

Input from the University of Bergen to the European Commission's consultation on the upcoming "defence of democracy package"

The University of Bergen (UiB) welcomes the new EU initiative of a "Defence of democracy-package" and appreciates the opportunity to provide input. UiB strongly encourages the EU to include research- and innovation needs and priorities as a central component of the package, and to acknowledge the crucial role the whole knowledge system plays for the open, critical, knowledge-based public debate that is the core of well-functioning democracies. In particular UiB wishes to emphasize the central role of autonomous, research-intensive universities in democratically resilient societies. These universities contribute to the public debate and the development of our societies in a number of ways; by providing new knowledge through research, offering research-based education to students, laying the ground for both technical and social innovations, and not least by being an arena for continued critical discussion of problems, ideas, and solutions, where students are trained in constructive argumentative exchange. UiB encourages the EU to work actively to protect academic freedom and the autonomy of universities in Europe.

A broad range of research fields will be relevant to support knowledge-based policy-making for resilient democracies and defending the rule of law. UiB encourages the EU to employ existing programmes, such as Horizon Europe, to promote the aim of defending democracy and the rule of law. We also encourage the EU to explicitly acknowledge the importance for resilient democracies of providing sufficient funding for independent, curiosity-driven research without thematic restrictions, such as in the European Research Council.

UiB's recent position paper on the new Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe for 2025-2027 (attached) points to Democracy as one of three core challenges of the next 3 years that should be the focus of strengthened R&I efforts. We here wish to highlight the following points concerning education and R&I needs in the area of Democracy:

Prioritize research within the humanities, including artistic research

First, the "Defence of democracy-package" should explicitly recognize the central role that knowledge of and about languages, history and the arts plays in a consolidated democracy. European modern democracies and values have developed in critical dialogue with European history and tradition over centuries. Critical discussion supported by knowledge about languages, history, and the rich multitude of cultural perspectives present in our societies is a central part of our democratic interaction. UiB recommends prioritizing research that contributes to such historically and culturally informed critical public discussions, where cultural knowledge and understanding can be an incubator for stronger awareness around identity and heritage.

Systematic research on the European heritage and art

Second, to uphold the European values of democracy, academic freedom, and inclusion, knowledge about these values is crucial. To maximize the potential of the European cultural heritage to promote participation in democratic practices, there must be a systematic accumulation of knowledge of this heritage, through research that demonstrates the richness of the tradition as well as the relevance of its perspectives. Mixed-methods methodologies, including artistic research and participatory methods, facilitate well for community empowerment and interaction between academia and (marginalised groups in) society.

UiB believes that the arts and artistic research has a central role in addressing topics vital to democracy in close interaction with groups in society. UiB encourages the EU to acknowledge the contributions of art in society and as a part of education, as well as of artistic research, to the democratic discourse. Knowledge of one's society and its cultural heritage is pivotal for self-reflection and increased cultural awareness, and cultural heritage and

artistic expression are among the first areas that are criticised, censored and banned in societies where democratic values are under pressure.

More funding for research on the legal and political EU order

Third, the EU (and EEA) and the ECHR are unique supranational legal orders on which research should be prioritized; currently it is under-funded and lacking a more active role in research policy given its importance for the development of rule of law in Europe. UiB regards legal research as a necessity in the defence and development of resilient democracies, not only since law regulates democracy and democratic practices, but also because national constitutional law and the supranational European legal orders are primary safeguards against democratic backsliding. More emphasis is needed on legal research on questions relating to governance of non-state actors as well as their own governance initiatives in the light of human rights and sustainable development goals.

Prioritize research on human and civil rights and AI

Fourth, in a rapidly changing world, questions concerning human and civil rights are central in several of the challenges we face and should not be overlooked, for example in connection with social transformations, democratic participation, climate change, migrants and refugees, economics, and particularly digitalization. AI is a factor that will represent new opportunities as well as challenges and raises many ethical and legal issues. AI-related research within a range of disciplines as well as cross-disciplinary research taking ethical and legal perspectives into account will therefore be needed.



