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The Association for the Advancement of Science and Technology in Spain (Asociación para el Avance de la Ciencia y Tecnología en España, AACTE) has repeatedly expressed its concern on the failure of the Spanish R+D system to attract, hire and fund qualified researchers. Such failure stems from three main factors: the lack of public and (mainly) private investment; a hierarchical and highly conservative approach that deprives qualified young scientist from independent support and funding; and above all, the endemic cronyism in the hiring and promotion of academic researchers.

We therefore deplore the recent declarations of Dr. Miguel Angel Quintanilla, the newly elected State Secretary for Universities and Research (*El Mundo*; June 14, 2006). Our surprise was compounded by the synchrony and the significant coincidences with the declarations of Dr. Carlos Martínez, President of the CSIC (*ABC*, June 9, 2006). These coincidences between their statements seem to indicate that they largely reflect the Government official position: a halt in the timid measures advanced by the previous Government to stop the widespread cronyism in R+D hiring practices; lack of transparency in the economic indicators of R+D investment, maintaining a/o the former Government's policy of grouping military and civil expenditure; and a disregard of the pressing need for the establishment of a coherent scientific career.

Instead of taking the necessary steps to solve the dramatic crisis of Spain's R+D system, both leaders indulge in far-fetched promises: they forecast the incorporation of an impressive number of researchers to the Spanish R+D system (around 50000 to 60000 by 2010, said Martínez) and consider as a priority to attract and hire more foreign scientists. Although we are far from disagreeing with them on both needs, the central question is: how does the Government plan to incorporate so many scientists to a research system that is able neither to fund adequately the research of those currently hired, nor to maintain the job of those on tenure-track? The hard reality is that the highly-publicized 25% increase in R+D investment is mainly devoted to fund corporative credits rather than to actual expenditure in long-awaited investments. The money is not reaching the laboratories, to the point that in 2005 Spain's R+D National Plan has been unanimously criticized by most (if not all) Spanish Scientific Societies. And if these conditions do not suffice to discourage all qualified foreign scientists, the Government has refused to eliminate the bureaucratic barriers that currently prevent their enrolment - e.g., the need to validate (*homologar*) all foreign titles before being allowed to enter the Spanish scientific or teaching career, a step that takes from one to two years in most cases.

Dr. Quintanilla also trivialize about the rights of Ramon y Cajal *tenure-track* researchers to consolidate their positions, and goes along with Dr. Martínez in suggesting that those that were not hired failed to meet Spain's quality standards for R+D positions during their five-year contracts. With all its limitations (e.g., its effectiveness in reducing Spain's brain-drain has been much lower than generally stated), the Ramon y Cajal Program has been the most transparent, most fairly evaluated and less endogamic hiring program ever in the Spanish R+D history. RyC researchers not only were subjected to a rigorous and highly competitive filter in first place; during their five-year contract, they have to obtain two more positive evaluations by the Spanish National Evaluation Agency.

What really exasperates RyC researchers and discourages other actors compromised with the improvement of the R+D system in Spain, is precisely that they are not kept out of the system by too-high hiring standards. While they are left outside the system, most Universities keep using endogamic procedures to hire tenured lecturers and promote professors that would never be able to obtain a RyC contract based on their scientific merits. More recently, the University deans confronted forcefully the first reform that tried to difficult such irregular hiring practices (introduced by the previous Government). They have probably succeeded to turn the tide with the present Government, which is planning to go back to the old permissiveness.

As of the Spanish research Council (CSIC), it is truth that it has made an important effort to create new researcher positions in the last few years. However, it would be venturous to argue that the opening of these positions has followed strict quality criteria, since it must primarily accommodate the interests and lobbying capacities of the different research centers. At any rate, the amount of positions available at CSIC is far away from the number of RyC researchers whose contracts are soon to end.

The ongoing reform of the current University Law would represent an ideal opportunity to approach these problems seriously and strategically: providing the necessary means and funding and, above all, controlling severely the transparency and fairness of the hiring procedures. Unfortunately, Dr Quintanilla's declarations show an unacceptable lack of respect towards a collective of researchers that have devoted many years of their lives to demonstrate, under fairly precarious conditions, that they can reach levels of excellence comparable to those at more developed countries. Reading his first press statement has generated widespread rage and pessimism - a bad start for someone who was expected to inspire hope and confidence.

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