

**Meeting of European national members of ICSU**  
20 October 2006, ICSU headquarters, Paris

**Introductory remarks and Summary** *rédacteur François Gros*

A little more than 4 years ago certain European national members representatives particularly from UK and France have developed the feeling that something ought to be done to take into account the global importance of the European membership within the ICSU family, and also the dynamics of Europe facing the international scientific challenges. Hence the question was raised about the need for some kind of coordination between ICSU and Europe. Several arguments were put forward in this respect during the previous meetings in Brussels and in Madrid.

The first objective of the 2006 Paris meeting that took place at the ICSU Headquarter was to address the possible but likely benefit of a permanent exchange of information between ICSU and the European organizations that are responsible of the European science policy (European Commission, ESF, ALLEA, EMBO, etc). The second objective was to examine what kind of coordination, if any, could or should be implemented between the national members themselves and, more generally, between ICSU and the European scientific community.

In practice the meeting has in fact raised the difficulty to obtain a real consensus on these two objectives. But it has also confirmed the necessity to continue searching for an appropriate solution to strengthen the links between ICSU and the Europe of science . Participants recognized that, as Europe is a main player in ICSU, it could bring a lot to this organization. It appeared that a first concerted move could be to identify one or two interdisciplinary programs that could be of interest to ICSU and the European members (for example a program in Life sciences involving mathematics, informatics, physics and social sciences ). The European group wishes to remain informal but it has been said by some participants that the creation of a permanent or semi permanent secretariat could be a useful mean to develop more concrete actions in the future.

The next meeting of the European members will take place in Berne, in 2007, on the invitation of the Swiss Academy of natural Sciences.

**Notes of the morning session** *rédacteur Ruth Cooper*

1. Thomas Rosswall welcomed all the participants to the meeting. He commented that, whilst unions met between each GA, national members did not have a formal mechanism for doing this, so meetings such as the present one are important for a concrete dialogue between ICSU and its national members.

2. Francois Gros thanked all those who had helped organizing the meeting and providing documents for it. He noted with pleasure that Professor Brechignac, CNRS President and President elect of ICSU was attending the meeting and would give a presentation. He summarized the conclusions of the preceding meetings, noting the diversity of organizations and arrangements for European national committees.
3. Thematic Discussion – chaired by Marie-Lise Chanin.
  - a. Thomas Rosswall gave an outline of progress in the implementation of ICSU's strategic plan, adopted at the last GA in 2006. He reported that ICSU had decided not to hold meetings in the US until further notice, owing to difficulties in obtaining visas for some people. As yet ICSU had no policy advising its membership on this.
  - b. Catherine Brechignac gave a presentation on Europe and ICSU, describing the scope of the European Research Council. She outlined the fact that the procedure to get European funding still remain too bureaucratic.
  - c. Leonidas Karapiperis reported on the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and its relevance to the role of international cooperation. He reported that ERC is now part of the EC Research Directorate. He commented also upon the Marie Curie programme which is regarded as a big success, fostering human capacity. Noted that FP7 would run for 7 years, not 5 as FP6 had done. There would be a mid-point review, which would look at funding priorities and levels. A major effort has also been made to reduce the bureaucracy with applications, processing etc. A Risk Sharing Finance Facility (RSFF) has been set up, which would enable loans for research. Noted also the need to build bridges between industry and research – the proposed European Institute of Technology might help address this point. The ERC will preferably fund frontier research at the cross-cutting edge of disciplines.
  - d. The group received a paper prepared by Ruth Cooper and Fiona Steiger from the Royal Society, comparing objectives between FP7 and the ICSU strategic plan. This had been prepared at the request of the meeting organizers in order to facilitate discussion.
  - e. John Marks gave a presentation on the ESF programme in view of a possible coordination with ICSU. He discussed the scope for ESF and ICSU to work in partnership as was already done to some extent. He reported that the role of Academies in ESF had been discussed recently, and it was agreed that relevant Academies would be valuable members of ESF.

A number of points came up during the discussion of the morning's presentations. It became clear that not all discussants agreed on either the purpose of the meeting itself or the objectives of this discussion. A suggestion was that ESF should coordinate the group but some participants did not share this view.

People agreed that in a first instance it was important to identify whether coordination of European members was desirable. In particular what should a coordinated group achieve that individual members could not separately achieve better (ie in other words what could be the niche for this coordination group).

