WAYS TO SOCIAL PEACE IN EUROPE

In the 1980s, Jürgen Habermas proposed “dominance-free discourse” as the way to resolve conflicts. With the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama has argued that this is “The end of history”. Johan Galtung’s 1997 book “Peace by peaceful means” dreams of an era of peaceful conflict resolution.

However, the last ten years have seen more wars than the previous 45. The Pax Americana is not delivering. But at least we hoped Europe might be saved from such tragedies. The conflicts in former Yugoslavia have taught us otherwise. After the bloodshed in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the world thought that with a few days bombing by NATO, peace would finally re-enter Europe.

What is the role of science in this context?

The biologist Hubert Markl, President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, has held the scientists in arts and humanities as responsible for the catastrophes in modern history. It is they who produced the ideologies for fascism and Stalinism. Have not some scientists helped fascist regimes? Did not the Yugoslav Academy of Science develop the concept of “ethnic cleansing”. Some scientists were party to the development of modern racism and fascism, based on a kind of Social Darwinism. But ideology is one thing, reality is another. Experiments on human beings during World War II were made possible by some doctors, engineers, and natural scientists deprived of ethical sense. Half the world’s scientists and engineers are still involved in military work.

Should we therefore abolish all sciences, including the humanities, philosophy, and the social sciences? Would this bring us nearer to peace? Or do we just need another kind of science? Since the Renaissance, intellectuals have striven for peace between religions, between nations. In the post-war period, scientists have worked for peace. There is Pugwash. There are associations of scientists and doctors against war. Peace research has developed. But peace is not a goal in itself: a cemetery peace is not worth living. Struggles for independence and social revolutions imply there might be something more valuable than just peace. Social peace!

The Osnabrück Social Charter

Our so-called industrial societies are richer than ever before. But we have more social inequality and social injustice both between and within nations. On the other hand, European integration is advancing to narrow these gaps at least within Europe. With the Amsterdam Treaty, political and social integration is progressing. We seem to be on the road to social peace in Europe.

In 1648 the Westphalian Peace Treaty was concluded in the cities of Münster and Osnabrück. It ended the Thirty Years War. It laid the foundation for the modern nation-state and for international law; it brought a period of relative peace to Europe. The 350th anniversary of the treaty stimulated the Osnabrück co-operation office to organise in November 1998, under the patronage of Jacques Delors, an international conference “Ways to Social Peace in Europe”. The more than 300 scientists, social partners, and politicians from all over Europe saw the main factors endangering social peace as:

- Xenophobia, and racism. According to a survey, one third of Europeans declare themselves more or less racist. Le Pen and Haider could be candidates for supreme office in France and Austria respectively;
- Unemployment. We know from history that the lack of work often feeds extremism;
- Social insecurity. As poverty and health problems persist, social insecurity is spreading. Nearly 20% of West Europeans live below the poverty line.

The conference viewed the neo-liberal, monetarist economic policy as a main cause. The alternative was seen to be a European Social Union based on the principle of sustainable development. The conference ended with the signing of the Osnabrück Social Charter. This has since been translated into 10 languages (www.aul.uos.de) and signed by more than 1,000 people.

I hope that we are not yet at the end of history, because this would also mean the end of the age of Enlightenment. It would also mean the end of science, because science is nothing else than Enlightenment. EUROSCIENCE has its role not only to promote science in Europe, but science with a human face, contributing to social peace.

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**NEWS**

**ALPHAGALILEO SCORES!**

The first major assessment of the AlphaGalileo Pilot has just been completed and a 60-page report mailed to funders and collaborators. The review looked in detail at usage for the first quarter of 1999 and shows that the service is meeting a genuine need and is already delivering benefits for European science, engineering and technology.

Usage rates showed impressive increases during the quarter. The total number of page accesses rose by 30% from 15,823 in January to 20,657 in March. In January 6,278 accesses were to the press release sections of the site. By March the numbers had risen to 9,199 (44.5% of all accesses). The numbers of registered journalists also continues to rise, from 347 in early January to 602 in early May: A rise of over 70%.

