



Focus on France – The French Chemical Society Is 150 Years Old

Several of the national Chemical Societies of European countries agreed to merge their journals about 10 years ago and create a selected number of thematic European Journals. The 10th anniversary issues of the *European Journal of Inorganic Chemistry* (*EurJIC*) and of the *European Journal of Organic Chemistry* (*EurJOC*), two of the first such journals to see the light of day, will be published later this year. It is therefore not only appropriate, but also incumbent on the European Journals to highlight and contribute to the celebration of the important events of their owner societies. This year is marked by the sesquicentennial anniversary of the *Société Française de Chimie* (SFC, French Chemical Society), one of the oldest in the world. Apparently, only the RSC (UK) has older roots, while the chemical societies of Germany, the United States, and Japan, to name a few, were established later.

The SFC was founded in 1857, though under a different name that has evolved through changes of status and mergers. As a matter of fact, it will soon switch back to its previous name *Société Chimique de France*, or SCF. The purpose of the Society is to gather both natural persons and legal entities

from the public or private sector who are involved in the science of chemistry and its applications. It intends to contribute to the development of all aspects of the chemical disciplines, to be the center of information, to provide avenues for the meeting of interested members to diffuse their thoughts and propositions on questions of teaching and research, as well as on industrial, economical, and professional issues, and to represent its members and their disciplines within the society at large. The SFC is currently strong with ca. 4500 active members and has 9 thematic

divisions, 13 scientific groups, 15 regional sections, and 15 clubs for younger members. A scientific general meeting is held every two years, and numerous annual meetings are organized by the individual divisions. The Society bestows a number of prestigious awards on French and international chemists and assists young scientists in their entrance into active professional life with an employment clearing house. It publishes, since 1973, a monthly magazine “*L’Actualité Chimique*” for the broad dissemination of knowledge in the chemical sciences and co-publishes, together with other European Societies, the above-mentioned European Journals.

Last but not least, it cooperates with other national Chemical Societies through the European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences (EuCheMS).

This year’s meeting SFC07: “*Chimie du Futur, Futur de la Chimie*”, held in Paris between July 16 and 18, 2007, marks the celebration of 150 years of the French Chemical Society. It is impossible to summarize in this short Editorial the impact of the multiple activities that the Society has had in its long and distinguished history. A detailed account of these will appear in a feature article published by “*L’Actualité Chimique*”.

The co-ownership of *EurJIC* and *EurJOC* by the French Chemical Society fulfils one of its goals, to distribute research results. Part of the success of a chemical society (although by no means all of it) can be measured by the success of the research activities of its members. We would like to highlight this particular aspect in this Editorial. The impact of French chemistry research in the past 150 years has been enormous, as is detailed in the article by L. Lestel and I. Tkatchenko (pp. 2368–2371). One may ask the question: where does French chemistry research stand today? It is our proposition that modern French chemistry research is as lively and as vibrant as ever. This conclusion could be simply based on recent individual achievements, as measured, for instance, by recognition with international prizes, or by the number of publications in important international chemical journals. The percentages of papers published in *EurJIC* and *EurJOC* by French chemists are 9 and 12%, respectively, for the year 2006. These figures reflect the importance of French chemistry, in view of the fact that chemists from more than 30 countries publish in *EurJIC* and *EurJOC*. More important, in our opinion, is the active role that France plays in the process of globalization of research. Globalization is not only an economical, a cultural, and a technological phenomenon, but it also affects scientific research. This argument is not restricted to chemistry but applies to all scientific disciplines.

Like in many other European countries, funding of research in France relies in part on national resources (the Ministry of Research, through the newly created and inde-

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pendently run “Agence Nationale de la Recherche”, ANR, the “Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique”, CNRS, and local governmental authorities), but a major portion of research support originates from the European Commission through a multitude of transnational programs. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a leading actor in establishing bilateral scientific cooperation programs (called “Hubert Curien Partnerships”, currently extended to almost 50 countries in all continents). Other bilateral programs are sponsored in different forms by the CNRS, including the establishment of virtual thematic research institutes (“Laboratoire Européen Associé”, LEA; “Laboratoire International Associé”, LIA) or networks (“Groupe de Recherche Européen”, GDRE; “Groupe de Recherche International”, GDRI) that join researchers from France and from other countries on the basis of a common research goal. These cooperation activities are not restricted to other developed countries but also include, and in some cases target specifically, developing ones. The establishment of shared transnational supervision of Ph.D. theses is encouraged and financially supported. Finally, visits of international scientists at all levels are sponsored by a variety of programs offered by Universities (open positions for visiting professors), by the CNRS (post-doctoral and higher-level fellowships), and by the local governmental authorities.

It is likely that globalization of research will continue to expand and that a growing fraction of major advances in science will be achieved through international cooperation. Thus, France and the French scientists seem well equipped to participate in this game by playing a leading role. It is

worth underlining that the consolidation of the European Journals can be seen as an expression of this research globalization phenomenon and that chemists (by way of their national chemical societies) have been pioneers, at least at the European level. Within this operation, the French Chemical Society has been proactive since the very beginning of its history. As a matter of fact, the SFC was created by a group of European chemists, only a minority of whom were French. The first two presidents were an Italian (Jacques Arnaudon, from June 30 to the end of 1857) and a Norwegian (Hans Anton Rosing, from January to June 1858). French chemistry has been highly visible since the 19th century, and many European chemists, for instance Justus von Liebig, were attracted to France to pursue their training. In more recent times, besides the above-mentioned important role played in the creation of the new European Journals, the SFC has established, by agreement with its sister societies, binational prizes with Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, and, since last year, the United Kingdom. These prizes allow extensive scientific exchange through lecture tours of the recipients in the host countries.

To conclude, the SFC is an Old Lady who has found a way to continued youth. Let her live forever!

Bilateral Scientific Cooperation Programs

Globalization of Research

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