

20 May 2011

**Response of the European Platform of Women Scientists to the
Public Consultation on the Green Paper
“From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU
Research and Innovation Funding”**

“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.

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS welcomes the invitation of the European Commission to comment on the Green Paper on a common strategic framework for EU research and innovation funding which calls for “a public debate on the key issues to be taken into account for future EU research and innovation funding programmes” and encourages “research, [...] and civil society communities and citizens” to engage in the debate.

Strengthening the role of women in science and innovation (Questions 7, 11, 14, 24)²

Gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in science and research is a precondition and a fundamental element for achieving the European Research Area (ERA) and the realisation of sustainable growth in Europe. Against this background, the gender dimension needs to become one of the main factors in marking the performance indicators of EU research and innovation, supported by and including the following actions:

- introduction of mandatory gender marks in FP8 to reinforce their importance in the evaluation process
- setting of gender indicators concerning the participation of women in EU funded research projects at all levels (young scientists, senior scientists, projects leaders, consortium managers) and sanctioning their absence
- setting of gender indicators concerning the gender dimension in the research design of EU funded projects and sanctioning their absence
- publication of gender indicator results to stimulate Member States and institutions toward change
- increased cooperation among all European institutions concerned with equal opportunities in science and research, such as DG Research and Innovation, DG Justice, DG Employment and Social Affairs, DG Information, the European Gender Institute, and DG Education to produce efficiency and avoid costly redundancies
- strengthening the role of women in science and innovation by enrolling excellent girl students in these fields. Already existing EU efforts, e.g. measures like “Women Science Ambassadors” must be continued and new actions towards parents and educators must be taken
- raising the prestige of scientists and the motivation for all types of science among the general public and girls and boys. This would require reinforced links with national education systems and with DG Education

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

² The numbers in brackets refer to the questions proposed in the EU Commission’s Online Questionnaire for the Green Paper on a common strategic framework for EU research and innovation funding.

- increasing research funding to support gender studies beyond the *status quo* to interpret results and propose innovative solutions
- continuing the publication of gender-disaggregated statistics in *She Figures* to allow a long-term comparison and a study of the evolution
- continuing to stimulate institutional change in research organisations

Toward a gender-sensitive notion of excellence (Questions 21, 22)

In the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Union set itself the objective to increase spending on R&D to reach 3% of GDP by 2020. To achieve scientific excellence and ensure technological innovation in such a strengthened research effort, the EU must significantly increase the number of female researchers among the estimated additional researchers to work on the increased research budgets. Using the full potential and scientific excellence of women scientists, therefore, is a precondition and key for a strong scientific culture and the realization of the 2020 objectives and the Innovation Union.

It is in the interest of any future oriented research policy, therefore, to encourage a revised gender sensitive notion of excellence as a guideline for future reference. In this process, a diverse composition of research groups as well as gender awareness. The still existing gender bias in current ways of defining and evaluating of scientific excellence needs to be genuinely looked at with a view of seeing how a more open and inclusive, gender-sensitive understanding of excellence could be created. When assessing the quality of scientific work it needs to be acknowledged that scientific excellence is multidimensional. Who is 'excellent' and what is 'excellence' in science is established through a social (decision) process of 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.

A more objective notion of excellence and innovation takes contextual factors into account and understands “Excellence” as outstanding achievements in science and research through which the researcher, under consideration of age, societal commitment, scientific environment and research experience, responds to the requirements of innovation, social responsibility, the need for interdisciplinarity, management abilities (team-building, supervision) as well as the ability to communicate science to society.

A more inclusive understanding of and an interdisciplinary approach to the concept of innovation are needed, so that “Innovation” may not only refer to the process and its outcomes through which new ideas respond to societal or economic demand and generate new products. The concept of “Innovation” also needs to include the improvement of societal structures and the creation of social innovation. Social Sciences, the Humanities, Gender Research and social and organizational innovations are fundamental to the goals of the European Union in this respect and their impact need to be acknowledged and emphasized more strongly.

