

Open Access:

Scientific work and public debate in the humanities and social sciences threatened by measures recommended by the European Commission

Open letter from the editors of French language journals in the humanities and social sciences to the Minister of Higher Education and Research, the Minister of Culture and Communication, the presidents of universities and grandes écoles, and heads of major research institutions

We are calling for the urgent opening of dialogue on the issues associated with open access in the humanities and the social sciences. The definition of sufficiently long periods of embargo, allowing journals to choose their economic model (balancing what they offer for free and what they offer for payment), is the only way to guarantee diversity and independence in academic research and public debate.

As the heads of journals in the humanities and social sciences, we have learned of the recommendation by the European commission of July 17, 2012 specifically concerning open access, or the free online distribution of “publications that result from research financed using public funds” in the various EU 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.

Naturally, we understand the Commission's objectives, particularly as concerns improving access to intellectual output and scientific innovation, and, all told, we share this objective. Moreover, what we do every day is perfectly in line with this objective, especially what we do with regard to the development and promotion of scientific knowledge that is as rich and diverse as possible.

We are nevertheless concerned about the conditions for applying to the humanities and social sciences a text that was compiled to remediate problems in the natural sciences. We are particularly concerned by the consequences that could arise from the establishment of a national regime, or centrally coordinated institution by institution, that would oblige academics and researchers to distribute their publications free of charge via openly accessible online archives after a very short period of embargo.

In line with the French Association for the Information Industry (GFII), we would like to recall the fact that *publication is not the same as editing*. Editing academic texts requires selecting them, improving them, and validating them via regular exchange with the authors. It involves compiling special reports and themed issues, correcting and formatting proofs, printing and distributing the texts and/or putting them online on high-value platforms (in particular enriching texts with hyperlinks and widely distributing the meta-data), and then marketing them. This also requires putting forward new subjects for research, gathering or locating young authors, and participating in the international exchange of ideas. These activities and services to the community and to the public all come with a corresponding cost, and unless this cost can be recovered, it would endanger our ability to continue to provide high-quality publications.

We are afraid that the embargo proposed by the Commission – delaying free distribution of material for 12 months after paper or electronic publication – will prove to be completely insufficient for maintaining a large number of academic journals in the fields of the humanities and social sciences, where publication is only economically viable over a longer period. These journals also serve an important function in public debates, and we believe that, in addition to income from academic sources, the other areas of knowledge publication in the humanities and social sciences – specifically opinion and debate publications – could also be threatened by the measure, as their authors are very often also paid from public funds.

We therefore fear that these measures as recommended by the Commission will quickly prove to be counterproductive; that they will lead to a deterioration in the quality of publications in the humanities and social sciences and to an impoverishment of intellectual debate, undermining the diversity that is so essential to the publishing landscape and limiting the independence of authors.

Research on tools and methods for improving the visibility and circulation of publications in the humanities and social sciences lies at the heart of our work, and we are constantly working on expanding their distribution, particularly by taking advantage of the opportunities created by developments in digital publishing. Although we are extremely skeptical of the relevance to our disciplines of the “author-pays” model, we are prepared to study the possibility of

alternative financing models. However, we consider these models to still be at an experimental stage, and believe that it is unlikely that any single model could prove suitable for the situation of the various types of publications in the humanities and social sciences.

In any case, we would like to draw the attention of those responsible for this matter at the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the Ministry of Culture and Communication, and the heads of universities and research institutions to the irreversible nature of the decisions that they have to take. We therefore urge caution in this matter, as it is clear that the implications of the measures recommended by the European Commission have not yet been fully explored.

Consequently, we urgently call for an independent impact assessment to be carried out on these matters. This study should take into account the specificities of the humanities and social sciences and of publications in French. We also expect without delay the opening of a genuine dialogue on these issues between the above-mentioned state actors, researcher organizations, scholarly organizations, the heads of journals in the humanities and social sciences, and editors.

List of the first 127 signatories (last updated on June 5, 2013)

@GRH (the editorial committee)

Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales (the editorial committee)

Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales (the editorial committee)

Annales de Normandie (the editorial committee)

Annales historiques de la Révolution française (the editorial committee)

L'Année balzacienne (the editorial board)

L'Année sociologique (Pierre Demeulenaere, editorial committee's president)

L'Archéologie industrielle en France (the editorial committee)

Archipel (the editorial committee)

Archives juives (Catherine Nicault, chief editor)

Bulletin de l'institut Pierre Renouvin (Antoine Marès, chief editor)

Bulletin de psychologie (the editorial committee)

Cahiers de psychologie clinique (the editorial committee)

Cahiers du genre (the editorial board)

Cahiers Jaurès (the editorial committee)

Carrefours de l'éducation (the editorial committee)

Commentaire (the editorial committee)

Communication et langages (Jean-Louis Soubret, publication director)

Communication et organisation (Valérie Carayol, publication director)

