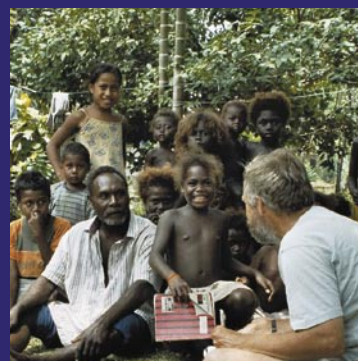


## Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

Position paper 2007



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The European Science Foundation (ESF) was established in 1974 to create a common European platform for cross-border cooperation in all aspects of scientific research.

With its emphasis on a multidisciplinary and pan-European approach, the Foundation provides the leadership necessary to open new frontiers in European science.

Its activities include providing science policy advice (Science Strategy); stimulating cooperation between researchers and organisations to explore new directions (Science Synergy); and the administration of externally funded programmes (Science Management). These take place in the following areas: Physical and engineering sciences; Medical sciences; Life, earth and environmental sciences; Humanities; Social sciences; Polar; Marine; Space; Radio astronomy frequencies; Nuclear physics.

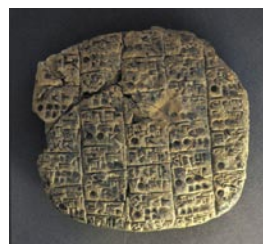
Headquartered in Strasbourg with offices in Brussels, the ESF's membership comprises 75 national funding agencies, research performing agencies and academies from 30 European countries.

The Foundation's independence allows the ESF to objectively represent the priorities of all these members.

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# 1. The humanities around us

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Self-reflection has been a fundamental characteristic of homo sapiens since the early stages of its development. Coupled with the human desire to explore, to conquer knowledge and to gain understanding, **self-reflection is at the root of the humanities.**

Culture is the result of the complex of conceptual, linguistic, affective, moral and behavioural systems that allow us to define and re-define ourselves in a changing world. This “cultural complex” is what the humanities study. This puts them right at the centre of the scientific enterprise. Culture is all around us and shapes our modes of engaging with the world, ourselves and each other in profound ways, which must be studied and understood if we are to come to grips with many of the challenges that we are facing.

The humanities focus on **‘the human element’** in the physical, biological, mental, social and cultural aspects of life. They attempt to provide insights into how knowledge arises from the constant interaction between individual and society. When studying culture, the humanities engage not just with its present manifestations, but also with those of the past. All culture comes to us from the past. If traditions, memories and ongoing practices are supplemented and reshaped by individual choices, those in turn are constrained by structural features of the various cognitive and value systems we employ. In this respect we are the product of our past, of the structural properties of our present environment, of our characteristically human capacities such as language, perceptual and communicative systems, and of our bodies.

The humanities study **the past** in order to understand how it contributed to shape the present, they investigate the variety of conceptual and cognitive systems that we employ to grasp **the present** and make decisions for **the future**. The humanities are concerned with temporal and spatial manifestations of culture, what distinguishes cultures from each other and what they have in common. They are thus in a unique position to provide insight into how humans shape their world, deal with differences and adapt to change.

The many forms of cultural manifestation are explored by the **different humanities disciplines**: history and archaeology study the past in relation to its physical and social aspects; literary studies, art history, musicology concentrate on the creative and artistic expressions of culture; human experience and human agency are core concepts of psychology and anthropology; the belief and value systems that we employ are studied in religious studies and in philosophy; the social expressions of conceptual systems are studied in language and history;



Platon and Aristote.

their underlying structure is the subject of the cognitive sciences, which engage elements from psychology, philosophy, logic, and linguistics. The latter studies the language system, which is so characteristic of humans and plays a central role in all aspects of culture; while the transmission and transformation of knowledge systems is the object of study of pedagogical and educational research and of the history and philosophy of science.

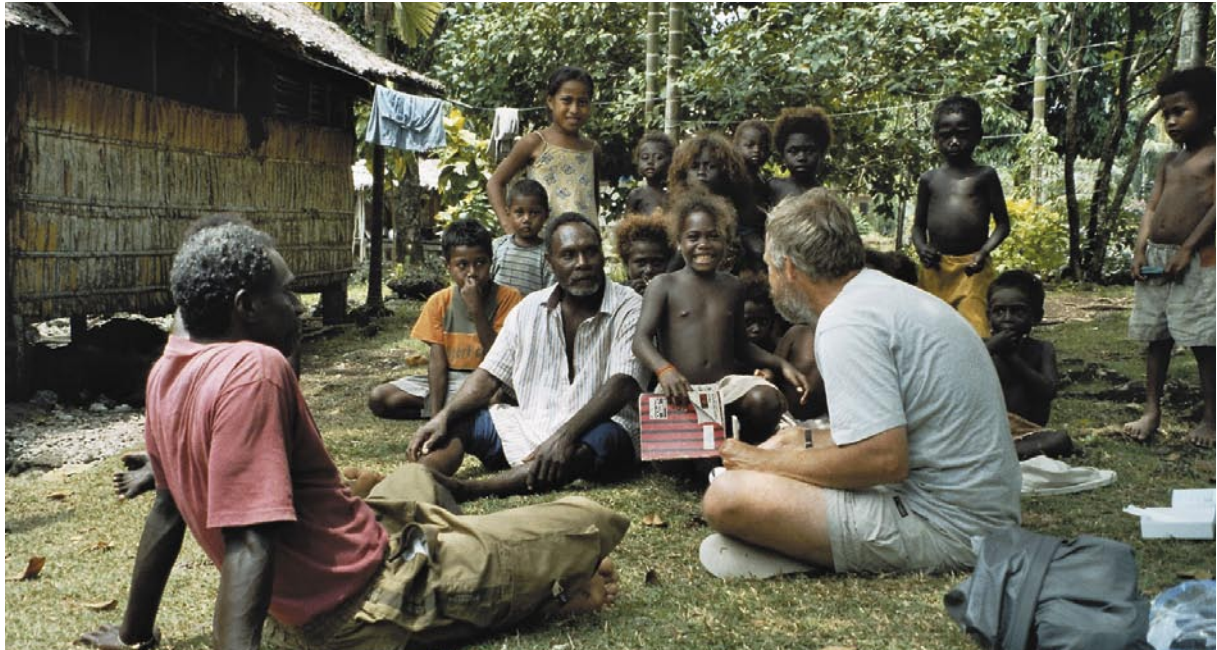
**In thus dealing with culture, its contents and its manifestations, its structures and its constraints, the humanities naturally interact with other fields of science and art.** Cultures arise in response to the challenges and opportunities of our physical environment, hence the results and methods of the natural sciences are also relevant: as for example, when physical geography informs archaeology and biology is relevant to linguistics. Often the interaction goes both ways: discoveries in neurophysiology are relevant to psychological and philosophical theories about cognition, and models developed in psychology and philosophy provide useful conceptualisations for neuroscientists.



# 1. The humanities around us

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Stoneking obtains information for genetic sampling from a resident of Koriovuku village on Ranonga Island, in the Western Province of the Solomon Islands.

In addition to mutual exchanges between domains, **new areas of research** have developed within the humanities as a result of linkages between the traditional humanities disciplines and neighbouring fields, e.g., area studies, cultural studies, gender studies, health research, heritage studies, media studies, and research related to globalisation and development. Engagement with the creative and performing arts, with the digital information world, and with the phenomena of enhancement of human capabilities are rolling out yet other fields for humanities research.