Mobility in a gender-sensitive scientific culture (Question 23)

EPWS fully acknowledges the need for researchers' mobility within the European Union to ensure the full implementation of the ERA and make Europe the first knowledge based economy in the world. The requirement of mobility, however, affects women and men researchers in different ways and to different degrees. This holds especially true for:

Social security and pension rights

Policy makers have to take into consideration that mobile women researchers, for various reasons, tend to be disproportionally disadvantaged regarding their future pension rights due to often longer periods of stipend- or fellowship-based qualification, not eligible for social security, and a very likely higher number of often relatively poorly endowed short-term or part-time contracts and periods of unemployment in between.

Caring responsibilities

Mandatory mobility may also force researchers with caring responsibilities to choose between career and private life. Since caring responsibilities for children and/ or elderly parents are still predominantly assumed by women, obstacles to mobility, therefore, may be higher for women scientists than for their male colleagues; this is particularly true when age requirements are involved. Women researchers also, more often than men, tend to live in dual career couples.

Against this background, EPWS encourages the adoption of mobility policies, measures and procedures that support the mobility of researchers that take into consideration the gender dimension of the issue by ensuring the following:

- easily accessible and comprehensive information on pensions rights in security systems
- specific attention to social differences and potential differences and inequalities between men and women in the design of social security and pension rights
- inclusion of stipends, especially PhD-grants, into social security relevant income (as already practised by some member states, e.g. France)
- more possibilities for short term stays rather than long term stays for men and women scientists with caring responsibilities
- better possibilities for dual research couples
- better possibilities for family-take-along
- adequate childcare possibilities at research institutions throughout Europe

Without consideration of the above, a mandatory mobility as a precondition to career advancement in Europe might counteract the Commission's parallel endeavours to increase the number of women in science and research.

Responding to the need of civil society involvement (Questions 1, 5, 6, 13, 27)

Civil society consists in the general public and in organised structures like networks or associations. Gathering a wealth of informed suggestions and ideas these Civil Society Organisations (CSO) complement the policy initiatives of national governments and EU institutions "bottom-up". As such, CSOs like EPWS constitute an important voice also in the European research and innovation policy debate.

Considering the present administrative and financial rules of EU research funding from a practical and financial point of view, however, CSOs have great difficulty in participating in European projects in spite of their often high expertise at European level. The emphasis on project funding, pre- and co-financing requirements and the need for CSOs to secure their running costs often enough prevent their participation in EU research funding schemes:

- Smaller CSOs need strong consortium partners when applying for calls and tenders and cannot assume the role of consortium leader. EU funding is tailored towards big institutions with a long-term financial background. Small CSOs have no big institution, a university or a research organisation, backing it to cover part of the running costs or help with co-financing and pre-financing engagements.

- It is next to impossible to secure funding for the *running* costs of an organization since most resources granted by public or private institutions are funds for *projects* or particular *services*. The contributions to administrative costs which remain within EU grant schemes and other possible grants only finance a very small fraction of an association's running costs.
- Due to the absence of a European association statute and the lack of law recognising sponsorship at EU level, a company or foundation based outside the country where a CSO is registered will get no tax return for their amount donated. Voting such law in EU Parliament and applying it in the Member States would greatly help strengthening the voice of CSOs at European level since member networks of CSOs, often notoriously under-funded themselves, are unable to cover the most substantial sum of the running costs of an association by their membership fees.
- The large amount of voluntary work per annum performed by many CSO members often amounting to a total of over € 100,000 p.a. cannot be brought into the calculation when applying for grants and projects at European level.
- Even though the Commission solicits the opinion of CSOs in their consultation processes the Commissions feedback mechanism with respect of the entries and opinions received could be greatly improved. To increase active CSO involvement in research at EU level in, more explicit interaction with the participants of public consultations is needed to give CSOs a sense that their input is valued and taken into consideration.

Contact details for further correspondence:

Dr. Brigitte Mühlenbruch

President

brigitte.muehlenbruch@epws.org

Prof. Claudine Hermann

Vice President

claudine.hermann@polytechnique.edu

European Platform of Women Scientists

Rue d'Arlon 38

B-1000 Bruxelles

www.epws.org