Comments from journalists have been uniformly welcoming and supportive. David Whitehouse, BBC, wrote, “If they (researchers) want to communicate with the media en masse then AlphaGalileo is a very good way to do it. It should be part of any research organisation’s PUS strategy.” Whilst David M Montgomery, The Scotsman, wrote, “It provides the media with excellent access to new research and developments, which often then receives wide public exposure.” And from Caroline Price, a BBC Producer, “I think the news mailing service is fantastic. Just what I need to know, in good time to do something about it with a direct link to more information when I’m good and ready.”

Finally a French science journalist wrote, “Bon courage! Nous avons besoin d’une information scientifique européenne!”

It is perhaps not surprising that the need for the service has been expressed so strongly. After all AlphaGalileo is a response to individual journalists articulating the same need. The email questionnaire to journalists in April showed that 30% had written more than three stories from material on the site. 9% added comments indicating that they wrote “more than three a week” or had written “dozens”. Feedback from contributors confirms that the service is delivering wider coverage. “Yesterday I posted it (story) on AlphaGalileo. I woke up to hear it on Radio 2 this morning and spotted it on the front page of The Times over breakfast...,” wrote Micks Warwicker, University of Newcastle Press Office. And an American chemistry reporter wrote, “It (AlphaGalileo) helps me keep in touch with what’s happening in Europe, which is important at a time when the emphasis is on global markets and audiences”.

Tom Parkhill, Society for Endocrinology, was contacted by a researcher from the “Vanessa Show” as a result of using AlphaGalileo. In a more traditional vein Tom was also contacted by The Daily Express, Die Welt, Swiss Television, ITN and Reuters. All organisations that he has never dealt with before. And the number of contributors continues to rise too.

In the last few weeks we have had releases from the Universities of Liège, Uster and Cardiff, plus the Ministry of Planning and Communication at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, led a discussion on “Grants for Science Research – problems of opening up funding within Europe”. The meeting was a response to members’ requests to discuss the situation whereby, in most EU countries, research funds could be awarded only to nationals of that country and not to nationals of other countries in the Union.

Dr Leech began by assuring the meeting that the heads of British research councils played a full and constructive part in the activities of both EUROHORCS (the Heads of Research Councils organisation of the EU) and the Research Managers Association of the EU. He pointed out, however, that apart from research councils having different remits in the various EU countries, each had to follow the policies of its government. UK government policy is to provide research funds to generate new knowledge which could be used profitably by industry, leading to a government tax revenue, part of which ultimately returned to the research councils. Within this policy framework, new European developments would be judged by considering national benefit, whether any such benefit might not be better covered by other means, and what was the most appropriate EU role in any such development.

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**OPENING UP EUROPEAN SCIENCE FUNDING?**

The Greater London/SE England section of Euroscience met at the premises of The Royal Society on 3 March. Dr David Leech, Director of Planning and Communication at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, led a discussion on “Grants for Science Research – problems of opening up funding within Europe”. The meeting was a response to members’ requests to discuss the situation whereby, in most EU countries, research funds could be awarded only to nationals of that country and not to nationals of other countries in the Union.

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Dr Leech
sketched out the advantages and difficulties of closer modes of European collaboration. These matters were taken up in discussion. A point made very strongly stressed the advantages of competition. In the US there were two methods of research grant management – the NSF model of university managers and the DoE model of civil service managers – and lessons could be learned from the results. The question was asked whether it would not be possible for the EU countries to place their research councils in similar competition, with scientists from all EU countries able to apply for all funds on offer. Strong views were expressed that opening up procedures to inter-European competition could not but enhance the quality of the science funded in Europe.

Dennis Rosen

EUROSCIENCE GOVERNING BOARD APRIL 17 1999

President Claude Kordon focussed the Board’s attention on the financial situation. He emphasised the importance of increasing the number of organisations becoming EUROSCIENCE associate members and of accelerating the membership drive. He also emphasised recent successful achievements of, and involving EUROSCIENCE, including:

- the “Science and technology in a new Europe” Symposium held during the Euroscience General Assembly, which the Board decided to publish;
- EUROSCIENCE’s involvement in the development of the AlphaGalileo science press centre, a British and French co-operation which will soon involve Germany (see p. 2);
- the successful European Parliament debate in Strasbourg (see p. 6).

The major remaining items discussed included:

- the EUROSCIENCE honorary committee.

11 European Nobel Prizewinners have already agreed to become members;

- reports on existing and new local sections (see pp. 4-5);
- the EUROSCIENCE Foundation, to be established in Hannover. This is progressing well.