In these interactions among disciplines and domains the contribution of the humanities is unique in that it focuses on **'the human element'**, even when dealing with general, structural (physical or biological) conditions. Quoting from Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*, (a poem published in 1733-1734), "The proper study of Mankind is Man". The focus on the individual in a spatial and temporal context provides an understanding of **"where we come from", "who we are", "where we are going"**, and how we can transform and innovate our world in the future.

Across Europe, the role of the humanities as a distinct area of research is conceived of in different ways. The Standing Committee for the Humanities as the European home to many different research councils, agencies and academies, naturally reflects the **diverse traditions of the humanities** in its broad range of coverage of disciplines. The list of humanities disciplines is not a static one; delimitations as to what constitutes the humanities vary from country to country, from research council to research council, from university to university. The European Science Foundation tradition for broad and encompassing definitions has created favourable conditions for research cooperation across domains and disciplines. The broad definition of the humanities as reflected in the remit of the Standing Committee for the Humanities is ideally suited to preparing the field for the challenges of the polidisciplinary research that lies ahead.

## 2. The humanities in a changing environment

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The need for transformation and innovation manifests itself within the humanities disciplines themselves, and is at the root of their intrinsic interdisciplinarity. As **the perception of what it is to be human changes over time**, the focus of the study of human culture in the humanities shifts and takes on new realities. **New insights into changes in the physical environment and into the fundamental biological make-up of humans** have been incorporated into the trajectories along which humanities scholarship develops. **New methods for the acquisition of data**, or new ways of exploring existing data, a better understanding of the human processing of information, have all changed the way the humanities operate. **New forms of multidisciplinary study** emerge, sometimes resulting in new disciplinary arrangements.

Academic disciplines are recent phenomena, established and modified in particular historical contexts. These contexts continue to change and result in alteration of the disciplines and their division of labour. At the same time, new fields emerge in response to new intellectual and pragmatic developments. Snow's distinction between the "two cultures" of the natural sciences and the humanities represented by the "literary intellectuals" seems thus increasingly archaic. Indeed, the separation of the "natural" and the "artificial" does no longer make much sense, given the post-modern condition with its conflation of all kinds of domains and its destabilization of the dualisms of the past. Even in the case of climate, the effects of human activity on nature become increasingly clear, as the growing public discourse about global warming testifies. Also, with the new genetics what used to be called "life itself" is increasingly modified by humans through "artificial" means, including genetic engineering. The age of the post-human, it is sometimes argued, has arrived, signifying new networks of organic and super-organic stuff embodied in cyborgs of tools, organisms, and robots. The "blurring of genres", therefore, seems inevitable in the academe. The humanities continue to offer useful tools for **understanding the cultures of science as they unfold**. At the same time, however, their demarcation, and, of course, those of other terrains of scholarship will be increasingly blurred. Area studies of the academic domain – of the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences – will, by necessity, involve frequent trans-border movement. **The future academe**, perhaps, will be defined as **multi-cultural and post-disciplinary**.



Some examples of ESF publications in the Humanities.

### a. Changing contexts: Europeanisation, internationalisation, globalisation

When the European Science Foundation was created almost forty years ago, its long-term vision was the Europeanisation of science. For the humanities, fora that facilitated the exchange between European researchers of various traditions and disciplines, were of particular importance. ESF's networking programmes acquired new relevance with the demise of the Cold War. As Europe now seeks to position itself in the globalised world, the vision of the Standing Committee for the Humanities extends to facilitating exchanges between humanities researchers beyond the frontiers of the enlarged Europe. Gone are the days when it was all right to publish an anthology titled *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, with only English, French and German authors, thus precluding all that Central and East-European countries had contributed to the Romantic discussion of Shakespeare.

The enlargement of Europe has also led to transdisciplinary exchanges (for example in health research), as the **borders between the humanities and other fields of research** are drawn differently from country to country. While tackling frontier research questions, **humanities research thus redraws its boundaries**, responding to external societal and political demands, as much as to internal pressure for methodological advances.

## 2. The humanities in a changing environment

Yet, **globalisation and internationalisation have affected the natural sciences and the humanities differently.** In a global knowledge-economy with fast communication networks, results from natural science research can be generated more easily in a universal division of labour, and can be universally applied regardless of the cultural backgrounds of researchers, who use common methods, common approaches and common techniques, and interpret their results in common terms. The quantitative methodologies of social science research are similarly universally applicable. This is not always the case for humanities scholarship, for which **language and culture are built into the process of research just as much as they are its object**, and where texts play a central role. Although globalisation has indeed affected the humanities, as we shall show, many of its disciplines and research fields have kept their distinct personalities. Many individual researchers still work within a national language, are affected by local conditions and discourses, and focus their research on their heritage and traditions. The European Science Foundation believes that it is important to support also this kind of research.

© Marian Vanhaeren / Francisco d'Errico



Nassarius gibbosulus shell beads from the Mousterian levels of Skhul, Israel, the open air site of Oued Djebbana, Algeria, and from present day beaches of Djierba, Tunisia.

Humanities scholars benefit too from **the new research infrastructures of the digital age.** Their working methods are changing, and the emergence of virtual research environments may be of great advantage to the humanities. At the same time, the very processes of the generation, transmission and application of knowledge, have become of increasing interest to the humanities scholar: cognitive similarities of humankind and traces of cultural differences are explored by humanities scholars, as well as different levels of understanding and misunderstanding. Intercultural communication has thus grown into a vibrant new field of research for the humanities reflecting the practices of the globalised world. See for example the rise of area studies as well as the revived interest in religious studies.

If internationalisation has multiplied the occasions for exchange, and thus increased opportunities for self-reflection, it has also begun to threaten the often linguistically-defined traditions of humanities scholarship in Europe. SCH is aware that its role is also to **defend the strengths of this multi-linguistically based diversity, by developing rigorous benchmarks of scholarly excellence regardless of the medium of expression.**

### b. Changing approaches: Different types of humanities research

Epistemology, the study of what knowledge is (what do we know, how do we know, and how we acquire knowledge) is a humanistic discipline par excellence. Traditionally humanistic research has aspired at the kind of knowledge related to **understanding** phenomena and clarifying *probabilities* rather than **explaining** and **predicting** them, the latter being primarily the domain of the natural sciences. However both methodologies are found in contemporary research in the humanities, approaches that are based on prediction and explanation (derived from the precepts of sciences of nature and objects), and approaches that are based on understanding and interpretation, (following precepts of the sciences of the mind, where subject has primacy over object).

This variety of attitudes and methods can be a strength of research in the humanities. They need not be in opposition to each other; the different approaches constitute different ways of investigating problems. The merit of any approach depends on the question under study; methods do not have intrinsic validity; their merit lies in their suitability and appropriateness to the problem to which they are applied.



**The Standing Committee for the Humanities derives strength from its diversity:** some humanities scholars produce predictive knowledge that can be falsified and tested and thus easily enters into collaborations with similarly structured neighbouring sciences, while the self-reflective nature of other strands of humanities scholarship generates epistemological tools that enable us to rethink the human and cultural context in which we live, offering to other research domains the insights of its difference. From this coexistence arises a keen sense for the questions that other researchers may skirt. Against this background, **the SCH defines humanities as research that has the human being (in its physical, mental and social complexity) at the centre of its enquiry.**



Movie posters.

The Standing Committee for the Humanities will thus continue to support excellent research in the humanities regardless of disciplinary or paradigmatic affiliations, as well as research projects which can be coupled with expertise residing in other ESF Standing Committees, notably in the social, medical, life, environmental and engineering sciences, just as it has always been willing to explore contact points with the Arts.

