

Young Scientists Workshop Prague, 25 April 2003

On Friday, 25 April 2003, Prague hosted the Young Scientists workshop, organised by the European Commission, the Science and Society section, and the National Contact Centre – Women in Science of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences CR. This workshop was part of a larger exercise of the European Commission: within the Women and Science Unit, an Expert Group of 15 female senior scientists has been set up by the Commission to study and report on the situation of women scientists in the Eastern and Central European countries and in the Baltic States. To learn more about this Group, called Enwise – Enlarge “Women in Science” to the East – and its activities, you can visit its website at the following address: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/science-society/women/enwise/index_en.html.

The related activities of the Group included organising a workshop on Young Scientists. The objective of this workshop was to provide an occasion for allowing a confrontation of the views of the Enwise Expert Group on the situation facing the younger generation of both male and female scientists in the Enwise countries with those of some of the representatives of this younger generation, in order to identify, with the panel that was set up, whether these young scientists feel themselves reflected in the approaches developed by the Enwise experts. The young scientists also commented on the issues of the brain-drain/brain-gain, and the attractiveness of a scientific career as seen from the young people's perspective etc. The general idea was also to give young people an opportunity to contribute their personal experiences and opinions to the debate, in order to expand the views Enwise members have on the problems young people are currently facing and on what might prevent them from staying either in their home countries or in a scientific career or even both. Each Enwise country was to be represented

by two persons (one male and one female scientist), who had been through a Mobility scheme, such as, in particular, the EU Marie Curie Fellowships; in the end, however, it was not possible to maintain the one male to one female ratio.

In the morning, the participants listened to contributions from individual European Commission and ENWISE experts participating in the workshop. Brigitte Degen, of the C5 – Women in Science unit, focused on the history and objectives of the section and the current exercise. João Pereira de Faria, of the C4 – Young People and Science Unit, presented the results of the recent Eurobarometer survey on the perception of science in Central and Eastern European countries, and went on to talk about EU scientific prizes, in particular the EU contest for young scientists. Bruno Schmitz, head of Unit Training Research Networks, presented the individual Marie Curie schemes. Representatives of the ENWISE experts from Estonia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic outlined the situation of young people and R&D in their respective countries. To close the morning session, Marcela Linkova, of the National Contact Centre – Women in Science, presented the results of a questionnaire that was distributed among the participants before the workshop. The questionnaire concerned young people's experiences with Marie Curie Fellowships, their perception of science and their scientific career, equal opportunities in R&D in their respective countries, and the attractiveness of science, and it highlighted gender differences in opinions that were revealed.

In the afternoon two sub-groups were created, wherein an effort was made to maintain a gender balance between the two sub-groups, as well as a balanced geographical distribution of the participants. Each sub-group was chaired by an Enwise expert. Marina Calloni, as the Enwise rapporteur, attended one hour in each sub-group, in order to ‘sense out’ any possible differences in the atmosphere.

The participants in each sub-group were

asked to choose a rapporteur from among themselves to take notes of the main points to be reported in the plenary session. The questions addressed in the afternoon debate were:

- What is your opinion on the status of science in your respective countries today? Do you agree or disagree with the Eurobarometer results? Do you or do you not share the views expressed by the Enwise experts in their morning presentations?

- From your point of view, what could attract most university graduates to become PhD. students and scientists in the future? What could attract most young scientists to take a post in a research institution (public or private)?

- Do you think there is a gender dimension in building a scientific career? Have you personally experienced that your gender has already had an effect on your own scientific path?

- What do you expect from EU Enlargement with respect to your position as a scientist?

- What would be your suggestions on what should be changed, and how, with respect to the present status of science and scientists in the society.

In general, it emerged out of the debate that the young people were confident, successful and able, after some difficulties, to secure financing for their research. A quite heated discussion ensued in one of the groups on the issue of equal opportunities and the position of women. The different experiences of men and women were discussed, with women drawing attention in particular to their denigration by older male scientists, and to the problems of harmonising a scientific career with family life. This issue was further highlighted by an 'involved father' among the men, who, with his personal experience, supported the claim that scientist-mothers and -parents in general face considerable difficulties in career building, owing to their preference for a different work-life balance.

Marcela Linková