

Academia Europaea: Origin and Early Days

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The Academia Europaea had its origin in a proposal that came in 1984 from the UK Department of Education and Science. This led to a Foundation Meeting in Cambridge in September 1988 attended by 54 of the Founding Members. They set up the formal framework and this provided the basis of the first Plenary Meeting held in London in June 1989.

It was the summer of 1984 and Peter Brooke, at that time the member of the UK government responsible for science policy, together with his Scientific Advisor, Professor Robin Nicholson, were considering new initiatives that might improve science in Europe. One possibility was the creation of a body of the best scientists in Europe that corresponded to the role the Royal Society played in the UK. Robin Nicholson was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and he understood it well as a prestigious association of individual natural scientists elected on their merits and free of political and other responsibilities and was well aware of the important role that it played in the scientific life of the UK. Would a similar organisation in Europe be able to play a comparable role? This began to take shape as a possible proposal to be raised at a meeting of European Ministers responsible for science that would take place in Paris that September. It would be prudent to find out how the Royal Society would react to such a proposal, so Nicholson came to discuss it with the President of the Royal Society, Sir Andrew Huxley, and its Foreign Secretary (me). I then discussed it with a small group of colleagues who gave it rather cautious support, no doubt at least in part due to its origin from a politician. Sir Andrew conveyed this response to Brooke. It was clear that the objective of the proposed organisation had to be well defined and particularly in the sense of how it could fulfil a function distinct from the existing organisations in European Science, notably the European Science Foundation.

Peter Brooke went to the meeting in Paris on 17 September 1984 with a well-developed proposal, which was received with considerable support from other

science ministers, notably the host, the French Science minister, Hubert Curien, who was enthusiastic.

Brooke's proposal was to emphasise how important science was for the future of Europe and the need for scientists to overcome the barriers due to 'history, psychology and prejudice, barriers not easily overcome just by administrative action'. He asked, 'Do we need a "Focal point for individual scientists.... is there a gap which might be filled by a fellowship of European scientists, a prestigious, self regulating body which fulfils the function of a national academy but on a European basis." ... "free from political interference and without the mediation of national institutions" ... "the initiative would be more profound if designed by the scientific community" and "it would be enhanced if it were to capture the imagination of the great foundations and companies in our individual countries".'

This more detailed proposal was brought to the President of the Royal Society and its Foreign Secretary by a letter from Peter Brooke on 30 September 1984 and a visit from Robin Nicholson. Once more, the Foreign Secretary organised a meeting of a few Fellows and the Officers of the Society, who was rather more positive, and after a meeting with Mr Brooke, the President wrote to him on the 19 November 1984 giving support, but emphasising the need to define the objectives of the new body and particularly to develop a good relation with the European Science Foundation and indeed to avoid any conflict of interests.

However, shortly thereafter, Mr Brooke moved to another government post. The new Minister for Science did not feel positive about the initiative and it was not until December of the following year that the Minister came to the Royal Society and, among other matters, this idea came up again, this time in a slightly more positive manner. This led to yet another meeting of some senior British scientists held in May 1986 under my chairmanship; this meeting included Brian Flowers who had been President of ESF. The participants gave the proposal strong support and, in consequence, the Royal Society decided to develop the idea.

So far, this had been a British initiative and the time had come to see how our European scientific colleagues would react, and a first meeting was held at the Royal Society in October 1986, with Jose Canovas from Spain, Mauro Cappelletti from Italy, Hubert Curien from France, Ruurd van Lieshout from the Netherlands, David Magnusson from Sweden, Eugen Seibold from Germany and Brian Flowers and me from the UK, and with Stephen Cox from the Royal Society acting as our secretary. Up to this point the definition of Science that we had in mind was the British one that applied to the Royal Society as the 'natural sciences'. However, the meeting was in favour of the wider definition akin to the German *Wissenschaft*, for which there is no precise equivalent in English, the nearest being scholarship or learning. Therefore, we needed to strengthen the group with representatives of the humanities and social sciences; this discussion highlighted the divisions that were present in the representation of knowledge in most countries that we might try to overcome. Many of the

most valuable advances in current science involved collaboration across disciplines. For instance, the great advances in molecular biology were due to collaboration between medical doctors, biologists, chemists, physicists and mathematicians, but now increasingly also philosophers and sociologists. In astronomy, as this extrapolated back to an origin of the Universe, theology and historical and anthropological considerations of human life came into focus.

However, any organisation that covers a very wide field while stimulating interdisciplinary goals must primarily serve the interest of those scholars, who will probably be the majority, whose focus is narrower. This required that election should be based only on standing in scholarship, and that full provision should be made for specialised activities as well as interdisciplinary ones.

