



## **FINAL REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE PROGRAM OF THE CONGRESS, July 2010**

The Subcommittee on the Program of the Congress was created following a motion adopted by the General Assembly in Sydney (2005). At that time, members had expressed dissatisfaction with the procedure of the construction of the program of the quinquennial congress. Here is an excerpt of the minutes of the Sydney Congress (7 July 2005):

« Some delegates deplored the fact that the Congress program did not make more room for certain periods of history like the Antiquity period and the Middle Ages. On this subject, Prof. Vigezzi noted that the contribution of the National Committees and International Organizations would prove useful. He proposed that the Bureau examine the current procedure for developing the program and report to the next General Assembly.

The motion was carried. »

Accordingly, the Bureau of ICHS nominated the following persons in February 2006:

- Arnita Jones, *American Historical Association*
- Brunello Vigezzi, *Commission Internationale pour l'Histoire des Relations Internationales* and *Giunta Storica Nazionale*
- Marjatta Hietala, *Bureau member* and *President of the Finnish National Committee*
- Jean-Claude Robert, *Secretary General*

After discussing by email and during a first formal meeting in October 2006, members of the Subcommittee stated the importance of gathering more information on the various associations composing ICHS and their own scientific pursuits, in order to be able to build a better program for the congress. It was decided that a questionnaire would be prepared and sent to all members. The questionnaire was drafted by the Secretary General and discussed by email. The first question dealt with the structure of the member associations, the second, with their history and activities, and the third, with satisfaction with the process of construction of the program of the Congress.

The questionnaire was sent by mail and email to all members of ICHS in April 2007. Because of the very low rate of return, a reminder was sent in June. As of 15 August 2007, approximately 50% of members have responded (26 of the 53 National Committees, 14 of the 29 International Affiliated Organizations and 5 of the 12 Internal Commissions). The answers came too late to prepare a full report to the next General Assembly (Beijing, 17 September 2007). Members of the Subcommittee then proposed to finalize the report in time for the first General Assembly of Amsterdam (22 August 2010).

An examination of the third section of the questionnaire, dealing with the level of satisfaction regarding the congress program, shows that while a majority of members is generally satisfied with the actual procedure, the International Affiliated Organizations are more critical. There were a certain number of interesting proposals that the

Subcommittee wished to consider. The majority of the International Affiliated Organization would be interested to pursue, in their own meetings, some of the themes of the congress.

The first two sections of the questionnaire gave the members of the Subcommittee a better idea of the diversity of its membership, of its structure. Members will find the complete text of the questionnaire, as well as different tables and compilations on ICHS Web Site, in the section "News", subsection "Minutes and Reports" (On-line after 31 July, 2010).

## **1. The structure of ICHS**

ICHS is an umbrella organization that has three components: National Committees (currently 54), Affiliated International Organizations (currently 29 + 2 in process of approval) and Internal Commissions (12). National Committees and Affiliated International Organizations pay annual dues and have the right of vote in general assemblies. Internal Commissions are set up by the General Assembly for a specific purpose and do not pay dues or vote.

National Committees present a lot of diversity. Their membership ranges from a few persons to a few thousands and their structure is quite variable. There seems to be four types of National Committees:

1. An open association with elective structures and financing mainly by members fees
2. An Ad hoc committee created by an existing organization for the purpose of one congress
3. A section from a National Academy
4. An association created by a government.

Generally, the objectives of National Committees are to promote the history of the country through a series of actions: meetings, publications, and representations. A very few, like the Russian National Committee or the British National Committee, appear to have been put up specifically to oversee the participation of the scholars of one country to International Congresses.

Affiliated International Organizations follow a more uniform pattern. They are all elective associations, and depend exclusively on their membership for support. They are organized around an object, a period or a theme/methodology. For instance the International Commission for the History of the French Revolution has its subject matter very precisely defined, while the International Economic History Association covers a much wider historical spectrum. Moreover, in the life of CISH, Affiliated International Organizations are relatively newcomers, most of them having been founded after 1960 or more recently. They are also more likely to reflect changes in historiography and methodology. They tend to take part to the quinquennial congresses: about 23-25 of them hold their meetings regularly at that time.

The status of Internal Commissions is different. They do not pay fees and do not vote in General Assemblies. In principle, they are created by the General Assembly for a specific purpose (new field of historical research, etc.) and a limited time. After 5 or 10 years,



they are either transformed into an Affiliated International Organization or disbanded. However, some are maintained for a longer time because of a specific situation regarding their structural funding problem. Most of them are not very active in the construction of the program, since only one or two do regularly participate in congresses.

