

ise: Initiative for Science in Europe

Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE)

Assembly Meeting - Report
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The ISE Assembly meeting, which was held in Lisbon on June 4, 2005, was attended by 31 participants representing 30 European organizations (see list of participants below).

At the opening of the meeting, Jose Mariano Gago announced his resignation as Chairman of the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) due to his recent appointment as Minister of Science, Technology and higher Education of Portugal.

THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ERC)

Jose Mariano Gago recalled that the impetus for the creation of ISE was the European Research Council and the need to involve the scientific community in science policy. He then reported on recent developments on the ERC at the political level and led a discussion on the topic. He notably reiterated the essential role played by the scientific community in the establishment of the ERC, but warned against any complacency for "everything would be going smoothly and in the right direction". He also advocated the need to identify "stupid ideas" such as "public funding is enough, what is missing is private funding" and "funding for basic research is sufficient, what is failing in Europe is the translation of research results into innovation" and to argue against these stereotypes. And he encouraged the scientific community and ISE to pursue their efforts.

His report on the ERC included the following points:

- The Competitiveness Council, which includes the science ministers of the EU member states, unanimously support the establishment of an ERC. Furthermore, the general mood in the Council is to add pressure to ensure that the Commission is not in charge of the ERC.
- Two issues seem to create reservations. Firstly, France is afraid that too large a share of the budget would go to the social sciences and humanities; however, the country is isolated on this question. Secondly, several countries would like to know more about the connections between the ERC and applied research.
- The major problem faced by the ERC concerns the budgetary issue. According to the EC proposal on the financial perspectives for the period 2007-2013, the budget of the Framework programme 7 (FP7) would double, compared to FP6, and the share of the ERC would represent 16% of the total FP7 budget. It now is clear that the doubling will not be obtained. According to Gago, a 30% hike seems a reasonable guess, which would imply a reduction of the budget of all FP7 actions. In this context, the ERC budget share, 16% in the proposal, would probably also be reduced. A possible way to achieve this result would be that Council reduces the duration of FP7 from 7 years (as proposed by the Commission) to 4 years (similar to the previous FPs). Indeed, the EC FP7 proposal

integrates a stepwise increase of the budget, the major increase coming during the last three years.

- Difficult decisions (*e.g.* discussions on the remit of the ERC) will come after the budget is approved and stakeholders must prepare for difficult fights. Gago also emphasized the need to “keep the politicians away from the debate on what the ERC should do”. Lobbying, at this stage, for issues such as focusing the ERC programmes on young investigators would open the door to political interference.

Jose Mariano Gago also announced that a first informal Council of Competitiveness meeting under the British Presidency of the EU would be held in Cardiff on July 11, 2005. The final report of the Identification Committee chaired by Lord Patten will be presented there. On the other hand, concerns were raised that the Commission may currently consider substituting an Advisory Board to the ERC Council. Gago therefore argued that ISE should firmly object to this development and provide support to the British Presidency, which seems to be a strong advocate of the independence of the ERC, through a public appeal in support of the ERC. At a later stage, ISE should also prepare a response to the final EC proposals.

It was decided that the ISE Steering Committee would draft the proposed appeal to be released at the time of the Cardiff informal Council of Competitiveness. The appeal would:

- ❑ Present arguments in favour of the establishment of the ERC (economic justification; first European instrument for frontier research, which could set the pace and standards to inspire national systems; etc).
- ❑ Reiterate the characteristics of the ERC (all sciences, excellence, etc).
- ❑ Argue for a significant budget (1 to 1.5 b€/year) and the independence (programmes and how the money is spent) of the ERC.
- ❑ Warn against a concomitant reduction of national budgets and the risk that countries do not fund what the ERC funds.
- ❑ React critically to the report of the Identification Committee, should ISE be able to obtain a copy of it in due time.

The Steering Committee will determine a dissemination strategy to maximise the impact of the appeal. This may take the form of a publication in a major newspaper such as the *Financial Times*, for instance, or in newspapers all across Europe. The appeal will be sent to all the Members of the European Parliament and the members of the CREST Committee.

