

Psychology in Europe:

A growing profession with high standards and a bright future

The EFPPA, the European Federation of Professional Psychologists' Associations, was founded in 1981, 20 years ago. Now it covers 31 European countries. The members are national Psychological Associations or Federations, one from each country. All 15 European Union members are included plus 16 other European countries.

In the world there are about 500 000 people with a psychologist's training. One out of three of the world's psychologists live in Europe. The EFPPA member associations together have 130 000 members.

In addition the European Psychology Students have just recently joined the EFPPA. The student organization EFPSA, European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations, has about 80 000 members. Our profession is growing extremely fast in Europe. It has been estimated that at the moment the number of psychology students is already around 200 000 in Europe.

The Head office of the EFPPA is located in Brussels. The general aim of the EFPPA is promoting high quality and ethics in the training and the practice of the profession. This is for the benefit of both the clients, European citizens and the psychologists themselves.

At this moment in time the following five goals are the most important in the activity of the EFPPA:

1) High level university education as the guarantee of quality

In Bologna, June 1999, the ministers of Education from 29 European countries adopted a declaration supporting a "European Higher Education Area". The aims of the declaration are clearly well-meaning but it is difficult to know how they will be implemented.

Since there is a possibility to misunderstand that the basic 3-year university education (Bachelor's degree) will be seen as a sufficient level of scientific education and professional training in the future, the EFPPA wants to make the following points clear:

1. In the field of psychology the 3-year university education (Bachelor's degree) is insufficient for both scientific and professional purposes. The Bachelor's degree is merely a starting level of the psychologist's training.
2. For professional psychological purposes, the scientific and practical training together should last at least six years. Both the core programme and the advanced studies should be provided within a university or an equivalent institution of higher education. Usually, the university degree at this level is the Master's degree.
3. In all European countries where licensing and legal regulation of the profession of psychology has been properly arranged, the required level of education is the Master's degree.
4. The European Federation of Professional Psychologists' Associations has decided on the requirements for training in psychology in its document "Optimal standards for professional training in psychology" in 1990. The whole document can be downloaded from the EFPPA website www.efppa.org.

2) The Europsychologist's Diploma

For the future the EFPPA is creating a Europsychologist's diploma which would be granted to all psychologists in the EFPPA Member Associations with a training in psychology which fulfills the EFPPA standards, which I previously mentioned. This would be a new, revolutionary step for the profession. Since the European Union will not regulate the profession, we will do it ourselves.

A European Diploma for psychologists is necessary for the achievement of several important goals.

The main goals are:

- to provide reliable, high-quality professional services for European citizens
- to allow free movement for psychologists in Europe and
- to ensure that the training level for the profession is equally high in all European countries.

Also, it seems that a European standard is necessary in order to promote the development of adequate national legislation concerning both basic and specialization training in psychology.

The European Commission has earlier indicated that it does not plan to issue a Directive concerning the training of psychologists. Therefore, a Europsychologist's Diploma can be developed and granted by EFPPA. There has already been launched a project already for this purpose. Universities, university networks and psychological associations in 12 European countries participate in this project in cooperation with EFPPA. The project is funded by the European Union.

The granting of the Diplomas could start around 2003-2004. Naturally, the Europsychologist's Diploma, of course, would need to be accepted both on the national level, that is, in all European countries, and in the European Union. This is a great challenge for the profession and for our organizations.

3) A Psychotherapy Certificate for European psychologists

The EFPPA has already created training standards for the psychotherapy training which is required for psychologists to be able to practice psychotherapy independently. These standards have already been accepted by the EFPPA in 1997. The standards have been openly published on our website. These standards include a 4-year special theoretical and practical training in addition to the basic psychological training.

The EFPPA also looks into the possibilities of creating a European Psychotherapy Certificate, which would be granted to those psychologists with a psychotherapy training, which meets the EFPPA standards.

This project could also be brought into reality in 2003-2004

4) Making the profession stronger in services and status

The EFPPA also aims for a stronger status of the psychological profession. This means promoting and defending the rights of psychologists:

- by promoting Regulations in Europe and Laws in European countries
- spreading wider public knowledge of psychology and psychologists
- creating more visibility for the EFPPA in Europe and the psychologists in all member countries
- improving the financing of the psychological services, both public and private

In many countries this means that the EFPPA demands for the profession of psychology an equal status to that of the medical profession. Equality should be manifest in the training, the financing, the legislation and the practical status of the profession. In many European countries, the profession of psychology is still in the shadow of the medical profession - and psychologists do not, for instance, have the possibility to become leaders of the health organizations.

5) Keeping science and profession together

Science and profession in psychology are intertwined in many ways. Unlike many other professions, the profession of psychology has grown out of science. The medical profession, for example, existed long before any real science of medicine.

The basic competence for the profession is created through scientific education in the universities. Science in turn is challenged by the problems that practitioners face in the "real life" of human beings. The success and credibility of psychology as a profession relies greatly on the close link between scientific research and practical application.

The EFPPA as a whole will be developed as a joint organization of academic and practical psychology, as the present statutes of our organization clearly indicate. The EFPPA aims to promote the development of psychology and its practical application, covering both science and profession.

My most important message to you is:

- We need to keep European psychology united and strong. Only together and united can we achieve our goals. We have to take special care of our unity and cooperation both in Europe and in the EFPPA, and especially in countries where there are many organizations.
- If we keep together and united, the future of psychology in Europe looks bright. It will witness a Europe with a growing respect for and insight into the psychology and psychological aspects of human life.

TUOMO TIKKANEN

President, EFPPA