In terms of general implication in the life of ICHS, all members are not equally responsive. Traditionally, Secretary generals of ICHS used to divide the membership in three: one third would respond regularly to requests from the Secretariat, another third would respond only occasionally, and the last third would never respond at all. I must say that the diffusion of the use of email during the last ten years changed the situation and I can say that now the proportion of responsive members is nearer 40% to 45%. Still, this proportion signals that there remains an important breach in the continuity of communications between the Secretariat and the members.

## **2. Are we on the right track?**

The objectives of ICHS are clearly formulated in the statutes:

« ...to promote the historical sciences through international co-operation. In particular it organizes every five years, in collaboration with the National Committee of the historians of the host country, an International Congress of Historical Sciences. It sets the date of the congress and determines its program. It may handle, patronize or support financially the publication of reference works of general interest and the organization of scientific symposia or of other events encouraging the spread of historical thought and knowledge. »

There are two dimensions to these objectives; the first one is the goal of promoting historical knowledge through international cooperation, and the second, the main instrument, the quinquennial congress. During the first years of the existence of ICHS, before the Second World War and even after, publications were very important and took a substantial part of its budget. Since the 1960s, publications have regularly decreased and the Congress remains the single most important activity of ICHS. In his book on the International Congresses of Historical Sciences, Karl Dietrich Erdmann has explained how CISH was founded in 1926, when it appeared important to put up a light and permanent structure to ensure continuity between International Congresses. These had been going along since 1900, and even since 1898, if we take into account the International Congress of Diplomatic History held in The Hague that year, and the lack of continuity meant that everything had to be build from scratch every time. On this last point, ICHS has clearly succeeded in organizing congresses since 1950. It is also noteworthy to remind that ICHS is a completely independent organization; it belongs to its members and is funded by them.

Very quickly another objective came into being for ICHS, and it is the comparative approach. Already during the 1923 Congress that brought CISH to existence, Henri Pirenne stressed its importance. Since the 1928 seminal paper by Marc Bloch, at the Congress of Oslo, a lot has been said about this approach (*Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes*). Of course, in the first place, all history is comparative in some ways, but the proper input of ICHS has been to advocate its use to help circumvent national historical monologues and try to bring comparisons between countries and regions. To cite Marc Bloch: « Cessons, si vous le voulez bien, de causer éternellement d'histoire nationale à histoire nationale, sans nous comprendre. » Recently, the



transnational concept appeared, newer approaches followed, such as « histoires croisées », entangled histories and the like, but inside ICHS, the objective of comparative history was always present. Even if a good proportion of historical research is still done within the context of national history, and for good reasons, there is a growing tendency to put it in a broader historiographical context and ICHS has helped to strengthen this approach, and will continue. On the other hand, the development of global / world history is also likely to widen perspectives and this is already evident in the work of many of ICHS affiliates.

Is there sufficient need / demand for a generalist Congress every five years? The situation has changed greatly, especially since 1960 with, first of all, the explosion of the number of universities the world over, and the concomitant rise of the number of professional historians. Furthermore, the development of international cooperation in most fields of knowledge, and the multiplication of bilateral, multilateral joint research projects have fostered numerous venues as well as the development of networks, either formal or informal. There are now many more international congresses, catering to all specialties of historiography. However, there seems to be a consistent demand for such a congress. At any rate, nobody objected to the quinquennial congress in the answers to the 2007 questionnaire.

The International Congress plays a double role: it has a scientific profile and at the same time it fulfills a social function that should not be overlooked. During the congress, a lot of dissemination of historical and historiographical information about ongoing research and problématiques goes on. It is a place to create or reactivate networks and various linkages, where directions of research can be seen in action in different settings and conditions. It is providing a meeting place for scholars the world over, creating a lot of occasions of intermingling with historians from other countries.

However, if a generalist congress can be a good place to observe the actual state of the discipline, such a venue is less suited to issue directions of research and to exert a normative function. In that respect, its role must remain to encourage personal contacts, interchanges and interactions without which the development of a global community of historians is not possible. It is more like a meeting ground, where colleagues can look around, choose and discuss ideas and methods. A generalist congress is a good tool to open up or to mitigate the different specializations of history or its apparent fragmentation. However, in order to achieve the best results, there should be incentives to bring people to invest their time in such an activity. Thus, there is an acute need to provide cross-historical period interest and stimulation in the program.

### **3. Building the Program of the International Congress of Historical Sciences**

The program of the Congress is the main preoccupation of the Bureau since the founding of ICHS. Periodically, procedures have been changed: at first, the local organizing committee was responsible for the entire program but it came back very quickly to be the responsibility of the Bureau. Maybe it is time to change again the procedure and the structure of the program.

