European research, technology and development has long been at the forefront of many breakthroughs but, according to the European Science Foundation (ESF), a rethink needs to occur to identify the challenges of the future and new agendas being developed. In addition to this, attention is needed on how these pan-European research agendas can blend with the specific dynamics of change occurring in various regions, and in particular, central and eastern Europe (CEE). This rethink is outlined in the ESF’s new report titled ‘Central and eastern Europe Beyond Transition: Convergence and Divergence in Europe’. The report aims to identify new themes for social science research in and on the CEE, to be promoted and endorsed by national and European funding institutions.

It would be a bit of an understatement to say that during the last 25 years we have witnessed some of the most profound political, social and economic changes in Europe's history. The fall of communism at the end of the 1980s not only reshaped relationships within the continent but also provided fascinating insights into the potential for, and limitations of, the large-scale reshaping of society.

With this in mind the ESF's report aims at identifying the developments in CEE which may have the potential to become hot research topics in the study of these regions as a part of European society, and as such be promoted and endorsed by national and European grant institutions. The report also outlines ways in which foresight on CEE can contribute to the development of the social sciences in general and input important topics into transnational research.

Commenting on the report, Robert Burmanjer, head of the Social Sciences and Humanities unit at the European Commission, said: 'The Forward Look provides a well-elaborated insight and recommendations on the place of Social Sciences and Humanities in central and eastern Europe and how these could and should interface with the international research project level.'

Overall, the publication provides a range of specific conclusions and recommendations contributing to the formation of targeted projects that meet the needs of policymakers struggling with the future challenges that are now facing Europe and the wider world.

In generating the report, three interdisciplinary thematic clusters were identified: Populations in change; New geographies of Europe; and Social cohesion. Populations in change assesses how migration, regional population change, ethnic minorities and integration affect the basic structure of CEE populations. New geographies of Europe focuses on the 'return to Europe', overcoming the West-East divide, on the influence of Cohesion Funds on local governance and on the expanding borders of Europe eastwards. Social cohesion focuses on the degree of socioeconomic transformation that post-communist Europe has undergone over the last 20 years, especially in terms of social mobility and social trust.

'Social sciences in central and eastern Europe were seriously distorted during the communist period.' explained Professor
Daniel David, vice-president of the Romanian Research Council (CNCS). 'This report could help us for integrating social sciences research from central and eastern Europe in the international area.'

This report has taken on a national importance for many countries. Peter Weiss, ambassador of Slovakia in Hungary, commented: ‘Rethinking of social science research in and on central and eastern Europe, setting new frontiers in social sciences and identifying main research challenges and subjects of cooperation between academics from western and eastern European countries is, without a discussion, one of the basic preconditions for overcoming the recent crisis in the EU.’

The report outlines eight structural recommendations for social science research in and on the CEE. These underline the need to ensure a stronger presence of CEE scholars and CEE social research issues in international level research projects. They also highlight real needs in terms of the development of research infrastructure and human capital, and they call for the implementation of good practices in terms of governance, scientific excellence and independence.

Source: European Science Foundation

Related information

| News | Towards a sustainable bioeconomy in Europe: how the Czech Republic is making the difference |
| Countries | Hungary |

Subjects

Coordination and Cooperation - Scientific Research - Social sciences and humanities

Last updated on 2012-07-26
Retrieved on 2019-07-20

© European Union, 2019