### c. New forms of interdisciplinarity

“Trans- and interdisciplinarity” and “horizontal integration” are increasingly on the agenda of research funding organisations. Ubiquitous priority themes – health, environment, food and agriculture, transport and energy, security, bio-, info- and nanotechnology – point to research questions so complex that they can only be tackled by relying on the cooperation between different areas of expertise.

In many fields of humanities research, the necessity to engage with neighbouring sciences is also acutely felt. **The Standing Committee for the Humanities encourages researchers to identify and work in fields, where the humanities can contribute to**

**the generation of knowledge and the production of constructive results.** Clearly, the requirements of the question under investigation should dictate the disciplines involved. **Trans-, inter- and multidisciplinary are not goals in themselves,** and the Standing Committee for the Humanities will naturally support excellent monodisciplinary applications when the research in question justifies co-operations between researchers of the same discipline, and whenever a mono-disciplinary approach seems most suitable for the investigation of a problem.

The European Science Foundation has always supported basic research but the boundaries between fundamental research and applied research are not clear-cut. For example, it is a specificity of humanities research to critically examines notions of society and humankind in relation to options proposed by applied technological research. For example, in a burgeoning area of research investment at national and international level – **security research** – the Standing Committee for the Humanities is supporting the development of a “Forward Look” on human and social dimensions of security research, drawing, among other fields, on cultural and media studies, psychology and semiotics.

Also examples of the engagement of humanities research with **new IT technologies** abound, notably at an interface that brings together arts, design, music and performance. For example, the Standing Committee for the Humanities sees great potential in digital game studies, and other fundamental and conceptualising explorations in fields related to the new creative industries.

**Information science** is likewise intrigued by the complexity of human communication and values collaboration with linguistics. Work in language and speech technology (including the relationship between automated information systems and natural languages) has brought humanities researchers to collaborate with experimental psychologists and with the world of Artificial Intelligence. Against this background, the Standing Committee for the Humanities believes that there is scope for better coordination of work on bi- and multilingualism in Europe.

Studies into linguistics and language distribution over time offer contact points with **biological anthropology and genetics**, an approach that can combine the production of new knowledge with the preservation of cultural products (endangered languages), as shown for example in projects under the European Science Foundation EUROCORES Programme ‘The Origin of Man, Language and Languages’ (OMLL). This research

## 2. The humanities in a changing environment

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plays an important role in taking a critical look at some key concepts of linguistics such as population, race, and culture, situating them in their historical context. At the same time, it draws attention to the individual aspect of language, which is the product of the mind of each and every human being.

Studies into consciousness, creativity, health, and ageing have opened fields, in which **neurosciences**, **life sciences**, philosophy and psychology now usefully collaborate. The field of landscape studies has likewise developed as a concept that integrates anthropology, archaeology, sectors of **environmental studies**, and many branches of history. It may allow relating the notion of biodiversity to the “cultural complex” of historic environments, which were transformed through contact with humans, thereby for example building bridges to Holocene climate change studies.

Humanities scholars have long been studying the order of knowledge as a phenomenon across the ages – as anthropologists, historians of science and philosophers. Developments in **Information and Communication Technologies** have accelerated the restructuring of and access to knowledge, with dramatic consequences for traditional keepers and transmitters of knowledge, such as archives, libraries and museums. At the same time, the rapidity of and multiplicity of channels for the dissemination of

scientific knowledge poses new challenges for those areas of the humanities who gather data from and with living communities, who might want to participate in the management of the knowledge thus assembled.

There are many new fields at the interface between the sciences and the arts, and between the arts and material culture, linking text, image and performance, that are only just opening up to interdisciplinary research. In an age of visual communication, new critical skills and methods need to be developed that can rival the rigour and robustness of critical methods which Humanities scholarship has been applying to texts for a long time.

Interest in questions of cultural, ethnic and religious identity is bound to remain high in a world characterised by **migration and mobility**. Humanities research, whose branches from philologies to cultural studies have the ability to aptly describe composite and time-layered realities, is well placed to enlighten policy makers and community workers on the hidden meanings of some of the dangerous discontents that can pitch communities and individuals against each other. Humanities research continues fulfilling a central role in monitoring and interpreting the cultural processes that accompany changes and tensions in society.



### 3. The Standing Committee for the Humanities and its mission

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The European Science Foundation was created more than 30 years ago in 1974 as a common European platform for research co-operation across borders. Its construction was unique, because it provided an independent voice for science at the European level, and because it embraced all the areas of science, including the humanities, within a single, independent and organisation for the support of basic research. Today the European Science Foundation consists of 75 different research foundations and academies in over 30 countries, extending beyond the present borders of the European Union.

Up to now, the European Science Foundation has been **the only pan-European high-level scientific organisation for funding and coordinating research in the humanities** through the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities. Operating within a membership organisation – bringing together many different research councils, foundations and academies – the Standing Committee for the Humanities naturally reflects the various traditions and delimitations of the humanities at national level. The ESF's broad definition of science – from physical and life sciences through human and social sciences to engineering – has throughout the years given possibilities for supporting collaborative research between all fields of research, within the humanities and in transdisciplinary activities.

Under the ESF Strategic Plan 2006-2010, The Standing committee for the Humanities has formulated its mission as follows.

On behalf of the ESF Member Organisations, the Standing Committee for the Humanities will contribute to the development of the ESF science policy agenda and provide expert advice on science policy actions at the European level in the field of its responsibilities. It will work proactively

- **to identify priority research areas for the humanities,**
- **to advance collaboration and co-ordination in basic research in the humanities,**
- **to foster excellent, transnational – and where appropriate – transdisciplinary research,**
- **to strengthen the voice of the European humanities, and to continue making the case for better conditions for research in the humanities in Europe.**

The ultimate objective of the SCH's operations is to act as a catalyst for the acquisition of new knowledge in the humanities, thus enabling its Member Organisations to fund research recognised to be excellent at European and international level.



Budapest (Hungary): The millennial memorial of the Hungarian Land-taking, 1896.

The Standing Committee for the Humanities will work towards its mission by:

- **promoting debates** on new and developing areas and on strategic activities in the humanities;
- **creating links between research communities** which in the humanities are often fragmented and between research funders;
- **planning – and where appropriate managing – collaborative research activities;**
- **provide guidance and advice for applicants – and to continue this advisory relation to the scientific activities it funds;**
- **securing the continued handling of high quality international peer review** in the humanities and maintaining data-bases of expert in the different disciplines;
- **developing means and methods of scientific evaluation** which are relevant for humanities research;
- **validating and maintaining lists of high quality scientific journals**, taking into consideration the specific needs of the humanities, and especially the needs of European humanities research (see the section on the European Reference Index for the Humanities);
- **supporting practices aimed at advancing European cooperation in basic research** (mobility of researchers, free flow of information and ideas, construction, use and quality control of research infrastructures);
- **developing closer links with subject associations;**
- **strengthening methods for the independent evaluation of research**, within the humanities and in transdisciplinary fields;
- **becoming a clearing house within Europe** for information on cooperation and collaboration issues relevant to humanities scholarship.

## 4. The Standing Committee for the Humanities in the European Research Area 2006-2010

The humanities were already present in the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, but they have been more explicitly integrated in the **7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme**. The relevance of Humanities is further acknowledged by its strong presence in the vision of the newly-founded **European Research Council**. This new awareness on the part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme can be interpreted as a turning point in evaluating the role of the humanities within the more general framework of European research – it also means that humanities research will have to situate itself more actively in this changed market.

