

European Plant Science Organisation

Activities' Report - Year 2016

Aldo Ceriotti

1. Introduction

The European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO, <http://epsoweb.org>) is an independent academic organisation based in Brussels (Belgium) that represents more than 220 research institutes, departments and universities from 31 countries in Europe and beyond. EPSO's mission is to improve the impact and visibility of plant science in Europe.

2. Main activities carried on by EPSO during 2016 relevant for Italy and for CNR

EPSO promotes plant science through a series of internal activities and by participating in initiatives of the European Commission, of other Scientific Societies, and different international organisations.

EPSO continuously monitors European scientific initiatives and calls of relevance for plant science, providing scientific advice to European and international institutions. For instance, EPSO participated in the following open consultations of the European Commission:

- Horizon 2020 Interim Evaluation
- Towards the EC Horizon 2020, Societal Challenge 2 strategy 2018-20
- EPSO online submission to EC consultation SC2

In these and other documents, EPSO has repeatedly stressed the importance of supporting collaborative basic research projects in Europe. EPSO has started discussing ideas towards FP9, the successor of H2020. This discussion has already started within member states, and EPSO wishes to contribute to the definition of a concerted strategy for research and innovation in the field of plant science and agriculture at large.

EPSO calls upon EU policy heads to maintain transparency, open communication and mobility of scholars and scientists across the world.

Together with the European Technology Platform “Plants for the Future” (Plant ETP, in which EPSO represents academic institutions) EPSO is promoting the creation of a Contractual Public Private Partnership for Integrated Crop Production in Europe (ICP-cPPP) to establish a collaborative, EU-wide Public-Private Partnership in the agri-food/non-food value chain.

Together with Plant ETP, EPSO has organized a series of workshops on societal challenges and plant breeding at the European Parliament. Within this framework, a 2nd workshop on Food and Nutritional Security was held at the European Parliament on 2.6.2016.

In 2016 EPSO has organized together with the Federation of European Societies of Plant Biology (FESPB) the joint conference “Plant Biology Europe” (Prague 26-30.6.2016). The conference represents a major European event in the area of plant biology, and the conference series will continue with the Joint EPSO/FESPB Conference, which will be held in Copenhagen in 2018.

To promote the participation in the H2020 Program, EPSO has released in 2016 two exclusive info packs for proposal writers, mainly societal challenge 2 calls 2016, at the EPSO members' only website:

- EPSO: Updated Briefing on Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2017, 24.8.2016
- EPSO: Briefing on the LIFE Programme Call 2016 for EPSO Members, 14.7.2016

3. Activities carried on by Aldo Ceriotti within EPSO during 2016 and impact on the Italian scientific community

The CNR Delegate participated in the two EPSO meetings of the Boards of Directors that were held in 2016 (Brussels, 17 March and 8 November) and in the General Meeting held in Prague on 26 June.

At the national level, the delegate has fostered communication between EPSO and the community of CNR plant scientists mainly through the action of the “EPSO Supporting Scientists” group. The group is composed of CNR scientists with expertise that covers the main areas of plant science which are of relevance for CNR.

EPSO promotes the activity of “Working Groups”, where scientists from EPSO Members get together to define EPSO view on specific topics or research areas. The Delegate has joined, together with other CNR plant scientists, the EPSO Working Group “Agricultural Technologies” which had a meeting at the CNR Research Area in Milan in November 2016. The working group has addressed a series of topics including:

- Genome Editing, with the publication of a statement on “Crop Genetic Improvement Technologies”
- Synthetic Biology, with the publication of the document “Synthetic Biology is more than the application of new breeding techniques”
- Nagoya protocol, which imposes restrictions to the international exchange of genetic materials. Statement in preparation.

The participation in this and other working groups represents an excellent opportunity for CNR plant biologists to play an active role in defining the position of EPSO on different topics of national and international relevance, and to create European networks focused on specific research areas.

4. Evaluation of the participation in terms of benefits and membership cost

The EPSO membership allows European research institutions and the community of European researchers to speak their voice and contribute defining research priorities and global research strategies in the area of plant science. EPSO regularly informs the delegates about upcoming events, initiatives and activities of relevance for plant science in Europe, and publishes a Newsletter which is distributed through the members-only section of the EPSO website. The Annual General Meeting is also an important opportunity to collect information about EPSO activities, to discuss general strategies, and plan future initiatives. Overall EPSO provides a useful discussion forum for European institution active in the area of plant science, promoting the formation of international networks which can further develop into research partnerships and lead to the drafting of proposal to be submitted in response to European calls.

5. Evaluation of Italians’ attendance and how to improve interest and involvement

Three other Italian institutions, in addition to CNR, are current members of EPSO: University of Milan, University of Bologna and University of Turin. CNR scientists have participated in EPSO activities by contributing to the group of “EPSO Supporting Scientists”, or by the participation in EPSO working groups such as the ones on “Agricultural Technologies” and “Horticulture”. To further promote the participation in EPSO activities, the group of “Supporting Scientists” will be expanded, including early stage researchers. Internal communication channels such as the Annual Conference of CNR Departments, the meeting of the Board of Directors, Department web-sites, Newsletters, will be used to bring to the attention of CNR plant scientists the activities run by EPSO and the opportunities offered by the EPSO membership to develop a comprehensive view of the area of plant science in Europe.

EPSO also offer CNR personnel the possibility of an internship at the Brussels office, to participate in specific projects and work in close contact with the EPSO staff.

6. Italian experts with important roles within EPSO or within related Commissions and Programs

The CNR Delegate was elected as member of the Board of Directors in 2013, and the term was renewed for three years by the General Meeting in 2015.

7. Conclusions

EPSO is the main European organization with a specific focus on plant science, monitors European research activities, and plays an essential role as scientific adviser for European institutions. EPSO membership contributes to the internationalization of CNR research activities, improves the visibility and impact of CNR in Europe, and provides the CNR scientific communities with further opportunities to participate in European research initiatives.

Milan, July 5, 2017

Aldo Ceriotti