A fuller account of the meeting is being posted on the EUROSCIENCE Web site.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

To complete the Board after the election at the last General Assembly, three positions had to be filled by co-option (see EUROSCIENCE News, No.6, page 5). Two elected members had resigned (N. Loder, N. Audard-Sword). The Board therefore co-opted the following five members.

Ole J. Bjerrum. Research Counsellor, Corporate Research Affairs, Novo Nordisk A/S, and Adjunct Professor, Dept of Biochemistry and Nutrition, Technical University of Denmark.

M. ember, Committee on Industrial Relations, European Federation of Pharmaceutical Science. Danish delegate in the EU Programme Management Committee on Quality of Life.

Rudolf Frans H. en, Doctor in Biochemistry, Leiden, with research interests in plant biochemistry. Former Director Physical and Life Sciences, Dutch Ministry of Education and Science. Former Director of Administration, CERN. Senior adviser, Office of the Director General, CERN.

Hendrik J. van der Molen, President, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Professor of Chemical Endocrinology. Scientific interests include endocrine-biochemical aspects of ovarian and testis functions. Member, Board of Trustees, Netherlands Organisation for Applied Research (TNO). Vice-President, Academia Europaea.

Francesco de Notaristefani, Professor of General Physics, University of Rome 3. National co-ordinator for technology transfer for INFN (Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics); until 1997 special adviser to the INFN President. Scientific interests are in nuclear physics; he has worked at Frascati and CERN.


MEDIACOVERAGEOF EUROSCIENCE

If you see or write articles involving the association, please let the Editor or François Pradeir know. If you can send a copy of the article, so much the better.

- Unikath (Universität Karlsruhe), February 1999, page 13, Alphagalileo.
- Poisk (Moscow), 19 February 1999, vol.7, page 509, Uvazhat’ sebya zastavit?
- Libération, 20 April 1999, La recherche se cherche un soutien européen.
EUROSCIENCE LOCAL SECTIONS

Local sections are a major asset of Euroscience. Improving the dialogue between scientists, engineers and citizens is a difficult challenge which requires patience and a sustained pedagogy. It can best be met on a (trans)regional basis, which makes it more likely for diverse partners to interact. Euroscience welcomes the dynamism of its local sections, and shall publicize regularly the outcome of its creativity. CK

THE LEMAN SECTION: A MODEL?

The Euroscience Leman section straddles the French-Swiss border and draws its members from three Swiss cantons and two French départements.

It started in October 1998, when the Euroscience Governing Board met at CERN, and a well-attended public lecture was given by by a Member of the French Parliament, Dr. Claude Birraux on his experience in the Parliamentary Office of Technological Assessment. After a year as an informal body, matters were formalised in October 1999. As of March, we have three types of programme in three directions, all of which have met with initial successes.

The first year’s ‘experimental’ activity consisted essentially of monthly meetings held in a CERN conference room; its main merit was to expose and discuss what could be the most promising activities. The first decision was to hold, in May 1998, a public debate on genetically modified plants: there had been debates in the French Parliament about maize and a popular vote was scheduled in Switzerland. We also felt that holding the meeting at Geneva University would give better public exposure. There were 4 speakers: a geneticist, a Director of Research of Novartis which developed transgenic maize, a representative of Swiss farmers, and a biochemist representing Swiss Greenpeace. A science journalist, Beatrice Pellegrini, moderated the meeting. It was attended by about 80 persons and was judged by all to be of high quality. Unfortunately we did not ask attendants to sign in, so we do not even know who attended and asked questions. There is a learning process...

A clear feeling emerged that attractive activities were essential if our influence was to grow: confining ourselves to monthly discussions, we could see that attendance was declining. But we were confident that a local section was viable. We therefore decided to propose statutes and convene a Constitutive Assembly. This took more time than we thought (people love to submit amendments...) but a meeting finally approved the statutes and elected a Committee of 12. This had a reasonable distribution of members (CERN, CNRS, Geneva Observatory, Geneva University, Nestle Research Centre, Lausanne University, World Health Organisation and two persons from Industry). Nevertheless, we judged it prudent to leave four vacancies to allow future coverage of other sectors.

The new Committee immediately started work on the following programme of activity.