It was agreed that more effort was needed to get “Science” better accepted by the society at large. Noted that science is differently viewed and accepted in each country and the problem is specific to each one. Noted also that the informal meetings of European members at the last GA had been instrumental in getting one of the two resolutions that were passed at the GA (for instance better emphasize social sciences).

During the discussion, reference was often made to the fact that the main strength of ICSU is its dual membership of national members and unions, and that ICSU is really unique in this respect.

**Notes of the afternoon session** chaired by Attilio Boriani  *rédacteur Gérard Siclet*

1. Carthage Smith gave an outline on what ICSU expects from its national members . He insisted also on the interest to achieve a more coordinated European approach for the pooling of resources that could give a stronger support to new activities in ICSU.

2. Gérard Siclet introduced the discussion on how to achieve a better coordination between the national members based on a working paper prepared by Heide Hackmann which was raising the following questions : what do we mean by coordination ? how do we define Europe ? What mode of coordination should we consider?

- a. The discussion showed that there are several answers to these questions : which Europe are we going to talk about? Will it be structured (as was more or less implicitly the case until now) by being restricted to the member countries of the European Union or should it be expanded to countries outside this Union. In the first case (European Union members) this geometry would in fact imply the participation of 25 member countries, plus the newly applying members, as well as Norway and Switzerland. If we take into account a larger geometry, such as that which is represented in the composition of the Council of Europe, this would mean 35 countries members of ICSU (including Turkey, the Russian Federation, Ukraine) plus 2 with respectively the status of “candidate” and “observer”, namely Belarus and Israël. If we take into account the Europe and North America region of UNESCO this would represent 37 countries members of ICSU, including Turkey, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Israël .
- b. Some participants suggested that the European members should propose to ICSU to cooperate in the field of Social sciences; others were putting forward the problems of Education and training as well as the question of brain drain between Europe and developing countries . The interest of interdisciplinary themes was often stressed. Finally in order to get a better view on what sort of coordination one should reach it was decided that a team, composed of Ingrid Kissling-Naf, Ruth Cooper, Eckard

Ehlers, Gérard Siclet, would prepare a list of “terms of reference” . Some themes were tentatively put forward , such as for exemple: establishing an “ad hoc” European coordination for the next General Assembly of ICSU; taking advantage of the framework program of the EU; issuing statements on important topics; increasing the visibility of ICSU in Europe etc.

- c. The discussion on the modalities according to which a better coordination could be achieved between the European national members showed that some of the participants have a preference for a low level profile, with informal links such as an annual meeting. These participants suggested that the decision to move forward would not be made until the structure and role of a European group had been totally agreed. Others stressed the fact that the European group is informal and that it does not engage the national authorities but could have a secretariat. Spain is presently discussing the possibility to offer such a secretariat.

In summary in spite of the diversity of views some strong points emerged during the afternoon session:

Europe is a main player in ICSU and Europe has a lot to offer to ICSU in some fields of excellence. The European research Council could become a major reference to ICSU’s policy. In this respect, a first concrete move could be to identify a few interdisciplinary themes that could interest both ICSU governing bodies and the European scientific community as a whole. These themes should represent a bridge between what ICSU is doing and what European organizations are doing.

### 3. Next meetings:

The Swiss Academy of Sciences proposed to organize the next European meeting in Berne in 2007 .

The Finnish Academy of Sciences and letters invite the European Group in Helsinki in 2008, as the Academy is celebrating its 100 years of existence.

### **List of participants:**

Jan Vondrak, Czech Republic

Juri Engelbrecht, Allea

Cora Laforet, Germany

Dr Schonwitz, Germany

Eckard Ehlers, Germany

B Friedrich, Germany

Ingrid Kissling-Naf, Switzerland  
Matti Saarnisto, Finland  
Armando Pombeiro, Portugal  
Gunnar Oquist, Sweden  
Ruth Cooper, UK (rapporteur morning session)  
Fiona Steiger, UK  
Attilio Boriani, Italy (chair afternoon session)  
Zenonas Rudzikas, Lithuania  
Jean Mawhin, Belgium  
Jack Spaapen, Netherlands  
Laura van Veenendaal, Netherlands  
Severino Falcon, Spain  
Lucas Christophorou, Greece  
Jean Dercourt, France  
Francois Gros, France  
Marie-Lise Chanin, France (chair morning session)  
Gerard Siclet (rapporteur afternoon session)  
Leonidas Karapiperis, DG Research, EC  
Catherine Brechignac, France (first session only )  
Thomas Rosswall, ICSU  
Carthage Smith, ICSU  
John Marks, ESF

Enclosed: copies of the presentations