where the opportunities are.

Q: About topics. The specific challenge as well as impact is understandable to researchers whereas the scope often becomes restricted in terms of methods etc. Would it be possible to have topics where the section on "scope" did not mention methodology?

A: Cross: In many areas some topics are too prescriptive. A few years ago we dropped the guidelines on this and it was meant to be almost optional. And we should not lay down the exact methodology; this should be the decision of the researcher.