1. A workshop on Science-based startups.
   This would be the first of a series, the goal being for Euroscience Leman to act as a bridge linking scientists, industrialists, politicians and venture capitalists locally.
   It took place on 13 April at Archamps, an industrial park close to Geneva. About 50 people attended, including politicians, industrialists, bankers specialising in venture capital, and intellectual property lawyers. One idea that emerged was to create a working group to prepare a paper for the Lisbon Conference, focussing on the need to teach the various aspects of starting-up a science-based enterprise, from market study to legal, financial and managerial aspects.

2. A Monthly “Science Café”
   This formula has been highly successful in France where it was first launched by the French Physical Society. A theme (preferably reflecting popular preoccupations) is selected and two or three specialists answer questions from the audience.
   The topic of the first, on 14 April in a popular café in Geneva, was “Climate and its Whims”. Questions from around 40 people (this time they left their coordinates...) were answered by two climatologists from Geneva and Lausanne. The second one on 19 May discussed “Mad Cow Disease, where do we stand now?”. This time we benefitted from the hospitality of the newly founded “Maison de l’Europe” in Geneva and over 60 people took part.

3. Links with pedagogy
   These seem to us essential if we want to communicate living science to a broad public. In October 1998, we participated in the French “Semaine de la Science”. This year our participation will try to synchronise activities in Switzerland and France.
   The August total solar eclipse gave us the excuse to initiate a live discussion between astronomers and high school teachers, using a French Interactive TV broadcast. CERN hosted the meeting, which attracted some 80 people.

There is still a lot to do. We seem to have identified activities that are well received locally. We need however to strengthen our membership base, and find more people (and more money) to sustain that programme of activities. To that end, we are starting a campaign to collect money from local authorities and foundations on both sides of the border.

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RUSSIAN EUROSCIENCE BEING SET UP

On April 14, about 30 Russian scientists and students gathered at the Institute of Chemical Physics of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow to discuss setting up an EUROSCIENCE section in Russia. M. Alfimov, V. Borissov and A. Ismail-Zadeh explained the principal goals of EUROSCIENCE and its working group and local section activities. It was suggested that EUROSCIENCE regional sections might also be set up in Moscow, St Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Voronezh and other Russian cities.

A local committee will now prepare a Constituent Assembly, involving scientists, students and other interested people from throughout the Russian Federation. It was suggested that new local working groups might be set up to focus on (i) the biosphere, society and science; (ii) a database of Russian scientists and their achievements; (iii) neurobiology and its relation to other branches of sciences and technology. A close co-operation between the Russian section of EUROSCIENCE and the Russian Union of Scientific Societies was approved.

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THE ESTONIAN SECTION OF EUROSCIENCE

On February 18th a preparatory meeting was held at Tartu University aimed at the formal foundation of an Estonian Section later this year. There is firm support from both the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Tartu University authorities. At present, there are 6 members of EUROSCIENCE from the Estonian scientific community. Estonian members plan to join the “Public Awareness of Science” working group.

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NEW CENTRAL SWEDEN SECTION

During the spring we have set up the structure for a local section of Central Sweden. The Stockholm Academic Forum, a joint body for the universities in Stockholm, will administer membership (address lists, membership fees, invitations to activities etc). On September 30 1999 a member recruitment meeting will be held and the activities for the coming year will be outlined.

Initially, we will focus on member recruitment among students, researchers and journalists interested in broad aspects of science. Among the activities we hope to run are: science café meetings (based on the Leman model – see above), seminars on topics in main areas of science, and debates with people involved in the making of science policy. A home page will be set up and a simple information package will be put together. Together with the Royal Academy of Sciences we plan to arrange a meeting during the fall with Swedish EU-parliamentarians on European science policy.

There are several advantages to working in partnership with the Stockholm Academic Forum. They have an extensive contact network in the Stockholm university system and their city centre premises will facilitate access from both the Stockholm area and the other cities intended to be involved (e.g. Uppsala & Linköping). Furthermore, their permanent staff will take care of the secretariat functions. The response from undergraduate students to EUROSCIENCE’s goals is very positive. We have also established links with the Swedish Research Council which we expect to be very valuable in the future.

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No local section near you? Why not start one?

