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*ADDRESS TO THE Final Workshop*

**The Socialisation of European Research  
from the Perspective of the Knowledge Society**  
*Interpretations and policies with  
the contribution of the social sciences*

*Brussels, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for the European Economic and Social Committee to host this important workshop; and for me it is a pleasure to welcome the participants of that workshop on behalf of Mario Sepi, the President of our Committee.

Choosing the premises of our Committee as a venue indicates that the organisers of your workshop are aware of how much the subject of your workshop also reflects one of the highlights of our own work. To demonstrate this, I quote from one of our recent OPINIONS – for your information: these OPINIONS are the main product of our work.

Please note, however, that the following sentences were written before the current economic crisis. They are even more relevant now in the face of this crisis.

Quotation:

“Top performances in the scientific and technical field, and their entrepreneurial conversion into a competitive, economic force, are essential preconditions for safeguarding our future (not least with regard to energy and climate issues), preserving and improving our current global position, and developing rather than jeopardising the European social model.

The basic prerequisite for achieving this goal is a social climate that is open to progress and innovation, in which society fully understands this and all its implications, so that politicians at all levels create the necessary conditions and take decisions that are conducive to such progress, and so that enough business confidence and optimism is built up for the necessary investments to be made in Europe and new jobs to be created. This also includes raising awareness of the fundamental significance of basic research, as this lays the necessary foundations for future innovations. An entrepreneurial spirit that is willing to innovate and take risks is particularly needed, as are political leadership, dependability and a sense of reality”.

End of quotation.

Now, we all know, of course, that achieving this goal is not as easy as it may sound, and addressing the difficulties and obstacles is the actual subject of your workshop.

Some of you may remember that I had the pleasure of making a contribution to one of your earlier workshops, on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at the “Science and Society Forum 2005”, which was held nearby in the European Parliament.

Prompted by one of the speakers at that Forum who had presented his talk before me and who had based his talk on the story of Frankenstein, I afterwards referred to his image by saying:

“Dear Colleagues, please take note, however, that it was not Frankenstein, a figure invented in literature, who, secretly and against the law, had first dug out corpses from their graves and dissected them. No, instead it was the great pioneers of modern science and art who did this first, namely Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo Galilei.”

Why do I recall this here at the beginning of your workshop? It is not so much to add some spice to your discussions, but to point to the persistence of the elementary difficulties between the human urge for knowledge and the beliefs of society, its anxieties, its “Zeitgeist” or even its well-founded fears and ethical principles. Let me recall: what da Vinci and Galilei did was not only against the religious feelings of their time, but actually against the law.

While this may be the fundamental area of tension – or formulated more neutrally: of the relation – between science and society which needs to be resolved, there are also others.

One of them concerns the important issue of evaluation and assessment. I mean the evaluation and assessment of the performance, but also the potential of individual scientists, of their results and their relevance, and of their organisations. These can be best assessed from inside by their peers in their specific disciplines – and we all know that even in this case historical errors have occurred.

But there is a problem. Society outside this group, for instance politicians and administrators, has a desire to rely not solely on insider judgement, but also to develop their independent assessment procedures. While this desire appears understandable and justified, and while the search for excellence and for outstanding personalities is perhaps the most important task in this context, it may lead to negative results. It may lead to a questionable overestimation of index values like the citation index, the number of publications etc. etc. It may lead to the danger of overlooking the most gifted and talented, those who do not follow the mainstream, those whose thinking and ideas are ahead of the crowd. I feel it would be a worthwhile exercise to analyse this problem.

However, it also concerns the as yet unfulfilled necessity, in the whole of the European Research Area, to offer working conditions and salaries which are capable of attracting the world's best scientists in their fields, and afterwards not to overload them with administrative burdens which either are unnecessary or can be done by others.

A further area of concern is the relation of pure research versus planned projects, again culminating in what freedom of science really means, involves and demands. While projects, also scientific projects like the construction of a new accelerator, can be planned and executed by well-known management principles, science itself cannot, at least not in a clear-cut way. Since the results of science are unpredictable, good science is also an art, or at least has some features of an art. It is the art of how to ask nature to reveal more about its intrinsic working system. So I read with great pleasure that you are addressing that question.

There are, however, more misunderstandings or misconceptions between science and society. This concerns for instance duplication. I have already expressed my critical view on the recommendation of the Commission to avoid duplication. Well, this may just be my personal opinion.

Therefore it might be worthwhile to perform a study on whether duplication not only serves to validate new findings, but is also a powerful motor for disseminating and extending new knowledge and skills, to teach and train others.

Last but not least – and I feel that this may even be the main issue of your workshop – there is the relation between the sciences and humanities, with the art of technology in between them.

While the main goal and mission of the sciences is to learn about the working pattern and “laws” of nature, humanities ask about their relation to society, about how this enriches or interferes with the fabric of society and human life. Of course, these two aspects can be and often are in the mind of one and the same person. When X-rays were detected, or penicillin, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen or Alexander Fleming immediately thought of their use, in fact Fleming worked from the very beginning on how to fight bacteria.

This all shows what a wonderful subject your kind of science is, what a challenging task!

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a successful and fruitful workshop.