



> News Release

EAGLES address members of the European Parliament

On October 11, the European Action on Global Life Sciences (EAGLES) organised a dinner debate in Brussels with about 40 participants from the European Parliament, the European Commission and EAGLES. The background for the meeting was the lack of clear dedication and focus in the 7th Framework Programme on the great humanitarian challenges of hunger, illness and environmental degradation which plague the developing countries.

A better dialogue is needed, and EAGLES is a platform for achieving this dialogue between scientists from the developing countries and European politicians, policy makers, members of the media and other leaders of public opinion. The meeting was initiated by MEP Britta Thomsen who also introduced the three speakers and chaired the discussion.



*Former Polish Prime Minister,
MEP, Jerzy Busek talks at EAGLES meeting in Brussels, October 2006.*

EAGLES Chair Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Library of Alexandria, gave an enlightening vision of the role of research in the fight against poverty, fundamentalism and isolationism, backed by a historical review of the trends in life sciences over the last 50 years. As an example on how important research and know-how can be, he mentioned India which in the early 1960s was deemed by many economists and development experts not to be able to feed its population of then less than 300 million people. Today the size of the Indian population has increased three times and India is a major food exporter in Asia. Dr. Serageldin suggested that knowledge was a key factor in development and knowledge should be considered a global public good – a human right. With knowledge, research and education we can abolish hunger and poverty related disease and Europe has an obligation to share its knowledge with the developing world.

EAGLES Co-Vice Chairman Prof. Huanming Yang, Director of the Beijing Genome Institute, who contributed to the Human Genome Project and led the Chinese rice genome initiative, referred to his own early experience with European scientists in Denmark where he spent several years pursuing his PhD. He advocated for assistance to emerging and developing countries not in the form of food aid, but by supporting knowledge and technology generation. He underscored that all life sciences are related, and that life sciences are, literally speaking, vital for the future and stability of the world. Trust built on research collaboration is the key which will also lead to mutual benefits. He advised Europe to

place much more emphasis on its status as a continent of many countries in harmony, and as a society built on knowledge and partnership.

World Health Organisation representative Dr. Gojka Roglic was the last speaker. Her presentation was a follow up from the recent EAGLES Symposium in Alexandria (April 2006), on the emerging epidemic of diabetes and chronic diseases in the world. Dr. Roglic documented that diabetes is rapidly becoming a very significant problem in the developing world. She went through the ten most common misconceptions about diabetes and its complications: Diabetes is not only a disease of the wealthy as 80% occurs in the low or middle income countries where millions of poor people are affected. Diabetes and its complications can be prevented, and prevention, or early detection, does not need to be expensive.

During the debate, prominent MEP's and officers from the European Commission commented on the presentations and discussed the main issue: the draft of the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme (FP7) does not take sufficient account of the problems of the developing world. Also there are no dedicated funds for collaboration with the developing world. The discussion had a positive note with interventions from some parliamentarians who are playing a key role in the development of the research budget of FP7

It was suggested by EAGLES that there should be a 5% budget target for research relevant to the developing world. MEP Theresa Riera had already suggested a target in the Parliament but did not get sufficient support.

If the Commission developed a mechanism in FP7 for measuring research and research training and collaboration with the developing world this mechanism could give an important indication on how the coming policy of "open collaboration but no dedicated budget would go". Such an indicator could be important for the decision makers and could be used for putting more focus on the development issue.

A hearing in the Parliament or a Parliament *Global Science Day* which would focus attention on the role of European science in the developing world was suggested. Both MEP's and members of the European Commission asked for more active debate and more lobby activities on this issue organised by the research community.

EAGLES Co-Vice Chairman Prof. David McConnell summed up the meeting and promised to follow up on the different comments and suggestions. Britta Thomsen thanked the participants for a very fruitful debate.



Imail Sergeldin talks at the EAGLES meeting in Brussels, October 2006.



Britta Thomsen and Miloslav Ransdorf, the two Vice Chairs of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy at the EAGLES meeting in Brussels.

Photos Sara Skærlund