A PLEA FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Would EUROSCIENCE members who have not yet renewed their 1999 membership please do so as soon as possible. Even if you are a member from an east European country for whom fees are waived at present, it is important that the office knows you still wish to be a member. FP
A public debate was organised by EUROSCIENCE on 15 April at the European Parliament in Strasbourg to analyse the results of European science policy and the role of the European Parliament in its development. The debate was prepared by the EUROSCIENCE Science Policy Working Group under the direction of Dr Frans Huy (CERN) and co-chaired by Dr Elly Plooij-van Gorsel (MEP, Netherlands) and Dr Frédéric Sgard (Sanofi-Synthélabo, France). It brought together several MEPs, scientific guests invited by EUROSCIENCE to initiate the debate, and a large scientific and journalistic audience.

A major problem reported by the MEPs was the difficulty of developing a European science policy against the will of each European Union (EU) member. They are reluctant to delegate more of their national budget and often fight to obtain the biggest share of the European research budget to finance their own scientific priorities instead of furthering a common research policy. A typical example of this tendency was mentioned by E. Plooij-van Gorsel: in the case of the PHARE programme, which supports the development of research in central and eastern Europe, some delegates argued for a lower budget to be allocated in order to retain a larger one for their own interests.

Thus MEPs have had to fight a difficult battle just to obtain a modest, barely above inflation increase in the European research budget of the fifth Framework programme. This budget still represents only about 6% of the total research expenditures of EU members. Peter Tindemans (former Director for Research and Science Policy at the Dutch Ministry of Education) therefore argued for a political move by the European Parliament in favour of a change in the distribution of European funds so that the EU would provide a larger share of total research spending. In addition, he proposed the creation of several new ambitious scientific programmes to match similar initiatives in the USA or in Japan, such as the Human Frontier Science Programme. These would be funded in part by national research agencies and completed by the EU with funds delegated for instance to the European Science Foundation. In a similar vein, Robert Klapisch (CERN) asked whether the European Parliament could ensure that the specialised treaty organisations such as ESA, CERN, EMB or ESO are open to European initiatives in addition to national research programmes to strengthen their role at the forefront of world science. The MEPs, being also in favour of strengthening the importance of European science, were mostly sympathetic to these views, but asked for more support from the scientists themselves. Thus, Claude Desama (MEP and former chairman of the Parliament Research, Technological Development and Energy Committee, Belgium) pointed out that greater pressure from the science community could have helped the Parliament in its fight against the European Council over the Framework 5 budget. The lobbying effort by scientists and scientific organisations hardly existed, in contrast with those of industry or pressure groups such as Greenpeace. Similar views were shared by Christof Tannert (MEP, Germany) who indicated that more actions from the scientific community are needed to back up the Parliament’s position on a stronger European research policy. The MEPs therefore welcomed EUROSCIENCE’s initiative to develop contact between political representatives and the scientific community, and suggested it should take a greater role in the defence of the interests of European scientists.

Further questions were asked concerning the difficulty encountered by the European research treaty organisations to integrate a truly European vision in their policies. Philippe Waldteufel (CNRS, France) indicated that, while the budget of these organisations is important, their efficiency is often hampered by the rules governing their decisions and financing. On the wider problem of the co-ordination of European research policies versus national policies, Alain Pompidou (MEP, France) suggested that the European Parliament might help to co-ordinate the different aspects and benefits of scientific projects in favour of a more Europe-orientated policy.

Finally, the importance of a strong European research policy and the already important results achieved in several domains were highlighted by Carlos Robles Piquer (MEP, Spain), although progress in the harmonisation of European higher education or in the relationships between research programmes and European policies remain to be made, as was pointed out by Bernard Rentier and Pierre Papon from EUROSCIENCE.

The main message from this meeting was the deep need of the MEPs to have more contacts with the scientific community in order to defend the idea of a stronger European Science policy. The European Parliament cannot go against national interests without the support of the scientists themselves and EUROSCIENCE has been asked to play a major role in relaying the needs of the scientific actors to the decision-making level. It is now up to us to fulfil this expectation...

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EUROSCIENCE AND THE ESF

It was November 1996, Strasbourg. In a bus returning from the Palace of Congress, where the General Assembly of the European Science Foundation (ESF) took place, Claude Kordon introduced me to the idea of EUROSCIENCE. In March arch the following year a first general assembly officially launched our organisation. Why am I recalling this conversation? Well, for many of the founding members, activity in the ESF was a trigger for the formation and then participation in EUROSCIENCE. Later on, the ESF became a prime logistic help in the preparation of our two General Assemblies, and several of our keynote speakers had strong associations with the ESF. To mention just the last assembly: Dr Reinder van Duinen (chairman of the Dutch NWO) was recently selected as a candidate for the ESF presidency in the year 2000.

