



Academia Europaea

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A statement by the Academia Europaea on the importance of the Humanities in the context of the European Research Area.

The statement was prepared by an expert panel of members of the Academia Europaea.

The panel members wereⁱ:

Professor Jürgen Mittelstrass (Philosophy)

Professor Jørgen Rischel (Linguistics)

Professor Stig Strömholm (Law)

Professor Henk Wesseling (History)

Having considered in detail the issues relating to the role for Humanities in the development of the European Research Area and in the debate surrounding the objectives for a new European Research Council: The panel have been pleased to submit to the Council of the Academia Europaea, an opinion for its consideration.

Authority.

The Council of the Academia Europaea, have been pleased to accept the statement of the panel and have authorised the publication of this opinion in the name of the Academia Europaea.

Jürgen Mittelstrass
President
02 September 2004

Statement on the Role of the Humanities in European Research Policy

“If I had the chance to begin again, I would start with culture”

Jean Monnet

In an earlier published statement¹, the Academia Europaea drew attention to the need to incorporate into the new European constitutional treaty a more explicit reference to the importance of research, scholarship and learning, as a basis for the well-being of European society. Recent developments in the debate on European research² make it necessary to comment specifically on the role of the humanities in this context.

1. Humanities and Natural Sciences – a reinforcing partnership of equals

It is often argued, especially in political circles, that the natural sciences are more directly responsible for the economic advancement of our societies than are the humanities. It is on the basis of this belief, that national and, generally speaking, international decisions on public financial support are made. The result is a systematic under-recognition of the humanities. The Academia Europaea sees this as a fundamentally misguided and incomplete approach to the development of any forward-looking European research policy. To see the public funding of the sciences, including the social and human sciences, merely as a means of promoting the

delivery of economic goods is dangerously shortsighted. Science, when curiosity-driven, does provide added value and is a legitimate objective for public policy. Also, when seen from a long-term perspective, investment in science does lead to

¹ “The position of science and scholarship in the draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe”. Published 20 October 2003 (see <http://www.acadeuro.org/publications2.html>)

greater innovation and validated applications. It is for these reasons that the Academia Europaea has been in the vanguard of support for the development of a European basic research funding facility, at Community level.³

Looking specifically at the humanities component of the broad range of human activity that makes up science and scholarship, significant advances in research and knowledge are usually the result of long-term projects, mostly undertaken by individuals, and often at very small and geographically fragmented centres of expertise. The Academia Europaea is of the opinion, that in order to achieve European added value there is a need for the development of a 'European Humanities' approach, which is able to deliver an effective, critical mass in scholarship. The European context requires a unique European-level commitment to a continuing endorsement of the relevance of the humanities, and provision of the means necessary to sustain such activity. Answering European issues requires a European collective approach in the humanities, just as much as in the natural sciences.

The Academia Europaea is concerned that public research policy has drifted too far towards a jaundiced view of the humanities. It seems to us that the humanities are now often seen only as a tool used to compensate for the public mistrust of technological complexity and for the accompanying damage to the public perception of modern science. More than ever before, the world is a product of our human interactions with our natural surroundings. Only when we Europeans are well educated in those disciplines that pertain to the humanities and social sciences that determine our view of the modern world, will the European society be able to profit fully from the wealth of scientific achievements, and be able to accept scientific

² Comm (2004) 353 Final. "Science and Technology, the key to Europe's Future", http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/pdf/com-2004-353_en.pdf and January 2004. EURAB report and recommendations on the ERA and the role for Humanities and Social sciences. EURAB 03.0476 Final

³ See "Towards a European Research Council": A further contribution to the debate (23 July 2003) and Do we need a European Research Council? 16 September 2002 (<http://www.acadeuro.org/publications2.html>)

complexity in the attempts to solve today's problems and challenges. Therefore, the Academia Europaea regards the humanities as equally deserving of public support,

and any European research policy should aim to foster a genuine interest in the humanities, just as is the case for the natural sciences.

2. Humanities in Europe – building a culture through research

Further European integration and enlargement of the Union particularly enriches the human sciences. Europe as a society may therefore be particularly enriched by the increased research opportunities that integration brings.

Whilst the natural sciences may profit from European integration and 'Unionisation', through economies of scale in research and by concentrating excellence: 'Europeanisation' also provides the humanities with a wealth of new primary sources for investigation. The humanities are more directly shaped by political developments than are the natural sciences. The Humanities provide us with the tools to analyse directly these developments and, through the application of research and scholarship, so provide us with a virtuous circle of answers that we can apply to shape future developments. We cannot expect the science of chemistry for example to change its fundamentals in direct response to political changes in Europe, but we do know that in a developing Europe, the subject matter of the humanities is constantly evolving – as the developments in our society draw our attention to hitherto unrecognised areas of research, and stimulate the curiosity of the researcher.

The radical political changes that we have experienced in Europe, and which we will continue to experience, necessitate a high degree of intellectual flexibility in its citizens. It is only by understanding other civilizations, countries and their social structures, that a deeper unification, going far beyond a shared political apparatus, may ultimately be realised in Europe. Indeed, an in-depth understanding of other civilisations, countries and their social structures is a necessary prerequisite to the

development of mutual respect and cultural reciprocity, which alone can secure fruitful coexistence in a global context and in a rapidly changing world. The Academia therefore urges a sustained and genuine active European level support for research into the existing social conditions, intellectual histories, and political systems, as a way for reaching such understanding, and hence providing us with the basic condition for the sound development of a European Union with its own identity – ‘as a union of enlightened citizens’.

The Academia Europaea believes strongly in an inclusive European research policy. A policy that explicitly supports basic research and scholarship at the Community level will provide the best chance to capture strong national traditions in the humanities into a truly European perspective. Peaceful cooperation in the humanities and social sciences across national borders is both demanding and historically rare because the subject matter of these branches of science is mostly limited in time and place, and because such approaches go against tradition. However, promoting such research and protecting the objectivity and openness of humanities research against nationalistic abuse is essential for the well-being of the collective European family. For this reason, the Academia Europaea considers it an imperative for any European Research Council actively to promote and support the humanities alongside the natural sciences.

3. In conclusion

The Academia Europaea is fully aware of the many and diverse challenges facing Europe and the wider world. We note that many of the challenges arise out of cross-cultural misunderstandings and that these challenges are often amongst the most difficult and pressing ones we face. Experience shows us that comparative studies of countries and civilizations are of fundamental importance in achieving real dialogue and effective cooperation. Furthermore, such studies have been traditionally difficult to undertake without the catalyst of supranational support. The benefits that can be expected from providing such research support consist of the

tools that the humanities can provide to reduce misunderstanding and the mistrust of the

unfamiliar, in the knowledge generated to restore faith and confidence in common approaches and in the creation of a better sense of what is our common European heritage. The Academia Europaea suggests that whilst any political failure to realise the importance of the role of the humanities in the European research policy process might not produce any short-term economic disadvantage, it will certainly mean a less stable road to integration in the long run. Europe would remain more vulnerable than is necessary. This must not be the unintended consequence of an incomplete European research policy. The Academia therefore encourages European and national policymakers to provide for a real integration of the humanities into research policy at the Community level. We strongly feel that such an approach will create an enhanced capacity to respond to both the societal and the technological challenges that will face an expanding Union.

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Jørgen Rischel - Professor of Linguistics at the University of Copenhagen.

Stig Strömholm – Professor Emeritus in International and Comparative Law. Former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Uppsala. Immediate past President of the Academia Europaea.

Henk Wesseling - Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Leiden [1973 to 2002]. Rector of NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study) from 1995 to 2002.