POSITION PAPER

ON THE NEXT STRATEGIC PLAN FOR

HORIZON EUROPE

FEBRUARY 2023

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



INTRODUCTION

The University of Bergen (UiB) welcomes the opportunity to give input to the European Commission in the Open Public Consultation on the past, present, and future of the European Research and Innovation Framework Programmes 2014-2027. UiB has participated in the EU FPs since its inception and many UiB researchers have been successful in securing funding across the programmes' funding opportunities. With this position paper UiB wishes to contribute to the strategic planning of Horizon Europe by sharing our recommendations for the next Strategic Plan.

Key overarching messages:

- **UiB recommends** that the overall structure of the current Strategic Plan is kept as it is, to secure continuity in the programme. The four Key Strategic Orientations remain highly relevant for the next period of Horizon Europe.
- **UiB welcomes** the fact that the current Strategic Plan acknowledges the importance of the ERC. **UiB recommends** that this clear acknowledgement is restated in the next Strategic Plan, and **we strongly support** scientific excellence as the guiding principle throughout the programme.
- **UiB emphasizes** the importance of providing good opportunities for participation in Horizon Europe for research-intensive universities and of acknowledging their special societal role.
- **UiB recommends** limiting the number of new Partnerships under Pillar II and only establishing partnerships when such organization of the R&I effort provides a clear added value. **UiB believes** that the funding in Horizon Europe should be as open as possible, for collaborations across disciplines, for excellence and wider participation.
- **UiB welcomes** the fact that the present Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of international cooperation. Horizon Europe should continue to be open to the world.
- UiB wishes to highlight (1) **Democracy**, (2) **Health**, and (3) **Climate, Ocean, and Coast** as the three core challenges of the next 3 years.

Re-inventing collaborative research and innovation

UiB recommends the introduction of **basic collaborative research** in the form of **Research Actions in Pillar II**, to give opportunities for explorative challenge-oriented research projects with lower TRL-levels.

UiB encourages the new Strategic Plan to pave the way for smaller scale Research and Innovation Actions, Research Actions and Innovation Actions oriented towards the different KSOs. **We recommend** the introduction of smaller scale, more explorative projects with less detailed demands for specific activities and lower TRL thresholds. This will make it easier for younger researchers and new actors to participate, and it will give room to test creative ideas on a smaller scale. These types of action may foster increased cross-fertilization between the Pillars, as insights from Pillar I and III may be developed further in these projects, as well as synergies with other funding instruments. If such small-scale actions are related directly to the KSOs rather than being cluster-focused, they may also foster creative cross-disciplinary research and innovation realizing the potential for fruitful interaction between the Clusters.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

Basic Research

To find sustainable solutions allowing us to tackle the diverse challenges we face, there is a need for **basic research** to enhance understanding of complex systems and processes, e.g., in global climate systems, ecosystems, and the human body. This applies to challenges related to all 4 KSOs and to all Clusters in Pillar II, for example related to: climate change; healthy oceans; pollution; loss of biodiversity; health risks; the need for better medical treatments; the need for more renewable energy.

The next Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe should **explicitly acknowledge** the need for **basic research in a wide range of disciplines** to support the efforts to find research- and innovation-based solutions to concrete problems.

Social Sciences, Humanities and Artistic Research (SSHA)

UiB **supports** the inclusion of Social Sciences and Humanities as a Specific Issue in the current Strategic Plan and **recommends** a continued and **strengthened** focus on Social Sciences, Humanities and Artistic research going forward. It should be noted that social sciences, humanities, and artistic research are relevant in all Clusters and should have funding opportunities, **in their own right**, in all Clusters.