The ESF is an association of over 60 non-governmental national research councils, academies and other science funding agencies from more than 20 countries. It was formed 25 years ago and from its first days of operation became one of the major European associations acting as a catalyst for the development of science in Europe. An initial goal was to form a sort of pan-European funding agency for basic science. This aim was never realised, but thanks to the initiative of van Duinen, introduced at our last Assembly to the general public, it may be revived. Brussels with its Framework 5 Programme focuses mostly on applied research, raising more voices of concern about the status of basic research in Europe. Its funding goes mostly via national sources, while the pan-European initiatives are mainly related to large research facilities which are too expensive for local funding. How and if such an ESF initiative may be implemented is a subject of ongoing debate among the ESF member organisations.

A recent initiative of the EUROSCIENCE Board was the formation of an institutional link with the ESF. It is not only personal roots that bring us together, but primarily the goals. The ESF’s strength is through its member organisations. A consensus mode of its operation carries, however, a certain rigidity. We are much more flexible and our strength relies on the individual creativity of our individual members. This is why a link (and maybe a future partnership) with the ESF appears to be a natural step. The reaction of the ESF Board, and especially of Prof. Eric Banda – the ESF Secretary General – was most encouraging.

How does the ESF operate? What are its resources? Where can we be of help in its actions?
Primarily, it funds its operations through its membership fees. They are totally inadequate for launching large research programmes, so the ESF took another route, different from Brussels-like funding. The ESF funds three major types of external research-based operations. One is networks, a second is a la carte research programmes, and the third is European Research Conferences (EURESCO). How do these differ from similar operations funded by other sources? A major difference is the scale and scope. Each is solicited at least once a year among its member organisations. But a prime condition for the acceptance is the breadth and pan-European character of the action. Strictly topical applications have very little chance of passing through a highly competitive ranking procedure. A prime task of any of the three initiatives is to stimulate links between European groups and researchers. The strongest of these form a core, but a large effort is being made to ensure the participation of developing groups, who, through participation in an ESF activity have an opportunity to engage in real scientific collaboration with the stronger ones. The EURESCO conferences, somewhat resembling in spirit and in operation the well-known USA Gordon conferences (frontier science, no proceedings, participation mostly on the invitation basis, the chairmen are responsible for the programme, not the organisational logistics etc.), are being fully financed from EU resources. Networks costs are covered by the ESF budget. They last for 3 or more years. Quite often they evolve into research programmes sponsored by the ESF. They are financed by the member organisations on a fixed fee basis. More details of any of these activities can be found at the ESF web site: www.esf.org.

But the activity of the ESF is not only to support basic research. A most important role is played by standing committees who qualify and supervise all three actions described above. But they do much more.

OUR STRENGTH RELIES ON THE INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY OF OUR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

In fact they are prime places at which science policy is discussed, and where steps are taken to enhance coherence among its member organisations. The ESF always wanted to be a major voice for science in Europe, and indeed the opinions of the ESF are carefully listened to, in Brussels, in the European Parliament and of course locally through its member organisations. Critics say it is more of a club than an active and vigorous fighting force for science. Perhaps so, but sometimes good clubs are needed, and this is why I hope the ESF’s next 25 years will be fruitful for the sake of European science. EUROSCIENCE can help and participate in these endeavours.

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The article by Alan Mackay in Euroscience News No.7 raised some interesting questions. Whilst no-one would deny that there are many dynamic and expanding areas of contemporary scientific research, any thoughtful person remotely involved in science must also be aware of and concerned by the ever-increasing number of academic gatherings and publications. Is there really an ever-increasing number of academic awareness and concern by the remotely involved in science must also be aware of and concerned by the ever-increasing number of academic gatherings and publications. Is there really an ever-increasing number of academic awareness and concern by the remotely involved in science must also be aware of and concerned by the ever-increasing number of academic gatherings and publications. Is there really so much new research to warrant this seemingly continual increase in scientific tourism and in scientific publishing? The answer is probably no, although certain fields are obviously enjoying phenomenal growth.