The European Science Foundation's mission and activities already foreshadowed the concept of the European Research Area (ERA) as promoted by the European Commission. The notion of transnational collaboration has always been a basic tenet of ESF and, by extension, of SCH. It is this closeness of purpose and mission that led ESF to strongly advocate the creation of the European Research Council (ERC) and a number of other coordination measures at European level, in support of attempts to implement the ambitious Lisbon Strategy of 2000 (which aims to "make Europe by 2010 the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world").

Within the developing European Research Area, the aims of the Standing Committee for the Humanities are:

- to increase awareness of the potential relevance of humanities research for societal issues;
- to establish and maintain a cooperative relation with the ERC, as well as maintaining close contacts with policy-makers and EU offices involved in FP7;
- to emphasise among its own funding principles "European added value", which will help increase the success rate of humanities research in other European-level competitions (including FP7 and ERC);
- to help establish objective quality assessment procedures that are tailored to the needs of humanities research, e.g. through the European Reference Index for the Humanities;



Map: Distribution of the Austronesian (triangles) and Papuan (diamonds) languages used in the sample. / Photo: Sailing vessel from Louisiade Archipelago as used by speakers of the Papuan language Yéfi Dnye.

- to initiate and participate in networking activities that help realise the above stated aims (e.g. EuroHORCs; ERA-Nets etc).

### a. The humanities in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme

To some extent, and in line with the goals of the Framework Programmes, the topics of research in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework programme (FP7) will be selected through policy-driven agendas. Humanities scholarship can **provide an historical, cultural and philosophical dimension** to these questions. Reciprocally, the themes promoted for investigation by FP7 will provide important data for scholars in the humanities. Examples of fields calling for empirical and theoretical research in the humanities are "demographic change" (incl. ageing, birth rates, migration); "lifestyles" (incl. family, work, consumption, health, youth, disabilities); "cultural interactions" (incl. traditions; diversity; discrimination); "gender". Issues such as criminality and crime perception will equally attract humanities researchers, and philosophers will study issues related to corporate social responsibility such as trust in the public realm.

**Foresight exercises** to underpin decision-making are currently included in the same work-plan. Some foresight exercises envisaged agree with ESF's emphasis, notably: thematic foresight on the developments in emerging research domains; foresight on research systems and policies in Europe and on the future of key actors involved; mutual learning and cooperation between national and/or regional foresight initiatives, (incl. third country and international).

The long term aim of the Standing Committee for the Humanities' engagement with the Framework Programme is to heighten the awareness of the contributions humanities research can make to the analysis and solution of societal issues. Eventually, this will help to firmly **establish the humanities as an integral part of policy-driven science programmes**.

To this end, the Standing Committee for the Humanities intends to maintain close contacts with policy-makers and officers involved in the implementation of FP7. At the operational level, joint activities, such as the envisaged **"New Humanities" conferences**, as well as major participation in the **ERA-Net project HERA** ("Humanities in the European Research Area") will strengthen the collaboration.

The Standing Committee for the Humanities will monitor the implementation of this development, and remain an **independent voice to evaluate and influence it**,



thus helping the scientific community to benefit from these new opportunities. In its own competitions, the Standing Committee for the Humanities will continue to select funded activities based on the fundamental criterion of excellence, while also setting store by the presence of European added value, when the proposed research activity is likely to contribute to the building of the European Research Area and can aspire, thanks to its relevance, to acquire future or additional funding in Framework competitions.

Alongside the many synergies that will arise between the Standing Committee for the Humanities and the Directorate for Research at the EU, SCH's wider mission will be to contribute to the way in which "the humanities" is to be defined for FP8.

## b. The European Research Council

The Standing Committee for the Humanities welcomes the creation of the European Research Council, and hopes that it will have a major impact on European humanities research. With the ERC the EU has created a funding instrument in which the scientific community itself, not the policy-makers, set the priorities. Significantly, **five out of its twenty selection panels cover areas in the humanities and social sciences.** Under these umbrellas humanities researchers can enter into competition based on scientific excellence and innovation.

The mission of the ERC will be to fund individual researchers and research teams, selected through a European-scale competition, with no attempt to balance the distribution of funds across member countries. Its funding capacity is intended to match its ambition to secure a leadership position for Europe at the frontiers of science.

Unlike ERC, the ESF, and consequently SCH, place their emphasis on promoting cooperation and coordination between different national-level member organisations. Against the background of the ERC, which aims at strengthening excellence, national support for research will see an increasing field for investment in transnational research. SCH will be in the best position to influence the policies of ESF Member Organisations which, as research-funding or research-performing organisations at the national level, still control the vast majority of research funds in Europe.

As the only pan-European legal entity which, through SCH, supports the coordination of excellent humanities research, ESF will develop a **cooperative relation with the ERC** in the years to come. ERC will draw on experiences with the ESF-EuroHORCs



1. Aristoteles, *Libri Naturales*, Italy, beginning of 14<sup>th</sup> century. Cod.Pal. Lat. 1033, fol 1 r Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. / 2. Galileo. Folio 116v of MS Gal. 72 kept in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence. / 3. Unnumbered folio from a manuscript written around 1480 in Leipzig and kept in Norrköping, Stadsbibliotek (Cod. 426 fol.).

EURYI (European Young Investigator) award scheme. In the implementation period, as ERC is establishing its funding strategies, the Standing Committee for the Humanities will work towards **ensuring that humanities figure prominently on the ERC agenda.** The Standing Committee for the Humanities intends to contribute to this goal by sharing its expertise and its pool of reviewers. Notably the work on a European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) could represent an important contribution. **If the humanities are to establish and maintain a strong position in relation to the ERC, it has to develop tools that can be used to adequately gauge scientific excellence and innovation.** Such tools need to be tailored to the procedures and methods that are characteristic of the various research traditions within the humanities, and need to be calibrated and maintained by an independent body. The Standing Committee for the Humanities intends to continue to play a leading role in this process.



'Harvest scene', Denmark. Painting by Peter Hansen (1910), showing men and women scything grain and tying the sheaves.

## 4. The Standing Committee for the Humanities in the European Research Area 2006-2010

### c. The ERA-Net Scheme

The Standing Committee for the Humanities is an active participant (work-package and task leader) in the ERA-Net project HERA (“Humanities in the European Research Area”), which receives funding under the FP6 ERA-Net Scheme [2005-2009]. **The HERA consortium** is composed mainly of a subgroup of ESF member organisations, and has grown out of a Special Support Action initiated in 2003 by the Danish, Dutch and Irish research councils for the humanities. The overall aims of HERA are consonant with the ESF’s focus on coordination, cooperation, and foresight.

The aims of HERA include stimulating transnational cooperation in the humanities and developing **collaborative research agendas**, thereby overcoming the historic fragmentation in the field. HERA wishes to ensure that the European Research Area benefits from the relevance and dynamism of humanities research.

SCH plays an important role, in particular with respect to the preparation, coordination and implementation of the HERA Joint Research Programmes, foresight activities and the development of the European Reference Index for the Humanities.

HERA has produced **reports on best practice and surveys on mapping reports of research priorities** which have also stimulated debates in SCH. Participation in activities such as HERA provides the SCH with another way of reaching its goals of fostering co-operation and co-ordination between its Member Organisations. The SCH therefore intends to continue to participate in such networking activities as are conducive to realising its aims.

HERA has produced five thematic scoping reports which SCH is now helping to develop into wider-ranging activities: “Cultural dynamics: inheritance and identity” and “The Humanities as a Source of Creativity and Innovation” will grow into Joint Research Programmes in the HERA framework. “Understanding and Misunderstanding (Cognition, Mind and Culture)”, and other reports on Values, Beliefs and Ideologies and on Globalisation and Environmental Issues will be developed in other formats.

