

Press release

The international conference Social Sciences and Humanities: A New Agenda for Europe's Challenges (SSH2016) opened on Monday 14 November 2016 in Slovakia's capital Bratislava. This prestigious event of the Slovak EU Council Presidency aims to emphasise the important role of social sciences and humanities for national, European and global prosperity.

On Tuesday in the opening plenary, speeches were given by Peter Plavčan – Slovak minister of Education, Research, Science and Sport, Wolfgang Burtscher – the Deputy Director-General of Directorate General Research and Innovation, EC and Vladimír Šucha – the Director General of the Joint Research Centre, EC. On the agenda are presentations of other outstanding personalities such as Slovak former Prime Minister Iveta Radičová, former Polish dissident Adam Michnik and others.

The three-day event focuses on the importance of social sciences and humanities' contribution to building secure, tolerant, inclusive and innovative democratic societies. The outcomes of the conference will be prepared as a set of recommendations for policy-makers both at national and European levels.

"The 21st Century will be a century of Social Sciences and Humanities. Firstly, they are much needed to help us understand the complex and interconnected challenges of our societies. Secondly, the data revolution is opening completely new perspectives for these sciences. If we fail to connect them with other sciences we will fail to understand the grand societal challenges", emphasised Vladimír Šucha, the Director General of the Joint Research Centre.

Minister Plavčan stressed in his opening address the role of education in social inclusion: *"The Ministry focuses its activities on the increase of the quality of education in regions populated by marginalised , mainly Roma, communities."*

Social Sciences and Humanities – so often disregarded as generating no economic benefit – are absolutely indispensable to address substantial challenges such as migration, radicalisation,

extremism and terrorism, crisis of democracy, unemployment, inequality or poverty, to name just a few. All these challenges have a human dimension. Without studying human behaviour, expression and social life, and understanding individuals, communities and societies, no solution can be found and no consensus achieved.

Wolfgang Burtscher stressed, that *„Rise of populism, radicalisation and terrorism are only some headlines of today and they require more than ever research in Social Sciences and Humanities“* as the themes for research topics for the Horizon 2020 calls for the remaining period.

The conference also includes several side events – a matchmaking event, a thematic workshop, poster sessions and social events.

The event has aroused lively attention. The pre-conference matchmaking attracted more than 170 participants from more than 20 countries and the Dandelion workshop more than 80 attendees. More than 330 participants have registered for the conference.