The appeal will be provided to all ISE members for use/adaptation. They will be invited to publish the appeal in their newsletters and send it to their own members to encourage its use at the national level.

FUTURE OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES OF ISE

A discussion addressed the scope of action for ISE in the coming months and years. Julio Celis stressed that there is still much to do on the ERC (reaction to the Identification Committee report and the EC proposals), but not so much in terms of activities. Another role of ISE could be the one of watchdog. The FP7 proposal also raises a lot of questions (technology initiatives, security research, human resources, research infrastructures, simplicity, etc) that should be addressed. Furthermore, FP7 is more relevant than the ERC for some ISE members whose research is more tightly connected to industry.

Julio Celis suggested that ISE should focus on the creation of a vision for science in Europe, which would be a long-term project requiring the active participation of all organizations. He also listed a series of topics that could be integrated in the vision: the researcher charter (which the Commission wants to make mandatory, a step that was heavily criticized by Gago), young investigator's careers, human resources, infrastructures, involvement of patients and consumers organizations in support of science, the use of scientific expertise (notably by the Commission), etc.

The importance of bringing science to politicians (and not only involving scientists in policy making) was stressed. This could be done by organizing/participating in hearings of the European Parliament.

Other than the watchdog role and the publication of statements on specific issues, Jose Mariano Gago advocated that conference organization is the trademark of ISE. Hence, the Initiative should, as a rule, organize an annual conference on hot European science policy themes (science education, jobs, scientific expertise, integrity, etc), an event that could not be ignored and, hence, would provide visibility to the Initiative. The suggestion was a little controversial, as ISE should not compete with ESOF. Furthermore, it raises the question of the financing of such events. Organizing satellite sessions or, better, plenary sessions (to maximise the attendance) on science policy at ISE member's conferences, with the participation of other ISE members, was considered a more reasonable alternative. Finally, Gago suggested that ISE could organize an "Index of science policy development", which would combine participation of ISE members and media interest.

<p>The objectives and activities of ISE will require further discussion. In the coming months, therefore, ISE will focus on the ERC and the framework programme 7.</p>
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ISE GOVERNING STRUCTURE

Given the resignation of Jose Mariano Gago, a **new ISE Chairperson** must be appointed. It was decided that the Steering Committee would make a proposal concerning the new Chairperson and the duration of his/her mandate (1 to 2 years) before the ISE Assembly, which should appoint him/her at its next Assembly meeting in the fall. A **Deputy or Vice-Chair** would also be appointed, who would succeed the Chairperson at the end of his/her mandate. In the meantime, **Julio Celis**, Secretary General of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS), will assume the **interim chairmanship** of ISE.

A **new Steering Committee** will also be elected at the next ISE Assembly meeting on the basis of a proposal made by the current Committee. A rapid turnover of its members would allow all ISE member organizations to participate relatively rapidly in the Steering Committee, thereby promoting trust, commitment and involvement. The proposal should however take into consideration the necessary stability and continuity that is required for the Steering Committee to carry out its duties.

ISE MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL ISSUES

Many meeting participants believed that it was necessary to foster the commitment of ISE members to strengthen the Initiative. For this purpose, a **membership fee** should be established, which could take the form of a voluntary contribution with a minimum and a maximum. This could, at least in part, be a way to tackle the issue of the budget of ISE. A proposal will be made by the Steering Committee at the next ISE Assembly meeting. An ISE business model, however, must be further discussed.

It was also suggested that ISE should develop a "**corporate identity**", which could notably be obtained by providing documents on the output of previous activities, updating the website of the Initiative and linking it to the websites of the members. This, however, would require a more formal type of affiliation to the Initiative and will be discussed at the next Assembly meeting.

Finally, it was suggested that the membership of ISE should be broadened, notably to incorporate more organizations representative of the human and social sciences.

ISE members are invited to communicate to the secretariat a list of organizations, including contact details, which could be contacted to join ISE.

**The next ISE Assembly meeting will be organized towards
the end of September or early October 2005.**

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