SCH will support a EUROCORES Scheme inside or alongside the ERA-Net Framework, which may offer, under FP7, continued support for the thematic, researcher-driven research programmes that have, in the past, created opportunities for original and innovative research approaches.

### d. EuroHORCs

The European Heads of Research Councils are moving towards ever closer coordination and collaboration between national research funding and proposal selection mechanisms across all scientific fields.

EuroHORCs have invented the “Money follows Researcher” principle, which allows for increased researcher mobility across Europe. EuroHORCs have devised and supported throughout four annual Calls the **EURYI Scheme (“European Young Investigators Award”)**, a multinational competition for outstanding young scholars, financed through a “common-pot” systems. Success of humanities scholars in these schemes have shown that the field is ready for the supra-national competitive environment which will be created by the ERC.

EuroHORCs are now working towards shared databases of researchers and referees, thereby contributing to maintaining a high level of peer reviewed control over selection processes in both trans- and supranational competitions. It is important that the needs of humanities scholarship be fully integrated into such research information systems early on, notably because of the complex nature of any keyword structure underlying such systems.



Chinese and Arabic calligraphies.

### e. Research Infrastructures

One of the important changes in humanities research itself that have been noted above is concerned with the development of **new methodologies and the creation of new datasets via the use of advanced technologies**. Not only the **digitisation of archives**, of visual and auditory material, but also **the development of new techniques for discovering patterns** in these data and connections between hitherto unrelated areas, have given the term ‘research infrastructure’ an extended meaning, one that applies in the humanities as much as in other fields.

Traditionally, large and specialised libraries, archives and museums at a given site attracted Humanities scholars from far afield. The technological drivers of the



Gizo: Fish Market at Gizo Harbor, Western Province, Solomon Islands.

digital revolution and the increased internationalisation of research in general have now led to a situation where the development of new research infrastructures typically takes place on a scale that transcends national boundaries, both with regard to the data concerned and with regard to the cost involved. **Establishing and maintaining large research infrastructures** is a task that transcends national boundaries, and hence it is one in which the SCH can play a facilitating, coordinating and validating role.

SCH has contributed to joint EU-EuroHORCs-ESF surveys of research infrastructures for the Humanities by providing typologies and selecting a masterlist of such research infrastructures. The aim is to work towards a closer collaboration between groups of typologically similar research infrastructures.

SCH is supporting the HERA recommendations on the further development of research infrastructures for the Humanities and offers its networking and collaborative research instruments (Research Networking Programmes and EUROCORES) as tools to build research programmes around the use of research infrastructures. SCH supports efforts to strengthen the research infrastructures recommended by the ESFRI road-map, which will provide enhanced opportunities for innovative and collaborative research in Europe.

### **An SCH Research Infrastructure: The European Reference Index for the Humanities**

SCH's own main research infrastructure project is the "European Reference Index for the Humanities" (ERIH). Europe's rich and lively linguistic and intellectual traditions in humanities research all find their

expression in scholarly publications. The new transnational mobility of researchers and the often transdisciplinary nature of contemporary science require that humanities researchers position themselves in changing international contexts, in which journal publications are often considered more relevant than monographs. Researchers and institutions **need a tool to evenly access and assess the scientific quality of humanities research output, irrespective of disciplinary and linguistic boundaries.** SCH has established this fully peer-reviewed, Europe-wide process, in which 15 expert panels aggregate and sift input received from funding agencies, subject associations and specialist research centres from across the continent, thereby creating a reference index of top journals in the humanities. It is intended for this exercise to be eventually extended to include emerging fields of humanities research (e.g.: media studies) and book-form publications and non-traditional formats. ERIH may be **a backbone for a fully-fledged research information system for the humanities.**



## 5. Instruments for implementing the SCH mission

Since 2000, ESF funding and networking instruments have been harmonised across all standing committees and all scientific domains. This has not always taken fully into account the needs of humanities research, characteristically composed of smaller groups, needing less coordination around large-scale facilities.

The changes in the landscape of humanities scholarship in Europe have now led SCH to reflect carefully on the best use it can make of the instruments offered by ESF. What follows is a sample of reflections on the specific needs of humanities scholarship in Europe (and beyond) and on the ways in which SCH can cater for those needs.



Cuneiform tablet from Tell Beydar, Jezirah (c. 2415 BC).

### a. Exploratory Workshops

This instrument has a particular resonance for humanities research. It has consistently proved to be the most popular choice for applicants to the SCH and enjoys a healthy oversubscription. It has a particular relevance in the changed and changing research landscape, because it enables small groups of scholars from tangential fields, often at the edges of the humanities domains, to spend a few days in close discussion of a common question, in a cooperative and experimental forum.

An Exploratory Workshop will normally involve **no more than 30 participants** – and it can be half this number – from within a number of allied disciplines,

which have been working on similar problems without ever having had an opportunity to sit down to share their different kinds of expertise. The purpose of the workshop is to let sparks fly, in the most positive sense. Researchers meet in plenary or small-group sessions to share their **current observations, discoveries or preoccupations**; out of this they may develop a new set of questions, **a new approach and proposals for further collaboration**.

It is expected that the end result should lay the practical foundations for a further stage of networking, whether in the form of a joint website, a joint publication and/or a database, an application for further international funding etc. In the most successful cases, it is the intimacy of the small-group context that allows thinking to flourish and a wholly fresh light to be shed on common questions. Typically perhaps of the humanities, the economy of the instrument is far exceeded by the intellectual results it produces.

### b. ESF Research Conferences

ESF Research Conferences share with exploratory workshops their objective **to stimulate the explorations of new frontiers in science**. **Four-to-five day long events**, they focus on a competitively selected theme, and bringing together world leading researchers and younger scholars, whether from academia or industry. No written papers are requested from invited speakers and no proceedings are published, but it is expected that new ideas and results will be discussed during the meetings and that dedicated foresight sessions are **to develop new directions for research**.

### c. Humanities Spring

SCH sees a need to further strengthen European collaboration between (young) researchers. It considers **exchanges on the future of one's discipline at the early stages of a scholarly career** as an important part of training, and as an important factor to stimulate high level research in the future. Summer-school-type events can fulfil such a function. In the past, SCH has funded one-off proposals occasionally, but increasing funding requests now require a new approach, and summer schools are often part of Research Networking Programmes, where they are, however, integrated into **thematically circumscribed activities**.

Often young humanities scholars find it more difficult than their peers in the natural sciences to articulate possible new shapes for their fields of research early on in their careers – not least because of the continued



weight of classical texts in many fields. Yet, SCH believes that as part of its engagement in foresight exercises, it seems only natural to also challenge promising young scholars – and not only seasoned specialist – to look beyond their current research and to develop visions about the future of their disciplines. It is for this purpose that SCH has decided to develop the “Humanities Spring”, as summer-school type week-long gathering aimed at generating fresh perspectives for the humanities, starting in 2007.

#### d. Forward Looks

With the dynamic development of research, the science community and the funding agencies at both the national and European level need to reflect on and be aware of the likely directions research will take in the future. As traditional disciplines combine to produce new multidisciplinary areas of study, agencies need to plan their resource use in order to meet such complex demand. Challenges include the development of new facilities and infrastructures, which may have a considerable lead time before becoming available.

The ESF Strategic Plan centrally places foresight exercises in science matters as a tool for its two traditional stakeholders, researchers and research funders, offering high-level advice in pan-European approaches between national agencies as well as informing European institutions.

