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European Scientific Cooperation

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Paradoxically, Unesco was able to organize regional meetings of ministers of science throughout the entire developing world before it finally succeeded in holding, in June 1970, the first conference of Ministers of European Member States responsible for Science Policy ('Minespol'). This was the biggest role Unesco had played on the European scientific stage since it had helped set up CERN in 1953 as a focal point for European nuclear research. The Scientific Cooperation Bureau for Europe is a direct outcome of the Minespol Conference.

The Bureau's chief is Manfredo Macioti, former Common Market scientific liaison attaché in London.

Macioti sees it as fulfilling two functions. Inside Unesco, it serves as a focal point for science activities involving Europe. These activities cover a wide range from the International Hydrological Decade to the International Cell Research Organization, from the World Scientific and Technical Information System (UNISIST) to the Man and the Biosphere programme. Outside Unesco, Macioti thinks the Bureau must provide a mechanism for East-West contacts and cooperation in Europe.

To perform these tasks, the Bureau proceeds along three lines : cooperation, analysis and information. Looking at them in order, we find that cooperation has been developing in two directions. Specific research projects, such as those being launched in southeastern Europe along the Danube-Balkan axis in five scientific areas, come to Unesco for support, through its European Bureau. At the same time, contacts are being strengthened with such regional organizations as the OECD, the European Communities and the Council for Mutual Economic Aid ('COMECON').

As examples of what can be done by way of analysis, we see the Bureau embarked on a study of the various international and European scientific organizations, preparatory to an evaluation of characteristic mechanisms for regional scientific cooperation. And in information, a first annotated bibliography on European scientific cooperation has been worked up to help guide those trying to find their way through thickets of acronyms and publications.

Even though the Bureau is young, it has already established good working relations with a number of interested non-governmental organizations, among them the European Physical Society. Macioti says that the Bureau is particularly interested in EPS as it is one of the few international organizations with membership representing all of Europe (other examples would be the Federation of European Biochemical Societies and the Euromech colloquia). At a science policy meeting held in Budapest in July 1972 (in which EPS participated), experts suggested a number of scientific themes for specialized symposia. Macioti hopes that support for these activities will be forthcoming from European physicists.

Since the late Forties, two distinct currents of scientific cooperative exchanges have developed in Europe. One involves the United States and affects Western European countries ; the other involves the USSR and concerns Eastern European countries. Present prospects for developing and strengthening a 'third current' of intra-European cooperation seem particularly good. 'The general objective of such cooperation would be the proper utilization of available resources to attain the maximum common good for the peoples of the region', Macioti has remarked. 'This may be pursued through the pooling of resources to achieve a critical size in certain branches of scientific research, through the provision of better scientific services to the European community, and/or through the promotion of industrial and technological development of the region which could improve the economic and social well-being of Europeans on the whole'.

Macioti is optimistic. He thinks that mounting costs, the scarcity of human resources, the necessity for joint norm-creating, the need for better services and specialization of science will lead most countries, irrespective of their social or economic structures, into closer working arrangements. This tendency, clearly recognizable throughout the world, will be particularly noticeable in Europe, he believes, where regional interests will prevail over ideological antagonisms.

As for the role that physicists will play in European social and economic development, Macioti feels this will continue to be substantial. True, certain branches of physics have been a privileged child of national as well as international science policies, and modern societies are going through a severe reappraisal of the role of science. Nevertheless, Macioti is among those who think that the new socio-economic goals of the 1980's (summed up most readily as the 'quality of life') will call for more and not less science. This means, in his opinion, that fundamental research in physics will contribute significantly toward a better understanding of nature and help us live in harmony with our environment.

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