

Statement by the President of the Academia Europaea

Professor Sierd Cloetingh

I was deeply honoured by the unanimous support expressed by the members of our Academy when they recently voted at our 26th AGM, held in Barcelona, to elect me as the sixth President of this unique institution.

The vision behind the founding of the Academia Europaea 25 years ago is still very much alive: bringing together scientists from the highest possible calibre, irrespective of their scientific discipline and country of residence in Europe, to address, in a bottom-up manner, cross-border scientific challenges and issues of common interest.

In doing precisely this, Academia Europaea has created a unique platform bringing all too frequently separated scholars from the natural sciences and the humanities together. In doing so it has necessarily mixed cultures from different geographic areas of Europe. This has not only been a rich cultural and scientific experience for those that have been part of the process of building up Academia Europaea in the past 25 years, but it is also of vital importance in order to set the stage for truly interdisciplinary research and research training – one of the greatest challenges of the coming decades.

In my own field of science - Earth Sciences - Academia Europaea has served as the catalyst in setting the stage for many cross-border research initiatives in Europe. In this spirit, I have myself as Section chair under the auspices of AE, promoted with the Section, the creation of the pan-European collaborative research programme TOPO-EUROPE, now in existence for 10 years, which has generated research opportunities for close to 100 young researchers from all over Europe, attracting over 30 Million Euro of funding for collaborative multidisciplinary research, with great societal relevance in areas such as natural hazards and energy resources.

Promoting scientific excellence and seeing it spread over the whole of Europe, thereby making Europe a more attractive place to be for future researchers in a world of strong competition is another key priority.

I have been very happy to contribute actively to this through my membership of the Scientific Council of the ERC, a body perceived widely as the flagship for identifying and selecting scientific research in a fully bottom-up spirit. Linking scientific excellence to innovation for the mutual benefit of both of them is another prime challenge, especially for Europe. Based on my experience as member and chair of ERC's working group for industrial relationships and innovation, which developed the ERC Proof of Concept scheme, I envisage a pro-active role also here for Academia Europaea. I have also recently been honoured to be appointed as a Vice President of the ERC effective from 1 January 2015.

As promoter of close to 70 PhD students from 20 different nationalities including many from Central and Eastern Europe, I have always been very much impressed by the drive and the self-organising capacity of young researchers. It is also in this context that I am very pleased with the initiative of a group of ERC starting grantees to create the Young Academy of Europe under its first president Andre Mischke. I am very happy I have been able in my capacity as ERC Council member and Vice-President of Academia Europaea to facilitate the creation of this Young Academy and its affiliation to Academia Europaea. Under my Presidency we will work to support and build this younger base of European excellence.

The creation of the regional knowledge hubs is another novel development, spreading the organization of activities of Academia Europaea further all over Europe.

The Wroclaw knowledge hub has been operational now for almost three years. It has a strong portfolio of new activities and regional links, especially in the humanities and the organization of the 25th Jubilee Academia Europaea annual conference last year. The staff there are working hard and will continue to get our support. The Barcelona knowledge hub has started more recently its activity, preparing a range of high profile events and links and has just delivered a wonderful annual assembly. A strong calendar of events is planned. In 2014 we have seen the successful launch of our third Hub. Our Norwegian colleagues have taken the initiative for this thematic hub in Bergen, with a possible focus on energy, resources and sustainability in the Arctic. We expect a lot from the team in Bergen.

All these initiatives show the commitment of a broad segment of Europe's scientific community to the Academia Europaea mission and the credit that Academia Europaea has built up. At the same time, it is evident that there is an increased need for coordination of the different activities of the regional knowledge hubs to ensure maximum synergy and benefit to the membership of Academia Europaea. It is here, where I see the need to strengthen the organizational base for the headquarters of our Academy in London.

I also see the need to reinforce the dialogue between the different sections. I strongly support the creation of a platform where the section chairs can meet to discuss issues of common interest, including cross section activities. I propose to better benefit from our multi-disciplinarity to bring together scholars and scientists from different fields for brain storming and a fruitful dialogue during our annual or ad hoc meetings. I will create new schemes to help support this.

We have to increase the involvement of the membership, and we will work with our Sections to deliver a more effective and efficient system for cross disciplinary exchanges, events and also widen the franchise of the members through establishing electronic ballots.

This brings me to the final issue: the financial base of Academia Europaea. Obtaining funding for an Academy as such is not a trivial matter, as experienced by numerous previous presidents. Securing funding for attractive activities, with an outward looking perspective is

obviously key. At the same time, we need to fully mobilize the membership at large, benefitting of the synergy of Academia Europaea and the Young Academy of Europe. Common efforts by the London office and the regional knowledge hubs are essential here.

Summarizing: I see the following priorities for the new President and the Board;

- Widening and intensifying participation of the membership, promoting synergy between Academia Europaea and the Young Academy of Europe.
- Strengthening the role of the sections, enhancing their effectiveness and interaction.
- Strengthening the internal organization and financial sustainability of Academia Europaea.

I hope over the coming weeks as we head to the close of 2014, my Board and I will set up a number of consultations with you the members, on a new business plan for the AE and also announce plans for a radical re-orientation of our structures and some aspects of our governance so that we can set the stage for a dynamic future development period.

I intend to try to publish regular (electronic) newsletters to keep you in touch. So please do make sure that your contact details are up-to-date in our database and keep your personal webspace topped up with news and information and interesting news.

Sierd Cloetingh
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