The envisaged **gatherings of Europe’s key scientific “actors” in any given topic** must aim at producing an assessment and recommendations of the highest scientific quality to be accepted by their scientific peers. At the same time, this should not inhibit adventurous forward thinking and sometimes **‘thinking the unthinkable’**. A useful model is that used by the U.S. National Academies of Science whose seminal monographs on key topics have influenced the direction of research.

The nature of research is that it is unpredictable but, within reason, a Forward Look for the next 5-10 years should provide a useful guide for everyone concerned in monitoring the health of European science. The role of European academies of science in bringing together Europe’s best brains will be an essential part of this approach.

Some of the themes explored by the SCH together with the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences have been the role of immigration and transculturality, urban environments, security issues. A Forward Look in higher education research is presently running. In order to map the state of our knowledge on higher education in Europe; to assess its strength and weaknesses when

compared with higher education around the world; and to look ahead towards developments likely to occur in the foreseeable future, a group of European scientists has developed a “Forward Look” which is expected to last for 12 to 15 months. The ESF Strategic Plan 2006-10 recognizes the leading role of the Forward Look instrument. Although Forward Looks are essentially science-driven, their final report must include mechanisms for the dissemination of its results and targeted recommendations that are likely to be used by policy-making European agencies when planning ahead or considering which directions to go.

The Forward Look instrument seems to be ideally placed to assist any group of European scientists willing to assess the state of their discipline (or polidisciplinary issue); to determine in which direction it will likely head in the next decade or so; and to provide policy-makers at the national and European level with ready-made knowledge on which to base their decisions.

In the future, the European Science Foundation wishes to involve its Member Organisations even more at the development stage of any Forward Look.

#### e. Interdisciplinary Initiatives

One of the ambitions of the ESF strategy is the **nurturing of interdisciplinary research initiatives, aimed at opening up new perspectives** in the scientific areas supported **across the five standing committees of the ESF**. Such initiatives, typically emanating from the midst of ESF Standing Committees but cutting across their domains, would focus on the organisation of meetings, preparation of publications or for promotion of outputs. They could later be developed into wider activities within or outside the frame of ESF.



A sledge dog unit during hunting in Thule, Greenland.

## 5. Instruments for implementing the SCH mission

For the Standing Committee for the Humanities, this is an excellent opportunity to explore and/or prepare **new fields of collaboration with neighbouring disciplines, by using optimally the opportunities offered by the variety of domains within the ESF.** This interaction between the humanities and the other disciplines will enrich knowledge and insight for all parts by posing different questions and different ways of understanding. It will also highlight the strength and weakness of neighbouring areas, and provide impetus for the improvement of research methods and theoretical innovation.

The Standing Committee for the Humanities is already involved in such initiatives, in the fields of “exploration research”, “polar research”, and in an initiative exploring the mutual methodological interfaces for social sciences and humanities research in selected fields.

### f. ESF Research Networking Programmes



This instrument (earlier called “à la carte programmes”) is an important tool **to promote sustained, intense exchange and contacts between scholars sharing similar research fields and trying to achieve a common ground of understanding in specific subjects.** Research Networking Programmes can assist middle-size international groups of scholars to push the ongoing discussion onto a higher level of understanding and to broadly disseminate it. In this respect ESF functions as a catalyst that allows emerging research problems to be effectively tackled: **ESF Member Organisations contribute “à la carte” to the financing of these networks, following their strategic decision to promote multilateral, international integration of their research base.**

The Programme “The Transformation of the Roman World” which had been launched by SCH and produced 14 important volumes that have set new standards in that particular field of research, is a typical example of the intellectual potential of this mechanism that may substantially change a whole research field.

Similarly, the Programme “Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe” (NHIST) is currently preparing a six volume book series entitled “Writing the Nation”. The volume series will reflect the distinctive and interconnected research agendas of the NHIST Programme and will be published during 2007-2009. The series of books will form a formidable handbook. They make use of comparative and transnational methods to provide overviews of the development of modern national historiographies in more than thirty European countries. The series, involving more than 100 scholars from across Europe, will set the agenda for all work on the history of national historiographies for years to come.

The importance of this instrument as a tool in implementing the SCH mission to create links between research communities in Europe and beyond is also shown by a Programme launched early 2006 on the chronology of archaeological findings, “Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean” (ARCANE). Chronology underpins all archaeological and historical studies. To establish the proper sequence of events is a prerequisite for writing history. The synchronisation of chronologies, and therefore of the histories, of the various areas of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East is an essential task without which the development of civilisations, their reciprocal influences, their convergence and divergence, cannot be described and understood. The ultimate goal of the ARCANE Programme is to produce a reliable, relative and absolute chronology of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, based on the synchronisation of regional chronologies for the third millennium BC.

### g. Collaboration ESF – COST

SCH is collaborating with the newly appointed COST Domain Committee for Individuals, Society, Culture and Health (ISCH).

A first area identified as providing ample opportunities for **the creation of a “network of networks”** is the field of landscape studies. Here, archaeology, environmental history and related fields meet, which are all covered in various dimensions by existing ESF and COST activities. The formation of transdisciplinary networks of networks aims at exploring the potential



© Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

Josef Danhuser, Parisian Salon, with Liszt at the piano.

of new scientific approaches. Drawing creativity from the conceptual links between networks, while building on the strengths of the participating disciplines, new platforms for research can be generated, one can imagine the development of trajectories for new basic research such as transcultural studies of landscape imageries or the history of biodiversity, to more applied studies in the field of cultural heritage. Thus, stronger and more diverse alliances can be formed, able **to tap into diverse sources for funding and collaboration.**

## h. Member Organisation Fora

MO Fora are new ESF activities developed in response to a clear demand from the Member Organisations. As output oriented and issue related venues, involving also non-member organisations as appropriate, they benefit MOs **strategic development** and/or lead to the **development of best practices, common procedures or cooperative activities.** The Fora will be time-limited activities, typically concluded within one year and will generally encompass one or more meetings of representatives of MOs plus others.

The ESF is initiating the development of the MO Fora instrument by inviting MOs to propose promising topics, from which the Governing Council will make a selection.

## i. ESF European Collaborative Research Programmes (EUROCORES)

The aim of the European Collaborative Research (EUROCORES) Scheme is **to enable researchers in different European countries to develop collaboration and scientific synergy** in areas where European scale and scope are required to **reach the critical mass** necessary for top class science in a global context. The scheme provides **a flexible framework** which allows national basic research funding and research performing organisations to jointly support excellent European research in and across all scientific areas.

Theme proposals are selected annually. Typically, an emerging field would be described, with a community of about 70-180 interested researchers, its need for collaborative research, and its **potential to produce cutting-edge new knowledge with an initial need for research funding of ca. M€10.**

In the past, topics such as "Origin of Man, Language and Languages", "BOREAS" (circumpolar research in the humanities and social sciences), "Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context", "Inventing Europe" (on the history of technology) and "The Evolution of Cooperation and Trading" (together with Life and Social Sciences) have all generated new collaborations across disciplinary boundaries.

The Standing Committee for the Humanities supports the instrument as the most successful means to date to generate significant new funding for transdisciplinary and transnational research in the humanities.

## 6. Summary

Culture is the result of the complex of conceptual, linguistic, affective, moral and behavioural systems that allow us to define and re-define ourselves in a changing world. The humanities focus on 'the human element' of this cultural complex and they attempt to provide insights into how knowledge arises from the constant interaction between individual and society.

