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Voices from the Editorial Board

Europe as a Community of Values

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The economic crisis that began in 2008 came to represent a growing aversion of many European states towards the humanities. Research cuts seriously affected all European universities and academic disciplines, but most especially the humanities. The reduction of budgets and personnel in these fields came along with a certain disdain, very often promoted by the ruling political classes. Many humanists came to abhor their university and their working conditions. For the first time in more than two hundred years, the formative role of history was seriously questioned. Today, there is a growing feeling that society can do without history: both as guardian of a shared past and as producer of a common future.

There are at least three ways in which the new *European Journal for the History of Medicine and Health* could play a role in the present international context. First, we can try to define and build an academic niche. In this case, the difficulty will always be to determine the added value of a new publication in relation to other well-established national or international traditions. Secondly, it may be also worth considering the role that the new journal can play in the context of an increasingly globalized world, where the 2008 austerity measures came along with severe budget cuts in the national health systems of many European countries. In this sense, we can aspire to fulfil the role of a new history of medicine and health for the future, now that the model of the European welfare state is called into question. Finally, we could try to look at

the issue from a wider perspective and undertake the role of a new European history of health publication in the context of the crisis of the humanities of the early twenty-first century.

These three possibilities refer to the same problem, which is none other than redirecting historical research in light of the crisis of our academic funding models. In general terms, the recovery of the political pulse requires, in the case of the humanities, three indispensable conditions. First, faculty members and research centres must accept the elementary principle of financial and social accountability. Secondly, the circumstance that academic institutions have almost always been reactionary in their ideas and resistant to change – more willing to nurture corporate interests than to defend public policies – should be replaced by a culture of collective responsibilities, which includes awareness of the position that higher education and scientific research have in the democratic articulation of the European Union. Last but not least, the New Humanities must self-consciously assert the results of their research rather than wait for a spontaneous recognition of their knowledge, which is often perceived as irrelevant and out of date. The corporate defence of disciplinary frameworks may have to be abandoned. It must be remembered that, like the scholars of the other humanities, historians have been on the payroll not because of the goodness or greatness of their ideas, but for having participated, to a greater or lesser extent, in the construction of national identities. Archaeology, but also history, philology, and philosophy were never basic nor objective. On the contrary, they have contributed over the past 250 years to presenting the political aspirations of national states. The birth of philology or the campaigns of archaeological missions, not to mention political, cultural or art history, was always linked to the interests of a high culture that served the demands of political legitimization, whether in the times of Napoleon I and his reform of the educational system, or in the Prussian model of highly hierarchical academic structures.

Like the rest of the humanities, history participated in the concert of nations, to the point that the political aspirations of European governments had to pass, not infrequently, through the sieve of historians and philosophers, whose profession never consisted only in thinking and writing, but in thinking and writing national dreams. The substitution of a form of subsidy based on the patronage of princes by another supported by the state apparatus had political counterparts that, to a certain extent, public representatives, but also citizens themselves, considered already fulfilled. Victims of their own excellence, absent from the great debates that affect all European citizens, the faculties and research centres are being ruined by two great dangers. The first is the progressive threat of an ideology of large numbers that only defends

and accepts quantitative research methods. The second is the threat of suicide policies promoted by the departments and research institutes. At least since the dawn of the modern world, the forms of professionalization of the humanities have been linked to three models: the anarchic, the corporate, and the national. Leaving aside the first – the preserve of those who do not require external financing – the rest has always been a struggle, more or less explicit, between centralized models versus university corporations. Despite their many forms, the conflicts between both forms of professionalization have been constant in the history of Europe. The examples are innumerable, and almost always with the same results: there is no attempt to create a centralized policy for the management of economic or human resources that does not clash with corporate interests. The lesson is clear: far from being locked into their old disciplinary frameworks until the storm subsides, humanists must take the initiative in their own reform, which implies reflecting on what role, if any, they want to play in the context of civil society and the public function; what is the place that the new generations will occupy in this new scenario; what new forms of the financing of their endeavours do they envision; what will be the social impact of these new humanities; to what extent the research results will be of local interest and international recognition; or in what way, in the context of the new global society, cooperative, face-to-face and dynamic forms of research will be promoted.

In the context of our immediate health and economic crisis, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, some things have changed, given a new swing to the medical and sanitary sciences and, by extension, to those fields of historical interest related to health and well-being. The door will not remain open for long, however. In order to face the challenge of dwindling interest in history, we may count on three different strategies that may also inform the editorial requirements of the new journal. First, we should prioritize research based on *problems* rather than disciplines. This has become an obvious priority during the present-day pandemic. It is much easier to be perceived as relevant when one addresses socially relevant issues. The Vilnius Declaration of 2009 and the agenda of Horizon 2020 always had the same aspiration: European research was meant to be based on social challenges rather than in disciplinary inertia. This is a good idea that cannot work in practice if the identification of those socially relevant issues is going to be decided by the central Brussels bureaucracy. Secondly, we should also prioritize trans-disciplinary research, not because we like the sound of that catchy buzzword, but because socially relevant problems demand the intervention of different expertise and disciplinary fields, including very often those fields outside of the humanities. As an addition to this point, trans-sectorial cooperation is also required. Science and

Medical museums and collections, curators and many other people working in the field have to be taken into consideration. Third and finally, the journal would also require a political European ambition.

The reform of the modes of financing the humanities proposed in Vilnius ten years ago was correct in many of its diagnoses, but was naive in its scope. It became clear that we did not need a professionalization project for the next 10 years. What we need, then as today, is a great project for the next 200 years. Our obsession should not be this or that social challenge. Our obsession should be Europe, not defined as a geographical or commercial space, but as an experience of shared values. In the perspective of such a project, of a political construction of the significance of Europe in a globalized world, there is no room for short-sighted policies or a lack of political ambition.