



Editorial

FEBS in the new millennium

Founded on the 1st of January 1964, the Federation of Biochemical Societies is one of the largest organisations in European life sciences, with nearly 40 000 members distributed among 36 Constituent Societies throughout Europe. The main aim of the organisation is to advance basic research and education in biochemistry, molecular cell biology and molecular biophysics. To achieve these objectives FEBS supports practical and lecture-based Advanced Courses and provides Youth Travel Grants to facilitate the attendance of young scientists. It also offers Long-term, Short-term, and Summer fellowships for training of young scientists as well as for technology transfer. Further, FEBS promotes a Meeting hosted by one member of the Federation each year unless there is an IUBMB Congress in Europe. If the latter should be the case, then usually there has been a smaller Special FEBS Meeting. Bursaries are provided to assist younger scientists to attend these meetings. FEBS also awards Fellowship Follow-up Research Grants to help re-establish Long-term Fellows in their home country. Additional information and application forms can be downloaded from the FEBS web site (<http://www.febs.unibe.ch>).

To support the above activities FEBS depends very much on the income generated by FEBS Letters and the European Journal of Biochemistry (EJB), the FEBS Journal. These journals were started by visionary scientists, including S.P. Datta, W.J. Whelan, and T. Bucher, who could foresee the impact of the scientific and economic spin-offs of these publications in the unification and development of the biochemical community in Europe and world-wide.

In the new millennium FEBS must be ready to tackle the challenges that are being posed by the explosion of new technology and new information in the life sciences, as well as by the evolution of ideas as a new generation of scientists take charge. There are not only economic challenges derived from the rapid pace of science and the development of sophisticated and expensive instruments, but also there is the urgent need to create strategies and mechanisms to nurture the careers of young scientists, who will be future leaders. FEBS does not have the resources to be a significant contributor to these economic challenges and therefore it must concentrate its efforts on catalysing initiatives, both at the national and the European level, to ensure that Europe can play its proper international part by remaining at the forefront of the life sciences in this millennium.

We are well aware that research in the life sciences is becoming multidisciplinary and it is clear to us that we must join forces with other international organisations in order to acquire a global vision for the life sciences. We need to coordinate our efforts, share our experiences, and collaborate in areas of common interest such as education, the impact of science on society, annual meetings, etc. The latter is crucial,

as there is an urgent need to have meetings in Europe that achieve critical mass and that provide opportunities for young scientists to network. FEBS, together with the European Molecular Biology Organisation (EMBO), the European Life Science Organisation (ELSO), and the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) have taken the initiative in this respect by establishing, together with several other organisations, the European Life Sciences Forum (ELSF, <http://www.elsf.org>). The aim of the Forum is to stimulate scientists to take a more active role in strategic and science policy issues, to enable us to speak with a unified voice, and to take joint action in matters of common interest. By consulting the scientific community at large we plan to generate a bottom-up approach, and most importantly, create a vision for the life sciences in this new millennium that in due course can be put forward for support by politicians and funding agencies. A paper concerning the 6th EU framework programme is already available on the web for discussion (<http://www.elsf.org>). Also, FEBS is very supportive of the initiative to establish E-Biosci in Europe, as electronic publications will become an essential part of future communication among scientists in richer and poorer parts of the world. The E-Biosci project, which was originally proposed by EMBO, has recently been formally adopted by the European Molecular Biology Conference (EMBC).

Within FEBS, central and eastern countries have serious problems as far as research funding, technology, infrastructure, and training are concerned. FEBS is committed to providing assistance for Ph.D. students to visit laboratories in western Europe, and to stimulate the organisation of more practical and lecture courses in the area. Recently, FEBS approved a new type of fellowship, the central and eastern Europe scholarships. These measures aim at providing both novel technology and networking assistance to achieve virtual critical mass in these parts of Europe. Also FEBS will continue its efforts to catalyse improvements in central and eastern Europe by providing bridges where possible between scientists, science policy makers and funding agencies. In this respect, FEBS is willing to assemble panels of scientific advisors to evaluate and formulate strategic plans. Implementing these proposals will be a significant escalation of FEBS' initiative of many years standing in the distribution of surplus research material via the Constituent Societies in central and eastern Europe: the Scientific Apparatus Recycling Scheme (SARS).

Finally, in an era where the impact of science in society is becoming increasingly important, FEBS has created a Science and Society Committee, chaired by Federico Mayor, that has as one of its tasks to discuss and advise on problems arising or foreseen from advances in science. In addition, the FEBS Council at its last meeting in Birmingham established a work-

ing group in education that is expected to network with their counterparts in other international organisations, in particular the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB).

No Society or Organisation can be successful without the active engagement of its members and FEBS is no exception. In an age of global information, FEBS is committed to providing more and faster information to its members by keeping an up-to-date web site, by posting information in the FEBS journals, as well as by distributing informative posters twice a

year. Your comments and suggestions for new initiatives will be greatly appreciated.

We are looking forward to seeing you all at the 27th FEBS Meeting in Lisbon, June 30–July 5, 2001 which is being organised in collaboration with the Pan American Association for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (PABMB). For further information see <http://www.itqb.unl.pt/FEBS2001>.

Julio E. Celis
Secretary General