The humanities study the past in order to understand how it contributed to shape the present, and they investigate the variety of conceptual and cognitive systems that we employ to grasp the present and make decisions for the future. The humanities are concerned with temporal and spatial manifestations of culture, what distinguishes cultures from each other and what they have in common. The focus provides an understanding of "where we come from", "who we are", "where we are going", and how we can transform and innovate our world in the future.

As the perception of what it is to be human changes over time, the humanities also shift and take on new realities. New insights into changes in the physical environment and into the fundamental biological make-up of humans have been achieved in the past decade. New methods for the acquisition of data, or new ways of exploring existing data, a better understanding of the human processing of information, have all changed the way research in humanities operates. New forms of multidisciplinary study and new disciplinary arrangements have emerged.

This paper has reflected on such changes which have had and will continue to have an impact on the human sciences and thereby on the organization of the Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH), primarily focusing on the effect of 1) Europeanisation, internalisation, globalisation; 2) the introduction of new approaches and methods and infrastructures in humanities research; and 3) interdisciplinarity.

### Present and future challenges

#### a. Changing contexts: Europeanisation, internationalisation, globalisation

The enlargement of Europe and the rapid internalisation of research in the recent past have led to extensive exchanges between different national traditions, languages and scholarly cultures, and to redrawing the borders between the different most scientific disciplines. However, globalisation and internationalisation have affected differently the natural sciences and the humanities.

The borders between the humanities and other fields of research are drawn differently from country to country. While tackling frontier research questions, humanities research redraws its boundaries, responding to external societal and political demands, as much as to internal pressure for methodological advances.

#### b. Changing approaches: Different types of humanities research

Epistemology, the study of what knowledge is (what do we know, how do we know, and how we acquire knowledge) is a humanistic discipline par excellence. Traditionally humanistic research has aspired at the kind of knowledge related to understanding phenomena and clarifying *probabilities* rather than explaining and predicting them, the latter being primarily the domain of the natural sciences. However both methodologies are found in contemporary research in the humanities, approaches that are based on prediction and explanation (derived from the precepts of sciences of nature and objects), and approaches that are based on understanding and interpretation, (following precepts of the sciences of the mind, where subject has primacy over object).

This variety of attitudes and methods is a strength of research in the humanities and the Standing Committee for the Humanities derives strength from its diversity: some human scientists produce predictive knowledge that can be falsified and tested and thus easily enters into collaborations with similarly structured neighbouring sciences, while the self-reflective nature of other strands of humanities scholarship generates epistemological tools that enable us to rethink the human and cultural context in which we live, offering to other research domains the insights of its difference. From this coexistence arises a keen sense for the questions that other researchers may skirt. Against this background, the SCH defines humanities as research that has the human being (in its physical, mental and social complexity) at the centre of its enquiry.







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18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century agricultural settlement of Arineckaig, Wester Ross, western Scotland.

### c. New forms of interdisciplinarity

In many fields of humanities research, the necessity to engage with neighbouring sciences is also acutely felt. The Standing Committee for the Humanities encourages researchers to identify and work in fields, where the humanities can contribute to the generation of knowledge and the production of constructive results. Clearly, the requirements of the question under investigation should dictate the disciplines involved. Trans-, inter- and multidisciplinary are not goals in themselves, and the Standing Committee for the Humanities will naturally support excellent monodisciplinary applications when the research in question justifies co-operations between researchers of the same discipline, and whenever a mono-disciplinary approach seems most suitable for the investigation of a problem.

### The mission and the goals of the Standing Committee for the Humanities

On behalf of the ESF Member Organisations, the Standing Committee for the Humanities will contribute to the development of the ESF science policy agenda and provide expert advice on science policy actions at the European level in the field of its responsibilities. It will work proactively

- to identify priority research areas for the humanities,
- to advance collaboration and co-ordination in basic research in the humanities,
- to foster excellent, transnational – and where appropriate – transdisciplinary research,
- to strengthen the voice of the European humanities, and to continue making the case for better conditions for research in the humanities in Europe.

The ultimate objective of the SCH's operations is to act as a catalyst for the acquisition of new knowledge in the humanities, thus enabling its Member Organisations to fund research recognised to be excellent at European and international level.

Through the different types of funding and support which are described in the paper, and in cooperation with the Member Organisations, other European research Funding Organisations and other committees within the ESF, The Standing Committee for the Humanities will work towards its mission by:

- promoting debates on new and developing areas of research and on strategic activities in the humanities;
- creating links between research communities which in the humanities are often fragmented and between research funders;
- planning – and where appropriate managing – collaborative research activities;
- provide guidance and advice for applicants – and to continue this advisory relation to the scientific activities it funds;
- securing the continued handling of high quality international peer review in the humanities and maintaining data-bases of expert in the different disciplines;
- developing means and methods of scientific evaluation which are relevant for humanities research;
- validating and maintaining lists of high quality scientific journals, taking into consideration the specific needs of the humanities, and especially the needs of European humanities research (see the section on the European Reference Index for the Humanities);
- supporting practices aimed at advancing European cooperation in basic research (mobility of researchers, free flow of information and ideas, construction, use and quality control of research infrastructures);
- developing closer links with subject associations;
- strengthening methods for the independent evaluation of research, within the humanities and in transdisciplinary fields;
- becoming a clearing house within Europe for information on cooperation and collaboration issues relevant to humanities scholarship.

## 7. Appendix - SCH Members 2005-2007

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• **Professor Gretty M. Mirdal (SCH Chair)**  
University of  
Copenhagen  
Copenhagen, Denmark  
*start date: 01/01/2004*  
*end date: 31/12/2008*

• **Professor Luís Adão da Fonseca**  
University of Lusitania  
do Porto  
Porto, Portugal  
*start date: 01/03/2002*  
*end date: 29/02/2008*

• **Professor Maria Agren**  
Uppsala University  
Uppsala, Sweden  
*start date: 01/03/2007*  
*end date: 28/02/2010*

• **Professor Ján Bakos**  
Slovak Academy  
of Sciences  
Bratislava, Slovak  
Republic  
*start date: 01/03/2001*  
*end date: 28/02/2007*

• **Professor Arnout Balis**  
Free University  
of Brussel  
Brussels, Belgium  
*start date: 01/02/2007*  
*end date: 31/01/2010*

• **Professor Rajko Bratoz**  
University of Ljubljana  
Ljubljana, Slovenia  
*start date: 01/04/2007*  
*end date: 31/03/2010*

• **Dr. Maurice Bric**  
Irish Research Council  
for the Humanities and  
Social Sciences  
Dublin, Ireland  
*start date: 01/04/2002*  
*end date: 31/03/2008*

• **Dr. Marc Caball**  
University College Dublin  
Dublin, Ireland  
*start date: 01/09/2006*  
*end date: 31/08/2009*

• **Professor Luca Codignola**  
University of Genoa  
Genoa, Italy  
*start date: 01/03/2005*  
*end date: 29/02/2008*

• **Professor Péter Dávidházi**  
Hungarian Academy  
of Sciences  
Budapest, Hungary  
*start date: 01/01/2004*  
*end date: 31/12/2009*

• **Dr. Kyriakos Demetriou**  
University of Cyprus  
Nicosia, Cyprus  
*start date: 01/12/2002*  
*end date: 30/10/2005*

• **Professor Leonidas Donskis**  
Vytautas Magnus  
University  
Kaunas, Lithuania  
*start date: 01/04/2005*  
*end date: 31/03/2008*

• **Professor Kirsten Drotner**  
University of Southern  
Denmark  
Odense, Denmark  
*start date: 01/03/2006*  
*end date: 28/02/2009*

