

Press Release

Will journals in the humanities and social sciences survive the European Commission's plans for open access?

On 11 February 2013, representatives from more than 120 journals distributed on the Internet portal Cairn.info and from around fifty publishers or publishing bodies that specialize in the humanities and social sciences met at the Maison de la Chimie in Paris.

The aim of this meeting was to examine the implications of a recommendation issued by the European Commission on 17 July last year concerning open access – free online distribution – for “publically financed research publications” in the various Member States. As a transitional measure, the Commission allows for publishers to delay making the material available free of charge for a maximum of 12 months after initial publication. It urged the Member States to take the necessary measures to implement this recommendation.

The vast majority of participants at the meeting organized by Cairn.info concluded that in the fields of the social sciences and humanities, the European Commission's plans would eventually lead to the disappearance of the vast majority of journals published in French, and hence also of the publishers who produce them. The implementation of a measure that obliges academics and researchers to distribute their work free of charge would cut off the income that these publishers currently receive from subscriptions by libraries and individual purchases – and this income is essential for covering the cost of producing quality publications.

The embargo proposed by the Commission – delaying free distribution of material for 12 months after paper or electronic publication – was generally agreed to be completely insufficient for ensuring the required academic revenues. Moreover, all other areas in which knowledge related to the humanities and social sciences is published would also be threatened by the measure, specifically opinion and debate publications, because their authors are also paid from public funds. Everyone present agreed that this scenario would inevitably lead to a deterioration in the quality of scholarship and an impoverishment of intellectual debate in the humanities and social sciences.

Responding to these issues, Michel Marian from the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research confirmed that these concerns were central to considerations by Geneviève Fioraso, the French Minister of Higher Education and Research. In particular, he said that the Ministry does not

consider itself in any way bound by the duration of the embargo as laid out by the European Commission. Mr Marian announced the Ministry's desire to carry out an impact study on the possible consequences of free distribution and access to publications in the humanities and social sciences, and a dialogue on these issues will be established with all stakeholders shortly. These measures will be taken in cooperation with other government ministries as well.

Those present at the meeting expressed the desire to continue to follow the matter closely, and editors of publications will moreover submit a motion outlining their position on the issue to their editorial committees. The content of this motion and the list of the first signatories will be published shortly.

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For more information, see: www.openaccess-shs.info



Contacts :

Marc MINON
Thomas PARISOT

CAIRN.info
5, rue de Charonne
75011 Paris
Tél. : 01.55.28.83.02

marc.minon@cairn.info

thomas.parisot@cairn.info