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The present situation of research workers in Portugal

The OTC acknowledges the invitation to participate in the 29th SNTRS-CGT (Syndicat National des Travailleurs de la Recherche Scientifique) congress.

I am Teresa Pinheiro on behalf of OTC, which is a Portuguese non-profit organization addressed to all those who are directly or indirectly involved in scientific research activities.

The aim of this talk is to highlight the present situation of science and researchers in Portugal.

The disinvestment in Science in Portugal in the last 6 years is devastating. The drift of scientific policies accompanied by a catastrophic human resource policy and brutal budget cuts during the troika intervention period, between 2011 and 2016) now reaches proportions, which go beyond the most pessimistic analysis that have been made over the last decade.

In Portugal, R & D investment in % of GDP fell by 17% from 2010 to 2016, while the EU trend (total of 28 member states) remained positive, although it has slowed down in the last 5 years (1).

The decline in public investment was reflected in the functioning of the institutions. The under-financing of the institutions, the ever increasing complexity of the administrative procedures has led in recent years to the loss of competitiveness of our research units, vis-à-vis the European partners. As a result we observe a lower productivity rate and the publication international visibility remains modest staying in 16th place in impact index among the EU countries (2).

The invasion of precarious work in public institutions carrying out R & D has reached overwhelming proportions. The numbers of the precariousness in the national R & D institutions, such as universities, state laboratories and research institutes, are not fully evaluated. It is estimated that the number of researchers without an employment contract can exceed 30% of the total number of the 40000 researchers in the country. These are values taken from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) for 2016.

These are rough estimates because there are no statistical studies on the number of Portuguese fellowship holders in all R & D activities in the country and abroad. In the last 15 years, nearly 20,000 people have obtained a doctorate in Portugal, most of them under the National Science Foundation (FCT) grant programs. But of these 20,000 new doctorates only a small percentage has been inserted in public institutions

or in private companies, with a work contract. The vast majority of this highly qualified generation continues to live on grants without social benefits, such as unemployment, vacations, illness or maternity leaves, and are payed with a very low salary around 1500 €.

Moreover, for the same qualifications, we are currently facing deep disparities due to the proliferation of different national grants, all delivered by the same institution FCT. During the dark years of the Troika, the INE figures point to a decrease in the total number of researchers in Portugal of approximately 25%. Certainly contributed to this decline many scholarships that were not renewed and those who decided to emigrate in search of a more stable work.

In the last two years we have noticed a very modest recovery in the number of researchers. However we could not see a clear cut with the old research policy or a real governmental new attitude towards science.

Recently Government measures to stimulate scientific employment and solve the precarious situation of researchers, sent worrying contradictory signals to the scientific community, and have not had any consequences to date. Despite the successive political announcements, there is no real desire to solve these problems.

In fact, we have created in the last decade the most qualified and best-trained generation ever. It is a pity that public institutions and companies had not evolved at the same pace.

So in Portugal scientific knowledge and scientific research are still not considered as an important social issue.

On behalf of OTC

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- (2) From <http://www.scimagojr.com>.