Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1541 (2001)[1]

Young scientists in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Science is playing an increasingly important role in the development of modern societies. The production, acquisition and use of knowledge (through research, information, education, training, and technological development) form the foundation of the "knowledge society" that will further develop during the twenty-first century. An ethical environment is necessary to ensure that the rights of citizens are respected, but a strong scientific basis is essential for a country to remain a competitive player in a global economy.

2. It is therefore of strategic importance that satisfactory recruitment of young talented people to the science sector be secured. Science education in schools should be strengthened, as requested by the Assembly in its Recommendation 1379 (1998) on basic education in science and technology. The profession should be made more attractive for young scientists embarking on a career. Opportunities for co-operation between young scientists should be promoted.

3. Recommendation No. R (2000) 8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the research mission of universities is also of particular relevance in this context, as are Recommendations Nos. R (85) 21 on mobility of academic staff, R (95) 8 on academic mobility and R (96) 7 on regional academic mobility.

4. Other initiatives aiming at enhancing and encouraging research co-operation in Europe include the decision of the European Commission to create a European research area, the Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education on the European Higher Education Area (Bologna, 19 June 1999) and many activities of Unesco and the European Science Foundation.

5. The retirement en masse of the "baby boom" generation, which has shaped research, teaching and technological development in universities, laboratories and industry over the last thirty years, and the important and rapid development of new sectors such as biotechnology, information and communication technologies, make the training and recruitment of young scientists a crucial issue.

6. In those European countries which experienced important economic and social reforms during the last decade, it is urgent to re-create the conditions to counter the dramatic brain drain and to maintain and further develop a sound scientific capacity. The Assembly welcomes in this context Recommendation No. R (95) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on brain drain in the sectors of higher education and research.

7. European co-operation among young scientists will considerably contribute to maintaining and improving Europe's competitiveness in all areas. It could also speed up and facilitate the pooling of research resources and the creation of common research infrastructures. Encouraging these young scientists to participate actively in international and European network co-operation and to undertake part of their advanced training (doctoral studies or beyond) in another country will give them valuable experience of working in a multicultural environment. This was underlined in Committee of Ministers' Recommendation No. R (95) 18 on youth mobility.

1. Assembly debate on 28 September 2001 (32nd Sitting) (see Doc. 9185, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Wittbrodt). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 September 2001 (32nd Sitting).

8. Consequently and with due consideration to the findings of the Assembly's Pan-European Conference on Science and Technology in Europe – Prospects for the Twenty-first Century (Gdansk, 9 to 11 October 2000) as well as to the conclusions and recommendations of the European Forum of Young Scientists (Gdansk, 7 to 9 October 2000), the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

8.1. promote a pan-European space for young scientists, in co-operation with other organisations competent in this field such as Unesco, the OECD, the European Union (including the Marie Curie Fellowship Association), the European Science Foundation and the Association of European Universities; and to this end:

8.2. make a survey regarding the situation of young researchers and postgraduate students in Europe (European and non-European), in particular regarding recruitment, training, mobility, career prospects, research independence and equality issues, with a view to formulating policy advice to member governments and institutions of higher education and research for the promotion of young scientists and Europe-wide co-operation among them through appropriate mobility schemes;

8.3. invite member governments, and in particular those of European economies in transition, to ensure an adequate level of funding for research and technological development so as to retain young scientists and facilitate the return of those who might leave to study abroad;

8.4. encourage member governments and institutions of higher education and research to launch new strategies for the recruitment, training and career development of young scientists, and, where possible, harmonise these and relevant administrative conditions in order to improve the attractiveness of the scientific profession and redress the unequal situation of women scientists;

8.5. invite member governments to encourage regional, pan-European and international network co-operation, in particular with the Maghreb countries, among institutions of higher education and research with a view to improving research capacity and the fostering of excellence;

8.6. ask member governments, institutions of higher education and research and industry to encourage research co-operation and mobility among young scientists in Europe by giving support to short-term and long-term mobility schemes (also open to young non-European scientists);

8.7. invite member governments to give their support to the Unesco Venice Office Project for European Advanced Seminars for Young Scientists (EASYS – master classes in science), that fosters Europe-wide, transatlantic and Euro-Mediterranean short-term mobility, and to ask Unesco and its partners to reinforce this activity.