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EuCheMS

The newly formed European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences is bridging national cultures to bring European chemists together.

As the European Union celebrates its 50th birthday and significant movement in the last 10 to 15 years towards increased economic and governmental cooperation, it is clear that the European Union's influence on European science has also grown. With these changes, there has arisen a need for European-wide scientific organizations that can interact with the European Commission, a governing body of the European Union, in shaping science funding and policy decisions. First envisioned in 2005 and legally established in March 2006, the European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences (EuCheMS; www.euchems.org), says President Giovanni Natile, "aims to provide a single voice for chemistry in Europe."

Historically, each European country had one chemistry society, and in fact many countries had more than one. EuCheMS now unites 50 chemical societies that together represent 150,000 members from over 35 countries, and this new body extends beyond EU borders to comprise most European nations, including Russia. "A primary goal of EuCheMS is to foster interactions between European chemists," says Natile, "and so the first task was to

organize a European chemistry conference, because for 50 years there had not been one." The resulting 1st European Chemistry Congress (www.euchems-budapest2006.hu/) was held August 27-31, 2006 in Budapest, Hungary. With almost 2,500 participants from 57 countries, the conference was by all accounts a huge success. Building on this momentum, the 2nd EuCheMS Chemistry Congress will be held September 16-20, 2008 in Torino, Italy (www.euchems-torino2008.it/site/home.asp). With an eye toward the future, EuCheMS has launched initiatives to support young chemists in Europe. The first European Young Chemists Awards were announced at the Budapest congress. From approximately 120 applications submitted by chemists under 35 years old, 14 people were selected to give presentations at the congress. The finalists included 8 women and 6 men working in 9 different countries, highlighting the diversity of Europe's next generation of chemists. "This was very successful," Natile says. "The talks from these young scientists exceeded anyone's expectations." At the Budapest meeting, EuCheMS also initiated a European Young Chemists network, which provides opportunities for scientists in

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the early stages of their careers to interact with each other and to contribute to the development of European initiatives.

EuCheMS is organized into thematic divisions, with the interface of chemistry and biology falling into the Division for Chemistry in Life Sciences. Ivano Bertini is the chair of the division, and as Natile describes, "Ivano Bertini is really the one who has started this recent, but very successful, division." Bertini believes that biochemistry has not been given sufficient prominence in European national chemical societies. In an effort to correct what he sees as an important oversight, the mission of the EuCheMS Chemistry in Life Sciences Division, says Bertini, "is to give visibility to biochemistry within the chemical sciences." As part of this effort, Bertini has started a series of European Conferences on Chemistry for Life Sciences, the second of which will take place in Wroclaw, Poland from September 4-8, 2007 (www.lifesciences2007.uni.wroc.pl/). These conferences will be biannual, in alternating years from the EuCheMS congresses, and will provide an important gathering place for scientists at the chemistry and biology interface.

EuCheMS efforts to increase interactions among European scientists are particularly important in light of the EU goal of fostering cooperation among nations. This EU policy is reflected in the guidelines of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7; <http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/>), a new European Commission program that will fund Europeanwide research from 2007 through 2013. With a budget of around €55 billion, Natile notes that "this is estimated to be 5% of the total amount of money that individual European nations dedicate to research." However, in contrast to national funding agencies, much of the FP7 money can only be used for cooperative programs. "To apply you have to set up a network in which at least three European countries are represented," says Natile, "and this is not only for public, but also for private research." As Bertini points out, "the need for transnational teams can be seen as a drawback, but it is also a way to build up Europe."

As part of FP7, the European Research Council (ERC; <http://erc.europa.eu/>) was established at the end of 2006 to fund basic research. The ERC will only have a small portion of the amount of money allocated to FP7. "What we hope," Natile says, "is that they will deal with 1 or 2 billion euro per year." Given the limited budget, the first call for proposals is specifically targeted to young investigators. "For young investigators," Natile says, "it can be difficult to compete successfully with well-established groups for funding." Because of this, EuCheMS supported the idea of targeting ERC funding to young investigators, and Natile expects that around 10% of the money will go toward funding chemistry.

"In order to get the benefit from the money the European Union

devotes to research," Natile notes, "we have to strengthen relationships among individual scientists of different nations." The EuCheMS chemistry congress and the European EuCheMS divisional conferences are important catalysts for, as Bertini says, "lowering barriers to interaction." One main challenge for EuCheMS in working toward uniting European chemists is, Natile says, "to find a way to go from a format in which we have 50 chemical societies as members to a format in which 150,000 individual chemists feel that they are direct members." As part of this effort, EuCheMS distributes quarterly newsletters that communicate information to individual members of the EuCheMS member societies, so that, describes Natile, "they know the projects that are going on at the European level, opportunities for applying for funding, and how to meet others to make a joint application."

The chemical societies of many European countries have traditionally been strong forces in international chemistry. The increased collaboration between European national chemical societies and European chemists that is being fostered by EuCheMS will likely serve to further strengthen national chemical societies. Additionally, having a strong European association to advocate for chemical research within the European Commission is critical. "The risk," says Natile, "is that if you are not there and present, chemistry could just be bypassed." Judging from the early success of EuCheMS, the voice of chemistry will certainly be heard as the European Union moves beyond 50.



Giovanni Natile