

## Science Europe: A logic piece in the puzzle

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Today's celebration of the birth of *Science Europe* marks a milestone for the scientific co-operation in Europe. It sends a clear message to the European scientific, political, and economic system and – most importantly – to Europe's society. This message, summarized by the subheading which we have chosen for the new organisation ('shaping the future of research'), embraces four elements:

1. As never before in history, knowledge and knowledge production through scientific research is the key element for today's multinational and multicultural society, for our central values of freedom, justice, and human rights as well as for society's cohesion and stability based on the rational argument and common rules for dealing with all kinds of conflicts which are part of our existence. Please note that the value of scientific research means much more than the production of economic wealth by innovation, much more than the competitive advantage relative to our neighbours in Europe and beyond, it is the basis for our communication and mutual understanding without which we would fall back into the dark periods of human history. Therefore it is important that Science Europe – although for the native English speaking person the word 'science' may have a more restrictive meaning – embraces organisations of all disciplines, from art and humanities, social sciences to natural sciences and engineering. They all contribute in their own way to what we understand as the *knowledge society*.
2. Knowledge does and should not have any national borders, nor has knowledge production. The architects of the European Research Area (ERA), launched in Lisbon in March 2000 by the Heads of State Governments of the EU together with the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, rightly concluded that Europe can only compete with the US – and in the future with Southeast Asia – if it bundles its forces and eliminates the inefficiencies and duplications which characterize the European research system. Yet, for several reasons a one-to-one transfer of the US system into Europe would be inappropriate. The science history of Europe and the US has been very different: Traditionally many European countries have strong and

successful national research systems with long tradition: Look at the UK, at Germany or France, look even at a small country like my own, Switzerland. These countries don't have to fear the comparison with the US, and certainly not with China and others.

Therefore, the second element of the message of SE is the conviction that the ERA can only flourish by a close cooperation between the EU and the national Research Organisations, or more precisely the national Research Funding and Research Performing Organisations. SE wants to become a strong partner and – in some cases – competitor (why not, competition is an essential part of success, as will be discussed below) of the EC. We strongly believe SE is not only for the benefit of the national research organisations but also of the EC by being a partner for the dialogue between the different players of the ERA.

3. Obviously, SE is not a new organisation – indeed, to add another European organisation to the myriads of existing ones, which would divert time and energy of researchers away from their main task, would not have been a wise move! – SE is rather a revitalisation of a great idea which, for historical reasons, has been pursued until now by two separate organisations, both with their own merits and tradition, both with strongly overlapping membership: (1) the European Science Foundation (ESF), founded nearly 40 years ago, and EUROHORCs, the (informal) organisation of the heads of European Research Organisations which exists since about 20 years. In order to avoid any misunderstanding: Note that ESF and EUROHORCs have closely worked together during the last years. The *EUROHORCs and ESF Vision on a Globally Competitive ERA and their Road Map for Actions*, commonly developed some years ago, have set the basis for an intensive co-operation in many areas as described in the road map. In spite of this (or perhaps just because of this co-operation), in both organisations a majority of MOs came to the conclusion that in order to meet the future challenges of the ERA it would be wise to combine the strong elements of both ESF and EUROHORCs and to abandon other activities which, whilst they have played their role in the past, became less important in the present European research landscape. Yesterday, at its last General Assembly EUROHORCs decided its dissolution. ESF in turn, which has not yet decided formally about its future, will continue to exist for a couple of years in order to meet its obligations with respect to its running activities and its employees. Thus, the third part of SE's message is the proof of its capability for dynamic adaption, a central quality for

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Claude Madsen, "Scientific Europe", Multi-Science Publ. Comp., UK, 47 pp

a fit, efficient and successful biological or societal organism. SE will remain small and flexible, keep strong links to its member organisations by close cooperation and by secondment of staff from its members. In short, it will support the work of its members and promote co-operation between them, provide a platform for dialogue with the European Commission as well as with the national ministers of research, and establish the scientific community as a third voice in the ERA, together with national governments and the EC.

4. 'A third voice, the voice of the researchers themselves without whom research would be idle, as much money we would pump into the system, this is the fourth element of SE's message. In order to keep close ties with the scientific basis without which research policy work would lose its ground contact, SE will borrow from ESF the idea of establishing scientific committees covering all disciplines composed of eminent scientists in their field. In addition, the improvement of the working conditions of researchers, especially young ones, by making national borders more transparent for ideas, people and money, will be another goal of SE. Improving the so-called ERA Framework conditions for the benefit of research and researchers will need close co-operation with national governments and the EC. Again, the precursor organisations of SE have contributed already to this goal, for instance with the schemes 'Money follows Researcher' and 'Money follows co-operation line' as well as with the Lead Agency Procedure which simplifies the evaluation of co-operative projects involving groups from more than one country. In essence, the national research organisations have realized that they are far from having fully exploited their potential for bilateral and multilateral co-operation schemes.

These are the four messages conveyed by the creation of SE. Work has just started, there are great challenges awaiting us, not only in terms of research questions (the Grand Challenges of Mankind), but also in terms of the build-up of SE. – But let me end with something personal which lies beyond our specific subject, that is scientific research. The process during the last two to three years to found SE, from the first vague ideas to the legal entity of today, was not always easy. It needed the continuous effort of numerous personalities, colleagues and (most importantly) their staff who answered mails when the chiefs were away or overlooked them. I would like to express my profound gratitude to all of you who have supported the idea of SE. And then there is yet another miracle, a miracle which should become a model for the co-operation within Europe. When at the end of last year

plans for SE became concrete we decided to form a Pilot Board and a Pilot Office. We did that without writing a single application, just a mail to the potential member organisations of SE asking for support in form of people, office space and money. And so it happened overnight: We got an office in Brussels, a very dedicated group of people, all seconded by national organisations, and a generous budget based on some still vague ideas about what we would need.

‘Don’t ask what you get, but contribute what you can...’ – if this will be the spirit in which SE functions in the future, it will become a bright star on the European sky. Let it happen!