



# Q&A

# ANTON ZEILINGER: AUSTRIA'S S&T VISION

by Cristina Serra

*North-South cooperation is a driving force that can help shape a better future for developing countries, says TWAS Fellow Anton Zeilinger, president of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.*

Austria has a strong tradition in international North-South cooperation: since the 1960s, this small, land-locked European country has engaged in programmes for development assistance and cooperation with Africa, Asia, Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Caribbean.

As president of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), TWAS Fellow Anton Zeilinger, plays a key role in implementing the national priority of international cooperation in science.

In an interview, Zeilinger said Austria is in a strategic geographic position that has long favoured blending of cultures, identities and skills. And the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which today includes about 800 members [six of them TWAS Fellows], has long promoted engagement at the regional and international level.

In recent years, Austria has participated in the elaboration of the European Union-Africa strategy, and in the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon, Portugal, [2007] with African women active in business, politics and civil society. It has also supported the establishment of an office of the African Union in Vienna and launched several long-term projects to support self-help actions in developing countries.

The interview with Zeilinger was conducted by TWAS staff writer Cristina Serra.

**The Austrian Academy of Sciences is a prestigious and historic institution in a relatively small nation. Why is ÖAW committed to international science cooperation?**

● International cooperation in science has a very long tradition for Austria. Austria was always at a crossroads of different cultures due to its geographical location. The Austrian Academy of Sciences – ÖAW – supports all activities to improve international science cooperation. This is an important way to increase mutual understanding.

**Why did ÖAW decide to host TWAS's 26th General Meeting and what do you feel were major outcomes from the event?**

● For the ÖAW it was a big honour to host TWAS's 26th General Meeting. It was particularly important to have the meeting in an industrial country like Austria, in order to help extend the importance of TWAS beyond developing and emerging countries. As always with such conferences the major outcome are the numerous personal contacts, which resulted due to the meeting.

**Austria has established scientific partnerships with developing countries worldwide. What are Austria's goals for such partnerships? What benefits does it hope to receive?**

● In the long run, scientific partnerships only make sense on a worldwide scale. After all, science is

## BIOGRAPHY

**Anton Zeilinger**, the president of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, is a physicist and the pioneer of studies on quantum computing and quantum teleportation [a process by which the exact state of an atom or photon can be transmitted from one location to another].

Zeilinger was elected to TWAS in 2014. He is the recipient of the Wolf Prize [2010] and of the UK Inaugural Isaac Newton Medal of the Institute of Physics [2008].

In 2009, the *New Statesman* included him among the 10 people who could change the world. The asteroid 48681 *Zeilinger* is named for him.



“ In the long run, scientific partnerships only make sense on a worldwide scale. ” Anton Zeilinger, ÖAW president

a general endeavour that should engage people from all backgrounds geographically, ethnically, religion, gender and so forth.

**Austria has signed agreements with nations such as South Africa and Egypt. Is this a recent trend or it is something that your Academy has been engaged with historically?**

● The Austrian Academy always has agreements with a number of academies worldwide. This helps to establish collaboration in many situations. It should be mentioned that the cooperation agreement with Egypt was already established in 1980, while the cooperation with South Africa was signed during the TWAS meeting in Vienna.

**Are there other partnerships established by the Academy in recent years?**

● A very recent example is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Cuba.

**We live in times of great challenges and changes. Perhaps old-fashioned North-South cooperation should be redesigned with an eye to the future. In your opinion, how should we shape new forms of cooperation?**

● The ÖAW wants to emphasise that cooperation should be mutual. For that purpose the ÖAW has started a programme to support short-time visits of young scientists particularly from emerging and developing

◀ Austrian Academy of Sciences President Anton Zeilinger at the opening ceremonies of the 26th TWAS General Meeting in Vienna, Austria.

countries. The aim is to encourage more scientists in their home institutions.

**Today the EU is facing the problem of a huge number of refugees knocking on Austria's doors, a number of whom are scientists. Does the ÖAW take part in the societal debate on refugees in an active and science-based manner?**

● The ÖAW has started a program to offer fellowships to officially recognized refugees in Austria in order to help them establish themselves in the new environment.

**There's a growing interest – both in developed and in developing countries – on how science can most effectively provide advice to governments. Is ÖAW an influential voice with the Austrian Government? Perhaps you can describe the relationship. In your view, what's the most effective approach for the scientific community?**

● For the ÖAW, the dialogue with society and with politics is very important. On the one hand, the ÖAW investigates specific scientific questions, which are put forward to the ÖAW and analysed on a high scientific level. It is important to notice that the investigations are outcome-open and not influenced at all politically. Another approach, which is important, is to meet members of Parliament occasionally and discuss mutual topics of interests. □