Confluences Méditerranée (the editorial committee)

Connexions (the editorial committee)

Critique (editorial board)

Critique internationale (the editorial committee)

Déviance et société (the editorial board)

Dialogues d'histoire ancienne (the editorial board)

Diogène (Maurice Aymard et Luca M. Scarantino, chief editors)

Documentaliste – Sciences de l'information (the editorial board)

Education comparée (Régis Malet, chief editor)

Éducation et sociétés (Jean-Louis Derouet, chief editor)

Éducation permanente (the editorial committee)

Les Enjeux de l'information et de la communication (the editorial board)

Entreprendre et innover (the editorial committee)

Entreprises et histoire (the editorial committee)

Espaces et sociétés (the editorial committee)

Esprit (Marc-Olivier Padis, chief editor)

Ethnologie française (the editorial board)

L'Évolution psychiatrique (Richard Rechtman, chief editor)

L'Expansion Management Review (the editorial committee)

Flux (the editorial board)

Gérer et comprendre (Michel Berry, chief editor)

Gérontologie et société (Françoise Forette, publication director)

Gestalt (the editorial board)

Gouvernement et action publique (the editorial committee)

Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains (the editorial committee)

Hérodote (the editorial committee)

Histoire et sociétés rurales (the editorial committee)

Innovations (the editorial committee)

Jeunes et médias (Laurence Corroy, publication director)

Journal de la psychanalyse de l'enfant (the editorial board)

Journal des africanistes (the editorial committee)

Le Journal des anthropologues (the editorial committee)

Journal de la société des océanistes (the editorial committee)

La Lettre de l'enfance et de l'adolescence (the editorial board)

La linguistique (the editorial committee)

Langage et société (Josiane Boutet, publication director)

Littératures classiques (the editorial board)

Management & Avenir (the editorial committee)

Marché et organisations (the editorial committee)

Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps (Association des amis de la BDIC)

Médiévales (the editorial committee)

Médium (the editorial board)

Mil neuf cent, Revue d'histoire intellectuelle (the editorial committee)

Monde(s). Histoire, espaces, relations (the editorial board)

Mondes en développement (the editorial committee)

Mots. Les langages du politique (the editorial board)

Mouvements (the editorial committee)

Négociations (the editorial committee)

Noesis (the editorial committee)

Nordic Historical Review (the editorial board)

Nouvelle revue d'esthétique (Carole Talon-Hugon, publication director)

Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie (the editorial board)

Parlement[s], revue d'histoire politique (the editorial committee)

Perspectives chinoises (the editorial committee)

Poétique (the editorial committee)

Pôle sud (the editorial committee)

Politix (the editorial committee)

Population et avenir (the editorial committee)

Projet (the editorial committee)

La Psychiatrie de l'enfant (the editorial committee)

Psychologie clinique et projective (the editorial board)

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Raisons politiques (the editorial committee)

Recherche et formation (the editorial board)

Recherches en didactiques (the editorial board)

Regards sur l'économie allemande (René Lasserre, editorial committee's president)

Relations internationales (Antoine Marès, editorial committee's president)

Repères, cahier de danse (the editorial board)

Réseaux (the editorial committee)

Revue archéologique (the editorial board)

Revue d'économie industrielle (Richard Arena, publication director)

Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines (the editorial committee)

Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle (the editorial committee)

Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France (the editorial committee)

Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France (the editorial board)

Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine (the editorial committee)

Revue de l'entrepreneuriat (Didier Chabaud, publication director)

Revue de l'histoire des religions (Charles Amiel, publication director)

Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes (Michel Casevitz et Philippe Moreau, directors)

Revue de psychothérapie psychanalytique de groupe (the editorial committee)

Revue de synthèse (Éric Brian, publication director)

Revue des études grecques (the editorial board)

Revue du MAUSS (Alain Caillé, publication director)

Revue européenne des migrations internationales (the editorial committee)

Revue européenne des sciences sociales (the editorial committee)

Revue française de droit constitutionnel (Didier Maus, editorial committee's president)

Revue française de linguistique appliquée (Hélène Huot, publication director)

Revue française de pédagogie (Laurent Cosnefroy et Jean-Yves Rochex, chief editors)

Revue française de psychanalyse (the editorial committee)

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Revue française de socio-économie (the editorial committee)

Revue historique (the editorial board)

La revue internationale de l'éducation familiale (the editorial committee)

Revue philosophique (the editorial committee)

Revue politique européenne (the editorial committee)

Romantisme (the editorial committee)

Santé publique (François Alla, chief editor)

Social Science Information sur les sciences sociales (Anne Rocha Perazzo, chief editor)

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Sociologie du travail (Didier Demazière, publication director)

Sociologies pratiques (the editorial committee)

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Télévision (the editorial committee)

Travail, genre et sociétés (the editorial committee)

Tréma (Jacques Gleyse, publication director)

Tsingy (Frédéric Garan, publication director)

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