

# La défense de la recherche et de l'industrie chimique en Europe

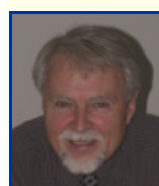
Bernard Sillion

Un groupe de chimistes européens renommés a pris l'initiative de rédiger une lettre ouverte destinée aux présidents du Parlement européen et de la Commission européenne, afin de présenter les arguments démontrant l'impérieuse nécessité de soutenir en Europe une recherche de haut niveau et une industrie puissante dans le domaine de la chimie.

Il nous a semblé important à la rédaction de *L'Actualité Chimique* de nous faire l'écho de cette démarche en publiant cette lettre et la liste des signataires qui nous est parvenue. Dans notre esprit, cela signifie que les membres de la Société Française de Chimie, c'est-à-dire toute une communauté de chimistes, éprouvent la même inquiétude sur le devenir de notre discipline qui voit l'Amérique se renforcer en recherche avec les cerveaux européens et l'Asie s'emparer de la production. Nous ne doutons pas que les autres sociétés savantes qui vont constituer la Conférence Pasteur partagent les mêmes sentiments et s'associent à cette lettre ouverte.

Ceux qui ont assisté à la très belle célébration du 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la Fondation Internationale de la Maison

de la Chimie ont pu entendre le Ministre de l'Éducation nationale exposer ses idées sur « les défis de la recherche française » et parler de l'importance politique de la recherche et de ses développements pour une nation (voir discours p. 90). C'est fondamental car cela signifie que c'est à partir de la clarté et de la lisibilité des politiques de chacun des États que pourra s'élaborer une politique commune en matière de recherche et d'industrie. La sensibilisation des décideurs européens aux problèmes de la chimie est justifiée mais elle n'exonère pas, et bien au contraire, elle appelle les gouvernements des pays membres à affirmer des positions fermes sur ces questions qui façonneront l'avenir.



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## Open letter to The President of the European Parliament and to The President of the European Commission

### Why we should keep chemistry research and chemical plants in Europe!

The last decade has been a difficult period for chemistry in Western Europe. Many chemical plants have been closed and the decline of chemistry is now considered as inevitable by a large majority of the public and the media. New research centers and production units have recently been established in the USA, India, South-East Asia and China.

As European citizens, we should not forget that the chemical industry provides more than two millions jobs and constitutes, with this workforce, one of the key industrial bodies in Europe.

For the last 15 years, public opinion has been deluded with the illusion of a so-called « post-industrial » no-risk civilization. A mindset that causes many people to accept and often urge the premature closure of many chemical plants, as has been done for heavy industries such as coal mining and steel production. In Western Europe, under pressure from active minorities, the development of new employment opportunities in the chemical industries has been stopped (it is easier to close chemical plants, even the recently modernized ones, than to encourage their evolution towards sustainable development).

From a historical point of view, Europe was the birthplace of chemistry and its rise has preceded and stimulated the tremendous development of many other industries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Chemistry is often at the service of

other industries, it is « the industry of industries ». No modern cars without chemistry, no electronic industries without chemistry, no cellular phones or satellite TV without chemistry, no latest generation aircraft or space travel without composite materials and efficient glues, no biocompatible prosthetics, ... etc. None of the essential features of modern life would exist without chemistry, and yet the visibility of chemistry is zero for the majority of the public.

A chemist is a Homo faber able to create new objects from raw materials. Without medicinal chemistry, no drugs. Whatever the progress in biology and genetics, in the post-genomic age, 70 to 80% of all future drugs will be small chemical entities, synthesized by chemists to specifically act on a pharmacological target identified by biologists. It is therefore entirely logical that pharmaceutical companies have decided to shift from a chemist/biologist ratio of 1 to 3 in 2002 to a ratio of 1 to 1 in 2005. When successful « biotech » companies are growing, they start to hire chemists in order to become real pharmaceutical companies, often keeping the name « biotech » to please the financial analysts and boost the share price! After the identification of genes, the post-genomic/proteomic era will inevitably require increased synergy between chemists and biologists. We must ensure that there will be some chemists left in Europe!

The United States of America had their own « post-industrial society » crisis in 1970-80, but they recovered

quickly from that temporary, debilitating disease. The electronic and software industries are essentially US creations with executive tasks distributed throughout Asia. American Justice has chosen not to dismantle their single industrial group that controls 90% of the world market for personal computer software. In that sector, Europe has been reduced to a zone of consumers of mass produced electronic devices for industrial, commercial and personal use.

The new research center of Novartis, a big pharmaceutical multinational company that used to be considered to be European, has created its new headquarters for research close to two major universities in Boston (Harvard and MIT). This has both initiated and accelerated the move of many other European pharmaceutical and chemical companies R & D centers to the USA.

Worldwide globalization causes a tremendous redistribution of the roles of each country within the development of the world economy. Some countries will create the new technologies, others will be the manufacturers and, at the end of the line, some countries will be just a zone of consumers. The latter must not be allowed to be the fate of Europeans.

European countries have the responsibility to reinforce the conditions (teaching, research, economic development) that are essential for an innovative, sustainable, safe and socially responsible chemistry community within Europe in order to increase our basic knowledge in this crucial area of science. This will ensure further economic growth and associated employment in chemical industries and will satisfy the need of society for old and new chemicals while paying due attention to safeguarding our environment for future generations.

Text of June 12th, 2004.

1. If you agree with the letter, you can sign this text by sending an e-mail to [EU.ChemistryAction@apinc.org](mailto:EU.ChemistryAction@apinc.org) with the indications of your name, institution, city and country.

2. To collect as many signatures as possible, thank you for sending this letter to your chemist colleagues. Many chemists from different EU countries have already signed this text.

Thousands and thousands of signatures will convince the European authorities that chemists are highly concerned by the future of chemistry inside Europe.

***This text has been signed by the following persons (18/06/2004)***

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