



Personal statement by Erik Smets

Dear CETAF delegates,

With this personal statement I want to inform you that I would be honoured to serve for a second term as a member on the Executive Committee of CETAF. I am for a second time nominated for the position of Treasurer, and, when re-elected, I would be happy to fulfil this role. My scientific and managerial skills and my experience as CETAF's treasurer for the past three years show, in my opinion, that I have ample expertise to continue in this position. I also want to emphasize that I am highly motivated to contribute to the CETAF strategy, and to add items to the CETAF agenda.

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For those of you that do not know my background, I add a brief overview of my career here. In 2005, I was appointed director of the National Herbarium of the Netherlands (NHN). Since 2005 I also hold the Chair of Systematic Botany within Leiden University. Previously, I was the Head of the laboratory of Plant Systematics at the KU Leuven since 1989, and I was elected Head of the Department of Biology (KU Leuven) from 2000 till 2005. From 2005 onwards, I was appointed Professor by Special Appointment at the KU Leuven. Soon after my arrival in the Netherlands, negotiations started to establish a new high profile national systematics and biodiversity institute. After three laborious years we received in 2009 a substantial amount of money plus an extra structural budget for the foundation of what is now known as Naturalis Biodiversity Center. In 2010, I was appointed to be the first Scientific director of this new institute. In August 2019 our new building (incl. a new Museum) will be opened and all staff, collections and labs will move towards this site after having spent several years in temporary locations around Leiden. CETAF 46 is scheduled to take place in Leiden the same week as the Biodiversity_Next meeting, a joint conference by CETAF, DiSSCo, TDWG, GBIF and iDigBio, and a very nice opportunity to visit our new museum. My main research interests are floral development of selected taxa and trait evolution. So far, I supervised – with assistance of my collaborators – 74 master theses, 44 PhD theses, and I managed 23 postdoctoral researchers.

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I attended my first CETAF meeting in October 2005 in Stockholm and I quickly recognized the possibilities and potential of CETAF. Therefore I decided to represent the NHN myself in its meetings instead of assigning a representative; I firmly believe more General or Scientific directors should do this. I was part of the Board of Directors of the EDIT project, participating in all Board meetings and various EDIT workshops, and I was an active member of the task force 'evaluation metrics'. During CETAF 25 I was elected auditor, together with my colleague Olof Biström from Helsinki. Later I became a member of the 'Research Assessment Group', I chaired the first 'CETAF Secretariat Evaluation Panel', and I was actively involved in the 'CETAF Strategy Group'.

My networking activities to make European systematic and biodiversity research stronger, led to the new initiative to organize the first 'Systematics' meeting which was held in Leiden during August 2009 by BioSyst.EU. Since then a second conference was organised in Vienna (2013) and a third in Gothenburg (2017) where I co-organized the CETAF symposium, entitled *The roles of natural history collections in exploring biodiversity*. I am convinced that CETAF's participation in this kind of meetings is very important to bridge the gap between the CETAF community on the one hand, and the collection building and research activities that are present around Europe in smaller institutes and in research groups in universities on the other hand.

Many research groups dealing with systematics house precious, albeit smaller, collections but are endangered because their research activities do not have the impact that is currently generally expected and demanded, and because universities often do not want to pay for the storage and management of (natural history) collections. If our community continues to ignore these facilities and collections, we risk to lose the opportunity to educate young students that will be the professionals of the future. DEST is a great initiative, and the newly formed DEST consortium is promising, but CETAF itself cannot fill the gap that will be created when universities continue to decrease their educational activities in taxonomy. It is still my conviction that we must try to find a clever way to join forces with the taxonomic community outside CETAF so that the CETAF institutes and consortia, as well as the research groups outside CETAF can form partnerships, and together raise one strong voice in Europe on systematics and biodiversity research.

The research infrastructure represented by CETAF is invaluable This infrastructure contains a vast amount of data, which has to be unlocked or must be preserved for future technologies. This data, once digitized, made interoperable and openly accessible will be a powerful and essential instrument to address present day societal questions and environmental dilemmas. Our challenge is to demonstrate this widely – especially outside our own community – and consequently change the image of our profession and facilities. The DiSSCo initiative which is on the ESFRI Roadmap and will be fully implemented from 2025 onwards brings new opportunities for CETAF since CETAF and DiSSCo are complementary (CETAF EC statement of 26-9-2018).

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I firmly believe that CETAF matured under the leadership of our Chair, Michelle Price, and by the support of the Executive director, Ana Casino, and her team. As an EC member it is not my task to mention the many achievements of the past period, but I think we became more professional. Now we have to enter a new phase with new challenges that need new initiatives. As a treasurer I am concerned how we can manage this organisation with the membership fees only, supplied by overhead incomes of projects, and without too many increases of the membership fees; CETAF must be involved in projects but on the other hand the core-tasks of the CETAF secretariat should not suffer from too many involvements in projects, which is a major challenge; we need to think thoroughly and open-minded about our identity and position towards with DiSSCo. In my opinion CETAF should be more active – together with its membership, working groups, task forces etc. - to deliver position papers, policy documents, and to form the right alliances. Within the CETAF community we must be able to move towards more collaboration, more visibility, and more relevance, in order to reach the impact we deserve. More than ever before, CETAF needs a committed Executive Committee and fellow members that are proud to be true CETAF ambassadors. I am ready to fulfil the role as Treasure if I am re-elected.

Erik Smets
Leiden, January 31, 2019