

### ECNC's 15th anniversary: Flying free

In 1994, I was approached by Albert Klinkenbergh and Rob Wolters (then working in the Netherlands Government) to join ECNC as President. ECNC was in the process of establishment, and we spotted an emergent niche for an independent, policy-oriented institution, bridging the gap between science and policy, and able to manage inter-state projects in the best European communitarian style. The challenge was obvious, and ECNC initiated a long 'Moving Forward' process of statutory reform and reshaping of its organization and *raison d'être*. ECNC also made a bid for the first Topic Centre for Nature and Biodiversity of the European Environmental Agency. The result was that ECNC became a full partner of the consortium, led by the Natural History Museum in Paris.

When I stepped down from the Presidency in 2001, ECNC was running smoothly, but still had one problem to solve. The financial contribution of the Netherlands Government

was still over 50%, meaning that ECNC was not as independent as it should have been. Sir Brian Unwin, former President of the European Investment Bank, became President of ECNC: the right man in the right place! ECNC is now making its own way and is truly independent. It has become a crucial actor in European policymaking and implementation, and its prestige is based on a record of successes. It surely has a long life ahead. Knowing the team at the wheel, I feel optimistic that ECNC has a promising future.

*Dr Antonio Machado,  
President ECNC, 1994–2001*

