EUROPEAN DECLARATION FOR MICROBIOLOGY

The European Declaration for Microbiology presents to the General Public, the policy makers, the scientific community and our colleagues the viewpoints and goals of FEMS.

Microbiology, the science of microbes (viruses, bacteria, algae, protozoa and fungi) has a long and continuing tradition in Europe since Antonie van Leeuwenhoek working in Delft, The Netherlands, first reported his observations of algae, bacteria and protozoa to the Royal Society of London in 1676. In the last 200 years European scientists, such as Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch, Sergei N. Winogradsky and Martinus W. Beijerinck, have made most of the seminal advances in microbiology and rate as highly as scientists in any other field of discovery. This strong tradition of excellence in European microbiology continues today, European microbiologists continue to contribute to the most important advances in medicine, agriculture, biotechnology and basic sciences.

Microbiologists world-wide have organised themselves into scientific societies. In Europe microbiology societies are fragmented by country on the one hand and by discipline on the other; they have separated into subject- related groups of virologists, bacteriologists, algologists, mycologists, protozoologists and parasitologists and into vocationally related specialities such as medical, food, agricultural, environmental and industrial microbiologists.

It is the aim of this declaration to begin a process that will provide a focus for and unify European microbiology. Only in this way can microbiologists serve our community of fellow scientists, politicians, industrialists and the general population of Europe to the best of our ability. Such a cohesion will enable us to compete successfully in an international market place and to strive to lead the world in standards of scientific rigour and integrity.

Realizing that we can do more together than separately, the Federation of European Microbiological Societies (FEMS) with its 46 member societies in 35 countries spread throughout Eastern and Western Europe aims to become the nucleus for such a cohesion. Let the beginning of the 21st Century and the fifth Century in modern microbiological research be the starting point for real cohesion and increased scientific cross-fertilization amongst microbiologists in Europe!

This declaration aims to initiate debate amongst European Microbiologists to establish mechanisms by which European harmonisation and, hopefully, in the future unification of microbiology can be achieved. We must do this without harming the rich diversity of microbiology in Europe. It is this diversity, which will generate tomorrow's Nobel prize winners and stimulate the expanding influence that microbiologists should have on technological, scientific, political, social and environmental thought in Europe.

FEMS believes that this declaration should specifically stimulate the following issues:

1. *To ensure that Microbiology serves the welfare of mankind, allows sustainable development for all people, ensures the protection and preservation of nature and helps achieve world peace.*
2. *To enhance the public awareness of the benefits of microbes to the world and mankind, and the understanding that the dangers posed by microbes are few and vastly outweighed by their benefits.*
3. *To ensure the access of all Europeans to accurate information about microbiology, including the availability of pertinent literature, and its benefits and threats to humans and our natural environment.*
4. *To support the understanding and preservation of microbial biodiversity, by research and the maintenance of a network of microbial culture collections.*
5. *To condemn the deliberate use of microbes to the disadvantage of humans (biological warfare and bioterrorism).*
6. *To ensure that the teaching of microbiology should be part of all European educational systems, and be fully integrated into scientific and social education, at all levels. To encourage microbiologists to communicate with the public about their work and the importance of microbes..*
7. *To encourage the highest standards of safety in all microbiological processes, products and procedures. To ensure that technological advances arising from microbiological research are thoroughly tested before exploitation.*
8. *To make certain that microbial genomic data are to be considered the heritage of all humanity and are available to all mankind.*
9. *To nurture European microbiology by increasing mobility of researchers within Europe, and retaining the best microbiologists in Europe, by providing frameworks to ensure that strong microbiological research takes place in Europe in universities, hospitals, government and industrial laboratories.*
10. *To support the potential growth areas of microbiology such as biotechnology, food microbiology, rapid diagnostics and environmental protection.*

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