

EUROPEAN ICSU MEMBERS MEETING
BERNE 26th October 2007

The increasing role of the European Scientific Associations

1. Background

In order to fulfil its duty of national representative to ICSU the Académie des sciences has founded 28 national committees that are the corresponding bodies of 22 international scientific unions and 6 interdisciplinary committees of ICSU. These committees are working under the umbrella of another committee of the academy, the COFUSI, chaired by Marie-Lise Chanin.

Each year approximatively half of these committees are called for a kind of cross-examination by a panel of academicians. The committees have to present a report on their activities, and the activities of their corresponding unions, and also give a short analysis of the development of their disciplines. This exercise contributes to give to the academy an up to date picture of what is going on in the scientific world.

2. The European scientific associations

This survey that has been conducted since 1999 shows an increasing influence of the European associations or federation of European scientists. These associations organize international congresses and seminars. Some of them have a close connection with the European administration, with the objective to be well informed of the new regulations to come and possibly to bring their expertise to the European Commission.

Some examples:

- **In Geology and Geophysics**, the European association of geosciences (EGU) launched in 2002 is now a challenger for the American association (AGU), for the union of geosciences of Asia, and also for the international union (IUGG). The connection with IUGG is quite weak.
- **In Soil Sciences**, the European federation of soil sciences associations has been launched in 2000 with the objective to be involved in the discussions on the new European regulations on soil and water. The internal congress Euro Soil is independent of the activities of the international union IUSS.
- **In Biology**, there are many European bodies without speaking of the well known EMBO and EMBL.

The European federation of biochemistry (FEBS) has now more than 40 000 members. The association has collaborative programs with

Eastern Europe (Romania, Ukraine, Armenia) and with North Africa (Tunisia and Morocco are associate members). The federation is a full member of the international union IUBMB.

The European Federation of Neurosciences has 15 000 members. The federation organizes an international congress every two years , and develop actions in Africa , in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe. In fact the European organization seems to be more active than the international union IBRO , where it has the status of regional members.

The European Federation of Immunology has been launched in 2004 with the objective to organize an international congress every 3 years. This organization is also involved in the accreditation of the medical laboratory in Europe.

The European Federation of Nutrition Sciences is composed of 25 national members. The federation organizes an international congress ever 4 years , with about half the number of participants of the International union (IUNS)congress. The connection with IUNS is quite weak.

The European Biological Scientific Association and the European Federation of Physiological Sciences (FEPS) are very active and keep a good connection with the international unions of biophysics and Physiology IUPAB and IUPS.

In microbiology there are at least 3 European associations with a total of nearly 20 000 members: the Federation of European Microbiology Associations (FEMS), the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB), the European Society of Chemical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID).

- **in Mechanics** , the European association EUROMECH has more than 1000 members. The association organizes congresses and seminars every year in connection with a sister organization in fluid mechanics EUROTHERM.
- **In Cristallography**, the European Association of Cristallography created in 2000 as a regional associate of IUCr is growing very fast. The association organizes conferences and meetings every year and develops a strong policy of cooperation with Africa and North Africa.

New European associations are under way

In Chemistry, the European chemists (more than 100 000 scientists) have been very sensitive to the implementation of the European directive REACH. The preparation of a European congress of chemistry is in progress.

In Radio electricity the European members of the international union URSI are planning to found an association that could become an expert body for the European commission.

In Geography, a European association recently created has decided to hold an international congress every 4 years.

This is not an exhaustive list

3. Conclusion

During the discussions between the academy and the representatives of the committees of the COFUSI it appears that the European scientific associations are more and more autonomous from the International unions, in their policy and priorities. They have sometimes very loose links with the international scientific unions. As a consequence they feel less concerned by the activities of ICSU bodies.

This situation could be seen as the progressive *de facto* creation of a European scientific region that the International Scientific Unions try to integrate with more or less success. More over there is a certain probability that the European scientists feel more attracted to work with the European associations they know well than with ICSU bodies. ICSU and the European national members should be aware of this situation. This is may be another reason to build up officially or informally an European region inside ICSU, in order to help ICSU to recognize and take advantage of the present evolution.

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