Much of the discussion centred on the identification of the role of such a society and particularly the distinction from the European Science Foundation, which was seen as an organisation bringing together national organisations concerned with research. However, this new body was to be composed of individual scientists not representing nations or parent organisations, nor subject to political control. However, it was essential that close and cordial relations should be established with the ESF.

The following meeting, held at the headquarters of the ESF in Strasbourg in December 1986, concentrated on relations with the EC, the ESF, National Governments and National Academies of Science. Whilst the EC supports many cultural and scientific activities at the level of governments and in developing countries within EFTA, it did not have an organisation of the type we were proposing and it should find the new initiative an important contributor to its overall interest in developing European cohesion. The ESF founded in 1974, brought together organisations concerned with research in Western Europe, and has led to important joint activities such as EMBO, ESA and CERN; it was essentially complementary and this should form the basis of a fruitful collaboration.

There was a European Academy of Arts, Sciences and Humanities (EASSH), based in Paris, founded in 1979. Its membership was restricted to 160 drawn from senior members of national academies and those recognised by Nobel Prizes or similar awards, including from Eastern Europe. It was closely associated with UNESCO and had as its very worthy declared objective the pursuit of peace through collaboration.

Any European organisation needed to give thought to the difficulties in the definition of Europe! Political reality meant that a definition of geographical Europe, including the Eastern area, seemed impractical. On the other hand, a country such as Israel, which was intellectually European in outlook, was outside any geographical definition. It was agreed that the initial definition would be of the countries making up the Council of Europe, comprising just ten states. This was the definition also used by the ESF and would almost certainly need later review.

Ordinary membership would be restricted to scholars normally resident in Europe, without national or subject quotas. The ultimate size might reach even 5000 but no statutory limitation was foreseen. Election would be through subject committees. There should be four categories of members: Ordinary, Emeritus, Honorary and Foreign. Ordinary members should be under the age of 70 at election and all Ordinary members would become Emeritus upon reaching the age of 70. The reasoning behind this provision was to ensure that younger candidates were fairly considered and to prevent the organisation becoming geriatric! In retrospect it seems curious that this ruling was so specific and indeed maintained even up to the Foundation Meeting. Members will know how much discussion there has been about academic retirement particularly in recent years: this regulation has not been implemented. The recruitment of members would occur by stages, first to another 20 and then to about 100.

An organisation of individual scholars has no obvious 'parent organisation'; could it expect to receive financial support from the EC or from national research funding organisations? Money would be needed for the basic functions, running an office with a minimum complement of staff including a Secretary General, for Council Meetings and the Foundation Meeting. The Royal Society had generously funded the costs of our exploratory meetings. While we would expect to find one-off grants for special events and also short term grants of a few years there needed to be the stability provided by a capital endowment that could be sought from Foundations and individual donors. It was decided against members paying a subscription at this stage, but it became a continuing item on the agenda.

We agreed that London was a suitable initial home.

At a meeting in May 1987 a précis of the aims and activities of the new society were defined.

An approach to the Advisory Board of the Research Councils (ABRC), the UK overall funding organisation, had been favourable and this had generously agreed to find suitable premises and to fund costs at least for the first five years. We hoped we might get a corresponding response from other funding bodies, such as DFG, CNRS, CNR.

The meeting on 11 December 1987 was the first at which the augmented group met, which now included Nils Erik Enkvist, Renate Mayntz, Torsten Hägerstrand and Jacques Tits. This group would be responsible for drawing up a list of about 100 scholars who would be invited to become founding members of the new academy.

The Constitution of the Academia was now considered in some detail and it was agreed that *Academia Europaea* was the most suitable name.

At the meeting in March 1988, we selected the scholars who were to be invited to become Founding Members of the Academia and to attend the Foundation Meeting, which I had agreed to organise, in Cambridge on 5–6 September 1988. 125 names were accepted from a list covering the main headings of humanities,

social sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, biological and medical sciences. In addition, Arnold Burgen would act as interim President, and David Magnusson and Ruurd van Lieshout as interim Vice-Presidents, serving until formal elections could be held. The format of the Foundation Meeting was decided and the detailed Statutes for the Academia were considered.

I had ceased to be Foreign Secretary in November 1986 and for the arrangements for the Foundation Meeting a temporary office for the Academia was found in Cambridge together with a part time secretary, Mrs Jan Morris.

The scene was thus set for the Foundation Meeting, which was held in two Cambridge colleges, Pembroke and Downing on 5–6 September 1988. Fifty-two of those invited were able to attend. The meeting had a wide ranging discussion of all aspects of the Academia.

The meeting did not accept a limitation of the scope of Europe but voted for the broad concept of Geographic Europe from the Urals to the Bosphorus, including the GDR and other parts of 'Eastern Europe'.

It was agreed that the procedure for election in the ensuing period would depend on nominations from at least three Foundation Members. There were to be no quotas of subjects or countries of origin.

