

Europe's new scientific revolution - opinion - 20 October 2014 - New Scientist

It's great to see scientists across the continent protesting in unison about funding and jobs, says the editor of a website exploring European research issues

SCIENTISTS complaining about budget cuts and job insecurity is nothing new. But in Europe, they have had enough. This week, thousands will take to the streets in an orchestrated, continent-wide protest.

The action will culminate on 17 and 18 October in Paris, Madrid and Rome. The scientists taking part hope to highlight how Europe's knowledge economy is being undermined by austerity, short-termism and a lack of adequate career structures.

In France, the protests are being organised by the Sciences en Marche movement. To minimise the risk of eliciting a Gallic shrug in a country famous for street protests, they are cycling to Paris from labs across the country, staying along the way with host families who have expressed their willingness to "adopt a scientist".

To coincide with the arrival in Paris, researchers in Spain will take to the streets of Madrid. Activist groups there are organising under the "Red Tide for Science" umbrella. It will be the second such street protest in a month.

The following day, Italian scientists from the For The Sake Of Science And Culture movement will demonstrate in Rome.

The protests are part of a bigger movement. Last week, activists from the UK, Greece, Portugal and Germany joined forces with their French, Spanish and Italian counterparts to publish an [open letter](#) to their governments and the European Union. It calls for an end to austerity and criticises their ignorance of "the crucial contribution of a strong research sector to the economy".

In Spain, for example, research spending has been cut by 40 per cent since the start of the financial crisis. In Greece, university research budgets have halved. And half of Portugal's state-funded research units are under threat of closure. The signatories hope to gain the support of many more scientists through a petition at openletter.euroscience.org.

It is ironic that it has taken so long for European scientists to take joint action on issues of mutual concern. After all, they have been collaborating scientifically for decades.

But now they have started, and the momentum is building. The activists have also launched a blog, *Homo scientificus europaeus*, hosted on the *EuroScientist* website. Named after what they fear is becoming an endangered species – the European scientist – the blog is an open forum for participants

to debate issues and discuss action.

Europe's scientists have been quiet for too long in the face of savage cuts. It is encouraging to see them collaborating across borders not just to do science, but also to make their voices heard on behalf of all Europeans.

This article appeared in print under the headline "Scientific revolutionaries"

Sabine Louët is editor of *EuroScientist*, an independent, participatory online magazine about issues in European research. It recently published a [*special issue on research activism*](#)

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