One of the inevitable results of this onslaught of information is that scientists find it more and more difficult to keep up with research papers in their own speciality, let alone with developments in general. Among the reasons given are that there are too many journals or that the home institution’s library has stopped subscribing to journals because of increased costs. Some research leaders now rely on private communications to keep abreast of the latest developments in their own fields. The irony of the journal glut is that the problem may be largely self-creating and self-perpetuating. The race to publish papers for career advancement undoubtedly plays a part.

The situation cannot however be solely attributed to commercial companies as is suggested in the article by Prof. Mackay. It is also compounded by the increased tendency for academic societies to indulge in the highly lucrative launch of academic trade shows and associated meetings, particularly in the U.S. These are often organized around numerous concurrent sessions, raising all sorts of scheduling problems for attendees. Senior scientists rarely attend for the full duration. They tend to fly in for a presentation and then fly straight out again – hardly what the meetings were designed for. Nowadays smaller conferences with limited attendance often attract the most high-profile speakers and prove to be the most worthwhile to attend.

During a recent visit to the Neuroscience Institute in San Diego, I caught a glimpse of the possibilities of a quite different scenario. There outstanding individuals from a variety of backgrounds work together, by invitation, on basic research in a challenging and stimulating environment. During my visit, the Director of the Institute, Nobel Laureate Gerald Edelman, told some amusing stories aimed at showing analogies between art and science and, in particular pointing to similarities between the creative processes in science, composition in music, and creation in the visual arts. While this unique and intriguing environment for research cannot instantly be transposed to all institutions and areas of research, it gave me food for thought about the bigger picture and the real goals and objectives of academic research.

It is probably time for science policy makers to take a new look at the way fundamental research is conducted. Perhaps it needs to be somehow uncoupled from the peer pressure to publish, to present papers and to climb the academic ladder. It also seems essential to provide means for scientists to broaden their outlook beyond their narrow specialties and to make important scientific issues accessible to a wider audience.

If one is to follow Prof. Mackay’s advice and lean towards publication in academic society publications, the drawback for European scientists is that many of the pre-eminent society publications are likely to be American-based. Whilst the DIY approach appears attractive, it does not take into account the real costs involved of maintaining print and electronic publications and of associated conferences. US-based non-profit academic societies are fully aware of this. As they have grown in size they have been forced to run their activities in a professional and commercial way, employing professionals with publishing and conference backgrounds.

European societies would do well to learn from this and to continue to develop new strategic alliances with commercial publishers and conference organisers to reinforce the presence of European science on the international scene. Most importantly, European scientists should not be deterred from supporting international publications that are European-led initiatives produced by commercial publishers, many of which are produced in partnership with established European societies.

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The article by Alan Mackay in Euroscience News No.7 raised some interesting questions. Whilst no-one would deny that there are many dynamic and expanding areas of contemporary scientific research, any thoughtful person remotely involved in science must also be aware of and concerned by the ever-increasing number of academic gatherings and publications. Is there really an ever-increasing number of academic awareness and concern by the remotely involved in science must also be aware of and concerned by the ever-increasing number of academic gatherings and publications. Is there really so much new research to warrant this seemingly continual increase in scientific tourism and in scientific publishing? The answer is probably no, although certain fields are obviously enjoying phenomenal growth.

One of the inevitable results of this onslaught of information is that scientists find it more and more difficult to keep up with research papers in their own speciality, let alone with developments in general. Among the reasons given are that there are too many journals or that the home institution’s library has stopped subscribing to journals because of increased costs. Some research leaders now rely on private communications to keep abreast of the latest developments in their own fields. The irony of the journal glut is that the problem may be largely self-creating and self-perpetuating. The race to publish papers for career advancement undoubtedly plays a part.

The situation cannot however be solely attributed to commercial companies as is suggested in the article by Prof. Mackay. It is also compounded by the increased tendency for academic societies to indulge in the highly lucrative launch of academic trade shows and associated meetings, particularly in the U.S. These are often organized around numerous concurrent sessions, raising all sorts of scheduling problems for attendees. Senior scientists rarely attend for the full duration. They tend to fly in for a presentation and then fly straight out again – hardly what the meetings were designed for. Nowadays smaller conferences with limited attendance often attract the most high-profile speakers and prove to be the most worthwhile to attend.

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