

**Why should the MCFA (NOT ?)
"dissolve" in Euroscience ?**

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In former times, the MCFA created somehow the image of a kind of "holiday-organisation", where you could refund your travel costs to nice European locations, preferably in the South. Many new, current fellows do not know the organisation at all or do not see any benefit in joining the organisation anymore. Benefits like networking or an e-mail address at our web site are not stimulating sufficient interest.

The way out?!

Joining ES would foremost help on the administrative level. ES has a dedicated office in Strasbourg with permanent staff, who take care of administrative duties and facilitate the distribution of ideas and positions. Thus, the members themselves are free to invest their energy on textual and conceptual work and do not have to tackle onerous administrative tasks. This might mean, for example, that the editors of the MCFA Annals would only have to review the articles, while the relevant ES administrative staff would compile all the articles into a printable version for distribution. This would perhaps increase the number of people who are willing to invest a portion of their free time to pursue the goals of "Euroscience - subdivision MCFA". But is joining ES the right way to fight this dilemma? I think not! In the following section, I will try to clarify, why I think this way. In my opinion, joining ES would not mediate any significant change with respect to the commitment of the members. It is just another organisation far away from the daily life of many people. On a general administrative level, ES is an organisation similar to the MCFA. ES simply perform better than the MCFA in securing proper funding so as to have sufficient financial power to sustain their various activities. There will be a MCFA subgroup within ES, but to my mind, simply joining ES is only trying to win some time before the complete fadeout. This move would only have an effect on the administrative side of our organisation; it would not change anything regarding the member commitment to and identification of active people within the MCFA. So why join ES and loose the MCFA entirely? I do not think that the current lack of funding is the only question to deal with. We have to find out what we want to use our own engagement and energy for. The question of funding will resolve itself afterwards. If we know what we want to do regarding the content of our work, I am sure we will obtain the required funding. But in the beginning, we have to ensure that we have something to tell; that we have a clear idea of what we want to do and that there is a benefit to the continued

existence of the MCFA. ES succeeded in this for themselves and joining them would mean that we could benefit from their position. Again, that would mean losing, at least partly, our identity.

Concepts of the organisations

We currently display a lack of visible identity to the outside and, more crucially, to the inside. In this state, joining ES would mean losing our identity entirely and being fully incorporated into theirs. I do not like that idea, since I think the concepts of the two organisations are quite different. The MCFA started as an association of individuals, who were previously or are currently Marie Curie fellows. Quite elitist, one might say. However, it does express a commonality found between all members. ES, on the other hand, is an association of individuals who are in some way interested in the integration of European science. The focus of our organisation is oriented towards fellows living in a foreign country, with consequent emphasis on mobility issues in Europe. This would be just one item of several within an ES framework. However, one of the drawbacks of the MCFA is that we currently concentrate too much on simply giving advice about physical mobility, without pursuing other relevant issues at length. We should also examine career development both during and, especially, after completion of the fellowship. By doing so, the MCFA might affect a positive change in present scientific career structures, in which a stay abroad represents more often a "lost" period of time in the CV than a successful step in the career progression of young scientists. Think of how much more input we could give on how to live mobility in a sustainable way. The MCFA could highlight novel career concepts by providing examples of different ways of working and living within science. ES focuses very much on this issue and that is why joining forces could be of some benefit to both organisations. But again, why should we give up our identity? I think we can accomplish a fruitful co-operation with ES, without the need for complete merging. ES has a permanent office in Strasbourg. This is often mentioned as a major advantage of joining ES. The MCFA once had its own office (located in Brussels), which had to be closed due to lack of funding. Why is an office crucial? It provides an initial contact point. Moreover, the administration of members details can be handled here. The organisation would be considered as being "more present". The issue of membership administration has to be seen within the context of fee introduction. If we introduce fees, it is expected that about three quarters of the current membership will simply resign. We would then end up with about 500 members (any more than this, I would be very happy). Many organisations can arrange such an administration on the shoulders of voluntary workers without being

a complete mess. Moreover, we already have a very good web page and database of members (better than that of ES), which can and does take over several administrative tasks. I have to admit that some legal affairs still need written paperwork. Even in the time of the Internet and all the other electronic wizards, which help in daily life, paperwork is still needed (I'm glad it is this way!). However, is an office the only place to keep such documentation? Perhaps we should think about a more efficient way to keep the relevant paperwork and store the most important documents at the chair of our organisation. This is a point we have to discuss and solve during the following months. Currently, our organisation has a very low number of active members. To my mind, the administration of these can be accomplished without the need of a permanent office. If we grow, the number of active members and generated income will rise and we may have to then think about a permanent office. But why plan for that now? Good representation is crucial to the success of an organisation. ES is currently much better than we are at this level; I do not doubt that. ES has better contacts with the EC and other relevant organisations. By joining ES, our presence on the international ground would increase. At the moment, however, our internal presentation is as important as that perceived by the outside. Some time ago, the following statement was present on the MCFA website: "The MCFA is in a critical situation". That is true, but can we fight the crisis by concentrating only on how external entities view the MCFA? By solely concentrating on improving our external image, we cannot expect to raise the commitment of our current members or attract new ones. Joining ES would mostly have an effect on the outside, but leave the inner situation virtually unaffected. Why should somebody join "ES-subdivision MCFA", if he/she already does not know why she/he is a member of the MCFA nowadays?

Focus of the organisations

ES has a much more political focus than the MCFA. I am a relatively "new" member, being only about one and a half years within the MCFA. As I understood the MCFA, it is particularly dedicated to the topic of mobility within Europe. As active mobile researchers, we know where the current problems are and can advise as how to best change these. As each of our members either has worked or still works for a certain period in a foreign country, we share a common bond. In an organisation like ES, this focus on mobility issues would be broadened and political points-of-view on other special topics would be more prominent. These issues affect our daily life as scientists. There are perhaps a discrete number of members working in projects that, according to the point-of-view of ES (as detailed on their website), are not tolerable. For example, imagine a Marie Curie Fellow working in the area of stem cell research. Would this fellow remain outside?

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**"One never notices what has been done,
one can only see what remains to be done."
Marie Curie**