- The new plan should to a greater degree acknowledge the importance of the **critical potential** in contributions from research within SSHA-disciplines, and in the next period of Horizon Europe UiB calls for strengthened opportunities for research projects with critical perspectives on current developments and policies.
- The plan should emphasize that ethical, psychological, and societal perspectives are relevant in the effort to find solutions related to all the challenges outlined by the KSOs and in all Clusters.
- The plan should highlight and acknowledge to a greater degree the special character, methodology, and contribution of disciplines within the humanities as well as of artistic research.
- In general, the **human dimension**, including concern for **human and citizen rights**, should be strengthened in the new Strategic Plan, to increase the awareness of the consequences of research, across all fields, for humans and human societies.
- Performing and creative art contributes to the expansion of the concept of knowledge and of dissemination in academia. Results from artistic research have a large impact and contribute to new and expanded ways of understanding culture and cultural heritage, knowledge, and skills. UiB welcomes the space given to artistic research through the New European Bauhaus and Pillar II, Cluster 2, in particular. Going forward, the **UiB calls for** a widened focus on artistic research across the clusters in Pillar II.

Legal research

For the new Strategic Plan **UiB recommends** to explicitly acknowledge the importance of legal research and legal and regulatory innovation. **UiB calls for** the introduction of legal research as **a new Specific Issue** to ensure that legal perspectives are considered in the wide range of fields and contexts where they are relevant.

The Strategic Plan should promote the value of **(1)** legal research in its applied form, and **(2)** legal research in its more abstract form. *For example:*

- (1) Related to current societal and political developments. The twin transition, in particular, involves complex governance and regulatory questions, both at national and international level, for example in relation to: EU Climate and Energy policies; Civil security; Artificial Intelligence; Digital Markets; Health data and services; Common use of coastal ocean areas; and Sustainable use of natural resources.
- (2) Related to the study of resilient and adaptable legal rules, interactions between soft and hard law initiatives, and the way technological development challenges traditional and more static concepts.

Innovation – more broadly defined.

UiB **encourages** a **broad understanding of innovation** regarding innovation routes, contributing disciplines, and forms of solutions, in line with the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA). To implement NEIA's comprehensive approach to innovation, UiB recommends that **innovation funding is applied more equally** to the technology and the arts, humanities and legal studies, social sciences, and health research. Although the current strategic plan positively highlights **Social Innovation** as a specific issue, there is still a lack of funding opportunities for social innovation projects. For the new Strategic Plan, **we urge to pave the way for new incentives for projects that explore how social issues and the human experience, including user acceptance, fairness, and ethics, promote or prevent market creation for new technologies.**

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

Democracy, cultural heritage, and history in Europe

The upcoming Strategic Plan should explicitly recognize the central role that knowledge of languages and history plays in a democracy. European modern democracies and values as we know them today, have developed in critical dialogue with European history and tradition over centuries. Critical discussion informed by knowledge of languages, history, and the rich multitude of cultural perspectives present in our societies is a central part of our democratic interaction. **UiB recommends prioritizing research that contributes to such historically and culturally informed critical public discussion.**

To uphold the European values of democracy, academic freedom, and inclusion, knowledge of what these values are and how they have developed is crucial. To maximize the potential of the European cultural heritage, there must be knowledge of this heritage, through research that demonstrates the richness of the tradition as well as the relevance of its perspectives.

The EU (and EEA) is a unique legal order on which research should be prioritized; currently it is under-funded and lacking a more active role in research policy given its importance for the development of rule of law in Europe. UiB regards legal research as a necessity in the defence and development of resilient democracies. More emphasis is needed on legal research on questions relating to governance of non-state actors as well as their own governance initiatives in the light of human rights and sustainable development goals.

In a rapidly changing world, questions concerning human and civil rights are central in several of the challenges we face and must not be overlooked, for example in connection with social transformations, democratic participation, climate change, migrants and refugees, economics, and particularly digitalization.

UiB **encourages** the Commission to elaborate on the issues above and the role for research in the upcoming ***“Defence of democracy package”*** to be presented this spring.