• **Professor Jacques Dubucs**  
University Paris 1  
Paris, France  
*start date: 01/01/2005*  
*end date: 31/12/2007*

• **Professor Therese Fuhrer**  
University of Zürich  
Zürich, Switzerland  
*start date: 01/07/2003*  
*end date: 30/01/2006*

• **Professor Peter Funke**  
Westfälische  
Wilhelms-Universität  
Münster, Germany  
*start date: 01/06/2006*  
*end date: 31/05/2009*

• **Professor Kostas Gouliamos**  
Cyprus College  
Nicosia, Cyprus  
*start date: 01/11/2005*  
*end date: 31/10/2008*

• **Dr. Sami Gülgöz**  
Koç University  
Istanbul, Turkey  
*start date: 01/11/2001*  
*end date: 31/03/2005*

• **Dr. Janet Halliwell**  
Social Sciences and  
Humanities Research  
Council of Canada  
Ottawa, Canada  
*start date: 01/03/2005*  
*end date: 29/02/2008*

• **Professor Eila Marjatta Helander**  
University of Helsinki  
Helsinki, Finland  
*start date: 09/01/2007*  
*end date: 09/01/2010*

• **Professor Poul Holm**  
University of Southern  
Denmark  
Esbjerg, Denmark  
*start date: 01/01/2004*  
*end date: 01/03/2006*

• **Professor Gürol Irzik**  
Bogaziçi University  
Bebek,  
Istanbul, Turkey  
*start date: 01/05/2005*  
*end date: 30/04/2008*

• **Professor Arne Jarrick**  
Stockholm University  
Stockholm, Sweden  
*start date: 01/03/2001*  
*end date: 28/02/2007*

• **Professor Etan Kohlberg**  
Observer  
Israel Academy  
of Sciences  
and Humanities  
Jerusalem, Israel  
*start date: 01/10/2004*  
*end date: 30/06/2007*

• **Professor August Kovačec**  
Croatian Academy  
of Sciences and Arts  
Zagreb, Croatia  
*start date: 01/03/2003*  
*end date: 28/02/2005*

• **Professor Joze Krasovec**  
University of Ljubljana  
Ljubljana, Slovenia  
*start date: 01/01/2001*  
*end date: 31/12/2006*

• **Professor Ulrike Landfester**  
University of St. Gallen  
St. Gallen, Switzerland  
*start date: 01/02/2006*  
*end date: 31/01/2009*

• **Dr. Louisa-Irene Loukopoulou**  
National Hellenic  
Research Foundation  
Athens, Greece  
*start date: 01/03/2006*  
*end date: 28/02/2009*

• **Professor Bohuslav Mánek**  
University of Hradec  
Králové  
Hradec Králové,  
Czech Republic  
*start date: 01/10/2004*  
*end date: 30/09/2010*

• **Professor Christoph Marksches**  
Humboldt University  
Berlin, Germany  
*start date: 01/04/2005*  
*end date: 31/05/2006*

• **Dr. Marco Martiniello**  
University of Liege  
Liege, Belgium  
*start date: 01/03/2005*  
*end date: 29/02/2008*

• **Professor Kari Melby**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology  
Trondheim, Norway  
*start date: 01/10/2003*  
*end date: 30/09/2009*

• **Professor Slavomír Michálek**  
Slovak Academy  
of Sciences  
Bratislava, Slovak  
Republic  
*start date: 01/03/2007*  
*end date: 28/02/2010*

• **Professor Claudine Moulin**  
University of Trier  
Trier, Germany  
*start date: 01/08/2006*  
*end date: 31/07/2009*

• **Professor Arto Mustajoki**  
University of Helsinki  
Helsinki, Finland  
*start date: 01/05/2001*  
*end date: 31/01/2007*

• **Dr. Guðrún Nordal**  
University of Iceland  
Reykjavík, Iceland  
*start date: 01/03/2004*  
*end date: 28/02/2007*

• **Professor Jón Ólafsson**  
Bifrost University  
Borgarnes, Iceland  
*start date: 01/10/2006*  
*end date: 30/09/2009*

• **Professor Karl Pajusalu**  
University of Tartu  
Tartu, Estonia  
*start date: 01/10/2004*  
*end date: 30/09/2007*

• **Professor Gísli Pálsson**  
Subject representative  
University of Iceland  
Reykjavík, Iceland  
*start date: 01/10/2004*  
*end date: 30/09/2007*

• **Professor Ioan Pânzaru**  
University of Bucharest  
Bucuresti, Romania  
*start date: 01/03/2003*  
*end date: 28/02/2005*

• **Professor Ilie Parvu**  
University of Bucharest  
Bucharest, Romania  
*start date: 01/03/2005*  
*end date: 29/02/2008*

• **Professor Maria del Carmen Picallo Soler**  
University of Barcelona  
Bellaterra (Barcelona),  
Spain  
*start date: 01/07/2004*  
*end date: 30/06/2010*

• **Professor Walter Pohl**  
Austrian Academy  
of Sciences  
Vienna, Austria  
*start date: 01/08/2002*  
*end date: 31/07/2008*

• **Professor Michel Polfer**  
University  
of Luxembourg  
Luxembourg  
*start date: 01/04/2002*  
*end date: 31/12/2005*

• **Professor Naomi Segal**  
University of London  
London, United Kingdom  
*start date: 01/04/2005*  
*end date: 31/03/2008*

• **Professor Martin Stokhof**  
University of Amsterdam  
Amsterdam, Netherlands  
*start date: 01/04/2005*  
*end date: 31/03/2008*

• **Professor Przemysław Urbanczyk**  
Polish Academy of  
Sciences  
Warszawa, Poland  
*start date: 01/08/2002*  
*end date: 31/07/2008*

• **Professor Wiljan van den Akker**  
University of Utrecht  
Utrecht, Netherlands  
*start date: 01/04/1999*  
*end date: 31/03/2005*

• **Professor Marc Waelkens**  
Catholic University  
Leuven  
Leuven, Belgium  
*start date: 01/02/2004*  
*end date: 31/01/2007*

• **Professor Milena Zic-Fuchs**  
University of Zagreb  
Zagreb, Croatia  
*start date: 01/10/2006*  
*end date: 30/09/2009*



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**European Science Foundation**  
Standing Committee  
for the Humanities (SCH)  
1 quai Lezay-Marnésia  
67080 Strasbourg cedex  
France

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 76 71 26  
Fax: +33 (0)3 88 37 05 32  
E-mail:  
humanities@esf.org  
Web page:  
www.esf.org/human

**Dr. Monique van Donzel**  
Head of Unit

**Dr. Rüdiger Klein**  
Senior Scientific  
Officer for Research  
and Foresight

SCH supports the principle of curiosity-driven, fundamental (“blue sky”) research in traditional core disciplines of the Humanities, such as: anthropology, archaeology, art and art history, classical studies, history, history and philosophy of science, literary studies, languages and linguistics, Oriental & African Studies, pedagogical and educational research, musicology, philosophy, psychology and religious studies and theology.

SCH is engaged in newly-structured, broad fields of study, such as “area studies”, “cultural and media studies”, “gender studies”, “heritage studies”; “humanities computing”.

SCH is contributing to the development of emerging, trans-disciplinary research areas, such as “complexity research”, “cognitive science”, “development, environmental and landscape studies”, “health and welfare research”, “migration studies”, or studies into culture and technology, and human-machine interaction.

SCH promotes the scientific and institutional interaction between the different disciplines and approaches of the Humanities, and between them and neighbouring sciences, which in the ESF framework are represented by the other Standing Committees and Expert Boards.

