

Preface

The life sciences, which bring hope, and often solutions, in situations of pain and distress both in the developed world and in areas still struggling to achieve growth, are creating dramatic changes in the fields of knowledge and power. They offer humanity, that is to say doctors or engineers, processes that borrow from nature astonishing precision and... formidable efficiency. However, at the same time, the domestication of life's most intimate mechanisms has made them somewhat commonplace, putting our principles and our secular values to the test of performance and, let's not deny it, of our fantasies.

In this context, I attach great importance to public debates on the increasing impact of life sciences and biotechnological innovations. The event we are organising on 22 and 23 March 2004 in the city of Genoa, the cultural capital of Europe, will put high-calibre scientists in contact with personalities from the world of art and literature. What is, therefore, the place of life sciences in today's European cultures? How can we monitor scientific and technical progress and make sure that European citizens benefit from research developments? Good governance is impossible without responsible citizens. But is it possible to imagine citizenship without cultural awareness? It is inconceivable to discuss the repercussions of research without taking into account what science is able – or unable – to achieve. And can one imagine these discussions ignoring also the impact of such advances on culture, using the word here in its fullest sense? These crucial questions are the focus of our concerns and will be at the heart of debates in Genoa.



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