

13 January 2010

Response of the European Platform of Women Scientists to the *Public Consultation on the future “EU 2020” Strategy*

“We will know that ERA is a shared responsibility [between science, policy and society] in 2030 when we see...half of all scientists and research policy makers, across all disciplines and at all levels of the Science system, are women”¹.

EPWS welcomes the invitation of the European Commission to comment on the EU 2020 Strategy, a public document intended to give the EU economy a brighter future. The consultation text seems to suggest that the only objective of the European Union is economic growth. However, this goal needs to be embedded in the political goal of building a European Union between nations striving for social integration, political coherence, equal opportunities, peace, education, societal progress, i.e. values oriented towards its citizens.

From the research community's point of view, EU political decisions and objectives should more clearly take scientific analyses into account to enable a better predictability of their consequences. Also, the Union's science policy objectives and the EU scientific programmes should maintain enough continuity so that scientists may be able to more reliably base their work on the topics funded throughout time to achieve more in depth results. Otherwise achievements might be incomplete and the overall situation frustrating.

Particularly for the development of a knowledge-based society, Europe needs leading-edge science and scientists in order to achieve its goal formulated in the EU 2020 Strategy, namely to become a smarter and greener social market. For this purpose, European research needs to reach all its potential contributors. This is especially important with regard to women scientists - given the substantial gender imbalance in science, where women represent more than half of the students' population, but hold on average only 18% of senior academic positions (*She Figures 2009*). In its resolution of 21 May 2008 on Women and Science (2007/2206(INI)) the European Parliament has called on the Commission in resolutions 5, 10, 14,15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 27 and 29 to take different measures for increasing the number of women scientists and their responsibilities and to improve their work-life balance, which should benefit all scientists, men and women.

Traditionally, research agendas have not taken the specific needs of women into account. However, if society is to develop a better understanding and acceptance of the advancements in science and technology, specific measures must be taken to address both the under-representation of women in science, and the lack of attention for gender differences in research. Moreover, the equal representation and the contribution of women in top panels addressing the future trends of science require special attention. A strong and coherent policy for equal opportunities in research is an integral part of a high-quality oriented scientific culture of Europe and is therefore a precondition for a strong and globally competitive European Research Area.

Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

In *boys and girls education* over Europe, a greater emphasis on gender equality and education to gender equality should be introduced. To motivate young people for science and technology,

¹ Preparing Europe for a New Renaissance, A Strategic View of the European Research Area, First Report of European Research Area Board, 2009, p. 18.

female and male scientists need to act as role models. Such activities have to be continuous as the generations of young people are constantly renewed.

In the European Research Area (ERA), Benchmarking of European universities should take gender equality policy as one criterion of excellence: this is already the case in the USA, where the ADVANCE programme of the National Science Foundation concerns the increase of the number of women in renowned universities, and the same principle has been applied in enterprises where Corporate Social Responsibilities include elements on how to close the gender gap.

Attractive career prospects for men and women scientists are mentioned in the Consultation. This includes the conditions of mobility but also the problem of dual careers (see below). A gender-balanced ERA should provide jobs, which allow at least a medium term security in terms of duration and payment, and structures that set the frame for at least a medium term planning of scientific careers.

Gender diversity in research and research leadership contributes to greater *innovation*. It renders research more creative and will therefore ultimately result in a higher likeness and success of innovation. To ensure the production of knowledge matching the interest of all European citizens, it is of crucial importance that European research takes the gender dimension and the reality of social differences and inequalities between men and women in our societies into account.

An encompassing scientific culture acknowledges that the integration of the gender dimension in research is essential if scientific results are to reflect the complexity of the whole and go beyond the partial. It also acknowledges that gender activities have to be mandatory, and this already at the proposal stage of funding schemes.

The selection of who is deemed *excellent* and who is deemed innovative is not free of subjective, often gender-biased, perspectives and therefore needs careful examination: “excellence” is established through a social (decision) process involving various stages – through visible indicators of “quality” (such as publications, social network, behaviour), criteria (such as research agenda, bibliometrics) and procedures (such as gatekeepers, transparency, accountability) and hence influenced by and dependent on a specific social context. As a consequence, not always the most innovative ideas or the best researchers will succeed in open competition. (See for example the 2009 EU report *The Gender Challenge in Research Funding – Assessing the European National Scenes*).

Defining fair, objective and stimulating assessment criteria for scientific excellence is in the interest of all researchers, research organizations, universities and industries as well as of society as a whole, because this is the only way to create, identify and maintain excellence throughout the European Research Area. Any strategy to increase innovation and research quality in Europe by promoting scientific excellence, therefore, should encourage a debate on excellence and innovation and ensure that all stakeholders, women and men researchers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and at different stages of their careers, are heard in the process.

Empowering people in inclusive societies

EPWS fully supports the European Commission’s objective of “empowering people in inclusive societies”. EPWS would like to add that in order to fully achieve this goal, the consideration of gender is essential. The periods that have to be considered for *better transitions in the work life*, as mentioned in the Consultation, must include maternity leave for women, responsibilities in child care and education for both parents and also in elderly parents care.

All *skills* need to be mobilised, including those of women, who represent more than half of the students in Europe. (See European Commission, *She Figures 2009*)

For a gender-balanced European Research Area, an encompassing scientific culture needs to consider the structural conditions for those it wants to encourage to work in science. It is important to note that obstacles for *mobility* are especially high for women in research as they often take the major part of caring responsibilities. Women are also more likely than men to forfeit their own career prospects for the mobility of their partner. Mobility can therefore force some researchers to choose between career and private life. This obstacle should be addressed among the initiatives to be proposed. Incentives such as employers seeking career opportunities for researchers' spouses or partners (especially also for academic couples) or overall packages including child care facilities, and other measures to help maintaining a family or relationship, could be set. Large enterprises have successfully established similar activities and could serve as best-practice examples.

In conclusion, the strategy to make EU a smarter, greener social market involves *both men and women*. An essential impetus was given by Directorate General Research on the Women and Science issue over the last ten years. EPWS hopes that the European Union will continue to play this role, to the benefit of its international competitiveness and that of its Member States.

How the architecture of scientific culture being envisioned by scientists and politicians of both genders will be shaped and eventually realised in Europe and in the European Research Area, will strongly influence the attractiveness of science and research careers as such and, therefore, also the future of science in society.

Contact details for further correspondence:

Dr. Brigitte Mühlenbruch

President

brigitte.muehlenbruch@epws.org

Prof. Claudine Hermann

Vice President

claudine.hermann@polytechnique.edu