Should the members of ICHS play a greater role in the construction of the program? Right now, National Committees and Affiliated International Organizations are canvassed for themes. Then a Subcommittee of the Bureau gets together and examines the whole list – generally more than 200 different proposals for approximately 50 sessions. Currently, the Subcommittee of the Bureau fuses some themes to be able to take into

account most of the proposals submitted. In fact, most of the time, no theme is adopted with the same formulation as submitted by members. In addition, National Committees or Affiliated International Organizations sometime peg names to a theme, but this procedure means that if there is a substantial change in the wording of the theme, there is almost no point of going back to the original proposer to ask that person to organize the session.

With the gradual involvement of the Affiliated International Organizations since the 1960s, the program of the International Congress became divided in two parts. First of all, there is the « main » program, with its fifty or so sessions, divided into Major themes, Specialized themes, Round tables, Joint sessions and Special sessions. Then comes the second part, the individual programs of each Affiliated International Organizations, each one being allocated three half-day sessions. The week of the Congress was divided in two: the first four days of the week being occupied by the main program and the last three days (Thursday, Friday and Saturday), by the meetings of AIOs. Starting in 2000, ICHS tried to spread more evenly the sessions; putting some AIOs meetings in the first part of the week, but with limited success. The AIOs number around 30, so actually, with the rule of three half-day meetings, the possible number of sessions is 90.

There are altogether more than 100 sessions during the congress (including business meetings of AIOs). Moreover, starting with Sydney in 2005, duration of the congress was reduced: the closing ceremony was moved from Sunday to Saturday afternoon, and in Amsterdam, it will be on Saturday morning. This means that there is one less day available for meetings, but we think that this was a step in the right direction. If the program of the congress could be completely unified, it would mean to plan an average of 25 to 30 sessions per day. However, this could jeopardize the status that ICHS gives to each of the three major themes, since there would be much more sessions in each day. Table 1 gives a picture of the daily breakdown of sessions for the last five congresses (Madrid, Montréal, Oslo, Sydney and Amsterdam).

**Table 1 : Number of sessions per day**

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Sunday	1	1	1	1	1
Monday	17	14	11	14	22
Tuesday	20	14	22	17	27
Wednesday	17	14	31	38	32
Thursday	17	15	34	50	48
Friday	18	24	49	49	44
Saturday	9	21	27	14	1
Sunday	1	1	1		
Total of sessions	100	104	176	183	175

There is an increase in the number of sessions starting on Wednesday. There are two reasons for this: the first one is the impact of major theme sessions and the second the sessions of the AIOs. Having major theme sessions meant for ICHS, to allocate a full day of meeting for each of the three themes. In order to give the possibility to more people



to attend these sessions, the offer of concurrent sessions was correspondingly reduced. However, since Oslo, because of the policy of trying to better integrate the sessions of the AIOs, more sessions were put in from Wednesday on.

The main program of the Congress is the direct result of the proposals for themes received by the Bureau three years before the Congress. Themes are organized, discussed by a Subcommittee and presented to the General Assembly. In the past, there was considerable criticism about this procedure because members felt that they could not really discuss the matter in detail. There is a real difficulty involved here, because the program is definitely not improvised by the Subcommittee, but is the result of a long and complex discussion among the members based on the consideration of all the proposals currently made (generally more than 200). Obviously, the General Assembly cannot redo in detail this operation. On the other hand, the program of the meetings of the AIOs is entirely independent from the General Assembly and each one can put up any theme that it sees fit. In addition, the program is finalized at a much later date.

#### **4. Proposals**

There are a few ways to improve the place of the members of ICHS in the construction of the program of the Congress while maintaining the overall responsibility of the Bureau for the program. The idea would be to give more leeway to members and still provide for a central responsibility to ensure that the preparation of the Congress will proceed efficiently. Here are some proposals to be discussed:

1. ICHS will keep five sections in its program: major themes, specialized themes, joint sessions, round tables, and special sessions.
2. To be considered, any proposal for a theme must be justified with a short text (minimum 200 words).
3. There must be at least two members of ICHS (NC and AIO) to propose a joint session.
4. Each Affiliated International Organization is entitled to one session in the main program. This means that there would be only two half-day sessions reserved for AIOs.
5. National Committees should be encouraged to propose special sessions to take stock of the development of historiography in a regional area.
6. The number of Round Tables should be reduced to 10 and incorporate younger scholars.
7. The list of all proposals will be sent to members of ICHS and they will have a short period to send their reaction to the Secretary General before the meeting of the Sub-committee of the Bureau.
8. The ICHS Web site should be used in the process. Steps should be taken to simplify the cumbersome procedure to receive all proposals and having to prepare long documents. This would mean putting more money into the web site.

The Subcommittee wishes the General Assembly to discuss these questions in order to help the Bureau of ICHS prepare the program of the next congress. After the discussions, the Bureau will finalize the operational details.

COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL  
DES SCIENCES HISTORIQUES



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

For the Subcommittee,

Jean-Claude Robert, Secretary General