

Europe wants excellence

M. Apostol

Department of Theoretical Physics, Institute of Atomic Physics,
Magurele-Bucharest MG-6, POBox MG-35, Romania
email: apoma@theory.nipne.ro

The European Council will hold soon a conference on excellence, and will issue thereafter a Declaration on Excellence, a first draft of which is already circulated in advance. The Council is made of heads of states and governments and assumes for itself the mission of defining the politics in Europe.

Of course, the politics in Europe (as everywhere) must do good to the people (to which ones? to all the people? to whom?, etc, etc are uncomfortable questions). The Council thinks that the Science and the Technology, achieved by scientific research and innovation, do good to the people, so the society should focus on them. Not anyhow, but in such a way as to make both research and innovation excellent. Without excellence Europe will definitely not have a good life.

"Incremental research of high productivity can reach levels which may be defined as excellent" is definitely a non-sense. It is the opening sentence of the Declaration. As if we could say that what is mean, poor and bad could be excellent concomitantly. However, we need something devastating, which would "change paradigms, open new fields and transform the society". This would be indeed excellent. But what would that be? The Declaration does not tell.

Between two extremes depicted vigourously in empty words the Declaration oscillates nonsensically. Poor words and lack of meaning are dangerous. Indeed, the Declaration calls for challenging the accepted knowledge and invites to the demolition of the science. The Declaration claims that the knowledge frontier would be a public good and of great benefit to the mankind. Would it? How many and to what extent, in what sense, do benefit from the quantum chromodynamics, quarks and the gravity in eleven dimensions? A good public good is the bread for everyone, tea and butter, and I would hardly say that this bit of food belongs to the knowledge frontier of modern science. The Declaration is a fanatic piece of absurd prose. Very artistical.

Indeed, it speaks also of "competition and internationally acclaimed experts". These two platitudes, stereotypes, too much used today in scientific research, are specific to a primitive society, where one needs to compete and fight with the others to get a piece of the knocked-down bear; there the most valient hunter is acclaimed indeed ("internationally") by all the tribe; with more definite societal consequences and rewards of course. The authors of the Declaration (heads of governments and states of Europe) reveal their primitive, tribal thinking of a predatory vision of the world and life.

For the Declaration's authors the scientific researchers should be brave, ambitious, iconoclast; turbulent, rowdy, tumultuous; and above all, especially "transversal and bottom up" (that means something different, "cross-disciplinary" probably, something new, forceful and good (is it a sexual conotation inescapable here? I do not hope to think so), the meaning is not very clear; but the

reader feels indeed something chilly, frightening, artistic indeed, as I do myself, while reading these words.

For fulfilling all this the scientific researchers need freedom, money and non-accountability, says the Declaration; love and pleasures I would add. Definitely not hard work, talent, modesty and faith in God. Excellence is no more "from caelum"; it is from Europe.

The Declaration is a stupid document, which reveals unfortunately the judgment weakness of its authors (heads of governments and states of Europe). It should be discarded and we should pray for these people.