In the current Strategic Plan, Cluster 2 is mentioned as particularly relevant only for KSO A. and D., **but its relevance should be highlighted for all 4 KSOs.**

Health

Horizon Europe needs to focus attention on the **following key areas** in its second half:

- **Health promotion and crises preparedness in the context of limited resources.** Effective health care, accessible and affordable for everybody, is a fundamental principle of European societies. UiB recommends strengthening research on health systems and their political contexts to efficiently achieve well-being and good health while promoting equity in Europe, both in normal and challenging times.
- **Health Data:** UiB **urges** emphasis on fully leveraging existing frameworks such as the GDPR and developing initiatives such as the European Health Data Space (EHDS) to unleash the full potential of the use of existing health data for better health care delivery, research, innovation, and policy making (secondary use).
- **Global Health.** Increased emphasis on global and migrant health is key for reducing inequity and improving health of vulnerable populations, in Europe and worldwide. A global perspective is also crucial to fight antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases.
- **Cancer and Precision medicine.** UiB **supports** research on genetics, environment, and lifestyle to tailor disease prevention and treatment, including a continued strong emphasis on cancer research.
- **Mental health.** UiB **encourages** increased efforts to address the unmet need for tailored mental health care for all citizens, and for children and adolescents in particular. We need more research to better understand the causes, co-morbidities, effective treatment and management of mental diseases that are increasingly impacting our society.

- **Ageing.** UiB **recommends** continued attention to research on dementia and other age-related diseases, and on their societal consequences in the context of demographic change and technology developments.

UiB supports research efforts that build on the experience with the covid-19 pandemic to ensure resilient preparedness for the future. Lessons-learned have shown that this is reliant on the quick development of an understanding of the complexities of a new health threat and its countermeasures in all areas of life. This in turn requires **coordinated, interdisciplinary research building on existing, durable collaboration among disciplines** and inclusive research on economically and juridically sound governance and information flow for times of crises. Such knowledge will be highly transferable for several other social challenges, like migration, climate changes etc.

Climate, Ocean and Coast

UiB **recommends** a strong focus on **climate, Arctic and coastal ocean** research with a cross-disciplinary, integrated approach. **UiB in particular encourages** a strengthened focus on Arctic research; the future ice-free Arctic needs more focus due to its central role in the global climate system, and its environmental, economic, and geopolitical consequences. **UiB supports** the development of an integrated Ecosystem Prediction System that combines the Earth system, Ecosystem and Social System models to reach the targets of the KSO B and C. **UiB also wishes to emphasize its support** for a Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) on ocean research.

In October 2022, UiB presented a position paper with recommendations for priorities in Arctic and coastal ocean research, «Making the Green Wave Blue», in collaboration with NORCE Norwegian Research Centre AS. The position paper was launched at a seminar in Brussels, where the leadership as well as researchers from UiB and NORCE had the opportunity to discuss main challenges in ocean research and the key messages in the position paper with representatives from the EU Commission (DG MARE and DG RTD) and other relevant stakeholder organisations. For elaborations on our recommendations, we refer to the one-pager summarizing the key messages from the event and the position paper (attached) and look forward to receiving feedback from the Commission on our recommendations.

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

UiB **greatly appreciates the possibility of attaching a position paper** to the consultation questionnaire and encourages the Commission to keep this possibility open in future consultations.

Regarding the ambitious goal of merging the three consultations, on the final evaluation of Horizon 2020, the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, and the new Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe 2025-2027 into one consultation event: UiB appreciates that this approach is motivated by a concern to avoid “consultation fatigue” among stakeholders. We do however believe that the purpose of the consultations would have been better served by three separate, **simplified consultations with fewer questions. More fields should be added for free format text-feedback**, which would improve the informational quality of the responses. We encourage the Commission to take these points into account in the design of future consultation processes, and to consider the risk that such an ambitious consultation effort can also result in several suboptimal equilibria such as information overload for both respondents and European policymakers, response fatigue for respondents while engaging with the numerous multiple-choice consultation survey questions, or a high number of uninformative answers (i.e., a predominance of ‘I don’t know’-answers as a respondent strategy to mitigate response fatigue and comply with the formal requirements of the online consultation survey).