

## Editorial

## A role for Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) in the European Research Area (ERA)

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The Federation of Biochemical Societies is one of the largest organisations in European life sciences, with more than 40 000 members distributed among 40 Constituent and Associated Societies throughout Europe.

FEBS seeks to promote, encourage and support biochemistry, molecular cell biology and molecular biophysics throughout Europe in a variety of different ways, through a wide portfolio of activities. We fund advanced courses, provide various types of fellowships, publish primary research through our publications (*FEBS Letters* and the *European Journal of Biochemistry*), facilitate the exchange of information at our annual Congress, and award prizes and medals in recognition of scientific distinction.

Apart from being active in supporting the career of young scientists, women in science – via various working groups and committees –, we also support our colleagues in Central and Eastern Europe, e.g. by distributing surplus research materials via our Constituent Societies.

At this year's FEBS Council meeting, which took place in Istanbul on October 25, 2002, it was decided to expand the activities of FEBS, by establishing a Working Group that will be actively engaged in the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA).

ERA, a vision championed by Commissioner Phillippe Busquin, was endorsed by the member countries at the European Council meeting in Lisbon in June 2000. At this particular meeting, the European Union (EU) Heads of Governments agreed to make *the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth providing more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*. In addition, it was agreed that *research activities at national and EU level must be better integrated and co-ordinated to make them as efficient and innovative as possible, and to ensure that Europe offers attractive prospects to the best brains*.

Instruments to achieve ERA comprise so far the EU Framework Programme 6 (FP6), and a potential European Research Council (ERC<sup>1</sup>) that was discussed thoroughly at a recent conference in Copenhagen organised by the Danish Presidency of the EU<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this conference was to define the aims and needs of European research, to look at the pros and cons of establishing an ERC, and to discuss the options and alternatives. Specific points that were discussed included the mission of an ERC, funding instruments and research areas, as well as links to the existing research funding structure.

A majority of the conference attendees agreed that it was essential to have an ERC, and a summary of the main points raised at can be found on [http://www.forsk.dk/dkeuformand/erc\\_main\\_points.pdf](http://www.forsk.dk/dkeuformand/erc_main_points.pdf). The conclusions drawn at the meeting will be sent to Helge Sander, Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, who will inform the Competitiveness Council on November 26, 2002. It is expected that the Greek Presidency of the EU will follow up on the discussions early next year.

To ensure the participation of the scientific community in the initial stages of the ERC discussions, FEBS, the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO), and the European Life Sciences Forum (ELSF) will host a joint meeting on February 18–19, 2003 to discuss the need and priorities of the ERC initiative. The meeting will take place in Paris, under the auspices of UNESCO.

The window of opportunity is narrow, and therefore we must make all efforts to transform the ERC idea into an active political object.

Julio E. Celis  
Secretary General of FEBS

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<sup>1</sup> ERC could mean one or several research councils.

<sup>2</sup> 'Do we need a European Research Council?' Copenhagen, October 7–8, 2002.