A number of important amendments were agreed to the draft statutes and regulations, notably to election procedures and the length of service of Officers and Councillors. There would be no subscription and the financing of meetings should be treated separately from that of the core activities.

The proposals for the first Plenary Meeting to be held in London in 1989 were considered with the emphasis on inter-disciplinary areas. The meeting was in favour of issuing regular publications and reaching an agreement with a publisher. The meeting then voted to elect the first President, Vice-Presidents and Executive Council, the list presented by the organising group was accepted *nem con*.

On the afternoon of 5 September, Hubert Curien, Ministre de la Recherche et de la Technologie de France, gave an address in which he described various European initiatives in science and technology and gave strong support for the new Academia Europaea.

In the evening, the members had dinner in the Hall of Pembroke College and after dinner heard a recital of music by Beethoven and Ravel by the Quatuor Parisii.

September 5, 1988 is thus the formal date of the foundation of the Academia Europaea. Figure 1 is a group picture outside the Pembroke Library and Figure 2 is the list of the First Officers and Council.

The New Council held its first meeting at 4 pm on 6 September and all except Professors Tits and Mayntz were present. After setting up a schedule for future meetings, and the Academia Europaea Trust, Trustees were appointed. Three members of the Council, Nils Enkvist, Brian Flowers and Jose Canovas were appointed co-ordinators for the election of new members. Revised arrangements of the selection



Figure 1. Members of the Exploratory Meeting outside Pembroke College, Cambridge

First Council of the Academia Europaea 1988.

President: Arnold Burgen

Vice-President: David Magnusson

Vice-President: Ruurd van Lieshout

Councillors:

José Canovas, Mauro Cappelletti, Nils Erik Enkvist

Brian Flowers, Renate Mayntz, Pericles Theocaris

Jacques Tits, Torsten Hägerstrand, Kristof Glamann,

Stephan Mueller, Jean-Claude Pecker

Heinz Staab, Herman van der Wee

Figure 2. The first Officers and Council of the Academia elected at the Exploratory Meeting in 1988

procedures and draft membership proposal form were promised. After a discussion on Finance several members undertook to approach contacts in banks, industry etc.

The format and possible subjects for lectures, symposia, and so on, to be delivered at the first Plenary Meeting of the Academia, which it proposed to hold in London in June 1989, were discussed, as were the appointment of a Secretary-general, the location of the office in London, a Certificate of membership and public relations. The meeting closed at 7 pm.

The first Plenary Meeting of the Academia was held in London at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference centre 26–27 June, 1989.

The morning was taken up with a Business Meeting; the President reported that the Academia now had 627 members coming from 20 countries, but there

was much to do to fill gaps. There were elections of a new Vice-President, Jean-Claude Pecker to replace Ruurd van Lieshout who had resigned, three new members of the Council, Aleksandra Kornhauser, Birger Munk Olsen and Hans Zachau; and David Spearman was elected as Honorary Treasurer.

The Academia had appointed an Executive Secretary, Dr Craig Sinclair (who was introduced at the meeting) and would shortly be moving into a fine office at 31, Old Burlington Street, London.

The main topic in the meeting was the difficult financial situation, members were asked to use their contacts to find new sources of support.

It was agreed that the meeting in 1990 should be in Strasbourg and Pierre Karli had agreed to act as its organiser.

After luncheon and an Introduction by the President, a keynote speech was given by Kenneth Baker, the current UK Secretary of State for Education and Science. This was followed by the Academia's first Symposium on 'The responsibility of the individual scholar to society' with presentations from Stig Strömholm, Reimar Lust and Philippe Meyer, followed by a Round Table Discussion in which the speakers were joined by Guiseppa Caputo, Pieter Drenth and Aleksander Koj.

In the evening there was a reception at the Durbar Court of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The following day there were two further symposia on 'The renewable resources of our planet' and on 'Human origin and future'.

There were a total of 190 participants, including some diplomats. This programme certainly lived up to our scenario of an interdisciplinary-international organisation.

My story effectively ends here, but it would be remiss if I did not enquire how far the Academia has come in achieving the goals that we set out in 1988. A list of the Donors from Academic organisations, charities, governments and business who had contributed by 1991 shows an impressive response and testifies to the welcome that the new body received.

The extraordinary range of recent meetings can be seen on the list to be found on our excellent website, and this journal first appeared in 1993.

The Academia established an Erasmus Medal in 1996, named after an outstanding European Scholar of the past and awarded annually to an eminent member of the Academia, recognising outstanding contributions to scholarship.

About the Author

Arnold Burgen is Emeritus Professor of Pharmacology, University of Cambridge, former Director, National Institute for Medical Research, UK and former Master, Darwin College, Cambridge. He was the founder and first Editor-in-chief of this journal.