

Robert Klapisch

## Euroscience

Science is an important part of the European cultural heritage. It is an important asset for Europe, in a world where politics and economy are increasingly becoming global. The size of the European scientific enterprise can be represented as follows: according to OECD statistics there were in 1993 in the European Union 770 000 R&D workers of university graduate level.

The total including other European countries except Russia in 1993 was 884 000 and if we include Russia, Ukraine etc, the evaluation comes close to that of the US (963 000). Looking at the share of world scientific publications (as of 1995) we find 32.6% for the European Union, the total for Europe including Russia being 36.7% compared to the United States 33.9% and Japan 8.3%.

At a time when a lot of important decisions affecting the scientific enterprise are being taken at a European level, such an important community needs a channel by which it can express its views.

Look at the United States. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) was founded 150 years ago, has 140 000 members and includes more than 300 American learned societies. It has a budget of some \$50 million, edits the well known weekly magazine *Science* and organizes annual meetings attended by over 5000 participants. The 150th anniversary meeting in February 1998 heard an address by President Clinton who announced important scientific initiatives.

AAAS is a very influential lobby group to the US Congress. It has also been endowed—by contract—with the task of analysing each year American outlays on science in all the different sectors and institutions, and it publishes authoritative reports to that effect. In addition to a permanent staff, the Association elects each year as President a prestigious personality (often a Nobel prize winner) who is able to access the highest levels of Congress and Government to pass the most important messages that the scientific community has been able to define.

Now look at Europe. Learned societies organized by discipline exist at a national and at a European level. On a cross-disciplinary basis there are a few countries where Associations for the Advancement of Science exist with various degrees of success and activities (the most visible being the British Association for the Ad-

vancement of Science which has an important influence in the United Kingdom in matters regarding the public understanding of science; also the French Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences). But at the European cross-disciplinary level, there is no such Association.

In my opinion, the European community has not given birth to a body capable of defining (through internal debates) and expressing (by direct lobbying of European bodies) the viewpoint of the scientific community. This was the reason behind the creation of Euroscience.

The establishment of multi-national Academies such as the *Academia Europæa* should enable European official bodies to draw on top level expertise in the assessment of scientific and technological issues. But to join the Academy, you have to be invited. (Similarly, membership of other cross-disciplinary organisations is restricted: membership of the research councils association Eurohorcs, for example, is open only to heads of research councils.) Euroscience is a voluntary association, open to all. It is the place where the voice of an individual scientist will be heard.

Euroscience was formally created in March 1997 by 237 founding members from 26 countries. The Association drew in over 1000 members from 41 countries in the first two years.

Its membership includes not only scientists but a broad spectrum of those interested in the scientific enterprise and its impact on today's world: engineers, industrialists, newsmen, educators and generally concerned citizens. Its scope covers not only physical and life sciences but also social sciences. It will strive to integrate the scientific communities all over Europe and provide a structure which helps foster a fruitful dialogue with bodies in charge of decisions at the European level: the European Commission and Parliament, national governments and funding agencies. It also wants to set-up a dialogue with its equivalent partners in America, Asia and any part of the world. We do not feel we are in competition with other European bodies, and we seek collaboration.

It will be sometime before Euroscience can mobilize anything near the resources available to the AAAS. But if membership continues its healthy growth (the doubling time is presently some 12 months in some European countries) then Euroscience will affirm itself as a valid interlocutor.

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### Public debate

On 15 April 1999, taking advantage of the campaign for the election of the European Parliament, Euroscience organized a public debate in Strasbourg in France with Members of the European Parliament. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Elly Plooij-Van Gorsel MEP. If I wanted to summarize in a nutshell the importance of this event, I would quote the reaction of MEP Christof Tannert (Germany) who said: "We are used at the European Parliament to being lobbied by various pressure groups (industry, agriculture, etc). However, we never see any scientists. You should make your voice heard; do come and lobby us."

### Local meetings

Euroscience is setting up local sections. The first of these is located in Geneva and the neighbouring lake Lemman region. It started in October 1997 with regular monthly meetings, and from time to time organizes public conferences. The first conference in October 1997 was a report on science and technology assessment by the French Parliament. A further one in May 1998 was a debate on genetically modified organisms in agriculture. And since April 1999 "Euroscience Lemman" has started a well-attended science café and also a working group on relations between research and industry. Several other local or national sections are presently being set up (Finland, Upper Rhine, Romania, Georgia, South East England, Russia, Estonia, Central Sweden, Italy).

### What is a science café?

The initiative for science cafés should be credited to the French Physical Society who, during its annual meeting in Paris in July 1997 held a well attended bar des sciences with volunteer specialists at hand to answer questions from the public. The success in France has been such that in March 1999 the sociology institute at the University of Lyons held a workshop to analyze the phenomenon. The Lemman section of Euroscience began a series of cafés in Geneva in April 1999.

### Officials

President Claude Kordon (France, neuroscientist); Vice-Presidents Jerzy Langer (Poland, physicist), Wilhelm Krull (Secretary General of the Volkswagen Foundation); Secretary General Françoise Praderie (France, astronomer); Treasurer Simon Mitton (UK, scientific publisher)