

Changing of the Guards: Presidential Report to the General Assembly of the European Stroke Organisation (ESO)

Dear friends,

When I started my tenure as president 2 years ago, I said it would be a difficult time of transition for ESO. At that time I did not know how right I was. Only one year ago I reported to the General Assembly (GA) that the Executive Committee was working on the merger with the European Stroke Conference (ESC). We were hoping for talks with the Programme Committee and to become part of it. But we were continuously disappointed and our hopes to have a combined conference gradually faded. Thus, we decided to put forward the idea of having our own conference. This we would like to ask you to support in the future.

What was the process of separation?

On 22 November 2013, the Executive Committee met in Garmisch during our Science Workshop in order to discuss one single point: the relationship with the ESC. The long list of previous attempts to get onto the road of negotiations with the chairperson of the ESC, Michael Hennerici, was reviewed. This list included his statement made at the General Assembly in 2010 to hand over the Conference to ESO in 2014 as well as many other statements and promises made at various occasions such as allowing us to sit in at the Programme Committee and to be responsible for a part of the scientific programme. Over time, none of these promises were kept. On the contrary, M. Hennerici told us last year that ESO was not an important contributor to the ESC conference. We were surprised because 40% of all speakers were ESO members as were a majority of the advisory board members, abstract reviewers, and chairpersons. At this time, we still had hopes he might come round.

With the support of the Board of Directors, we asked for a fair representation in the Programme Committee, a full day of ESO activities in the scientific programme and a fair share of the revenue. Finally, a road map of transition was worked out in great detail but was flatly rejected by the chairperson of the ESC. Now, at the Nice conference, our preplanned and scheduled ESO controversies session has been deleted from the program without any understandable reason and we are not even permitted to hold our General Assembly on the premises of the Congress site.

Therefore, the Executive Committee suggests to become independent from the ESC and to hold our own ESO conference from either 2015 or 2016 onwards. We already received support from the Board of Directors and now ask the General Assembly to ratify this decision.

In December 2013 I have written a presidential report for our newsletter detailing the events that brought about this decision. I suppose most of you have read it. In sum, our decision is based on the ESO's need to have its own conference, for such a conference to be based on non-profit principles and to provide the earnings for educational and other purposes as stated in our mission.

To accomplish this as well as other measures to become independent we inaugurated working groups were to prepare the necessary changes:

1. A **Bylaws Committee** (Didier Leys, Chair; A. Algra, G. Vanhooren) was asked to prepare the necessary bylaw changes. These changes have been communicated to you and we will ask you in a separate point on our agenda to confirm them. They relate to a different definition of an ESO supported conference and the need to hold a General Assembly not at the ESC anymore but at an ESO supported conference in the future.

2. Working groups for

- the biannual **European Stroke Science Meeting** in Garmisch (H. Mattle, M. Dichgans, P. Sandercock, A. Chamorro, D. Berezcki). The Garmisch meeting was again very successful, the proceedings will be published in 'Stroke'. The Executive Committee thinks this meeting should be continued in 2015.
- the biannual **ESO/Karolinska Stroke Update Meeting** (N. Wahlgren, M. Brainin, T. Steiner, JL Mas, N. Bornstein). The Karolinska Update meeting has now mutated and become enlarged as the ESO/Karolinska Stroke Update which will be held in Stockholm in November 2014 and will focus on guideline issues, topics and speakers are still to be selected.
- the **annual ESO Congress** for 2015/16 (K. Lees, Chair). The possibility of holding an ESO Congress already in 2015 has been actively pursued under the leadership of Ken Lees and has been preplanned by a group of persons that are also members of the current Executive Committee. Assuming that the General Assembly will vote in favour of this development, these persons will immediately hand over this project to the ESO without reservations. As a matter of fact, due to the very enthusiastic and professional preparations, this conference is scheduled to be held in Glasgow already next year, from 17-19 April. The preliminary announcement has been distributed. If you accept this report you will at the same time accept this development to host the first ESO congress in Glasgow 2015.

- ## 3. A „European Stroke Journal“ Committee (M. Brainin, K. Lees; D. Leys, G. Rinkel, D. Russel, S. Kiechl, V. Caso)
- The ESO Journal group is exploring the possibilities including a business model for an ESO owned journal. Several options are being explored including a collaboration with the WSO owned IJS.

Other recent highlights include the activities of our committees, among them the Industry Relation Committee that has provided a manuscript from a workshop held last year in London on device trials in acute stroke under the leadership of Phil Bath.

The Guidelines Committee under the leadership of Thorsten Steiner and Jean-Louis Mas have provided a guideline on ICH which we will publish simultaneously in the EJM and the IJS. It will be disseminated also broadly among European neurologists if it becomes accepted as an ESO/EFNS/ENS Guideline which is quite likely. Another ESO guideline on Prehospital Management of Stroke is under way and is chaired by Vincent Thijs.

A description of ESO including its history has been published in Stroke last December and an update of ongoing activities is scheduled for June.

Visibility for ESO is high among non-stroke conferences, it contributes an ESO Symposium at the forthcoming EFNS/ENS meeting in Istanbul in June.

Furthermore, at the first Congress of the EAN in June 2015 in Berlin, which will become the largest neurology meeting in the world, the opening session is a session contributed by ESO on ICH. This session will be chaired by two eminent female representatives from ESO, Valeria Caso and Charlotte Cordonnier.

ESO has been active in the Atrial Fibrillation Preventing Stroke Initiative held in Brussels last month and had the opportunity to speak at a symposium held for the prevention of stroke together with representatives from SAFE.

The necessity to become more present at important EU levels in Brussels is absolutely evident. The cost of brain diseases in Europe amounts to 798 billion Euro per year and dementia and stroke are the largest group among the neurological diseases. The cooperation with the European Brain Council, the EFNA and the Biomedical Alliance for Europe are important options to pursue. In future, research funding programs will have to become more influenced by ESO to make stroke a priority issue which currently is not the case. For this,

the cooperation with stroke support organisations such as SAFE is eminently important.

Furthermore, as a regional organisation, we have to support initiatives from the WSO that include the world-wide stroke awareness campaign, the World Stroke Day, the Bill of Rights for stroke victims, and its advocacy role at the WHO. The world-wide fight against NCDs has to be supported from our side as well.

There are other issues to prioritize. Among them is the striking underrepresentation of females in our organisation, especially as officers. Currently, among the Executive Committee the female:male ratio is 1:8 (12%) and in the Board of Directors it is 2:9 (<20%). A change of this ratio to 30% or even 40% should be actively pursued. We should encourage good female stroke scientists to come up and volunteer for work in the ESO.

Finally let me say a few words of thanks. Firstly, my colleagues in the Executive Committee who all have committed a lot of time to ESO and have provided rapid and thoughtful contributions on innumerable discussions and helped to form our decisions. It is a very special experience to have such a nice group of international experts to help steer the ESO.

The excellent help from Congrex Switzerland office should be mentioned and the support in the electronic election process. For our current elections we had more nominations than ever before which shows that ESO is on its right way. But also our excellent new website should be mentioned. For all this, Julia Bicher and Elvira Pistillo deserve our sincerest thanks.

Our membership is gradually increasing and has more than 600 members. This speaks more than all the other numbers. The growing membership proves that ESO is alive and thriving. Our General Secretary Patrik Michel readily picks up all issues and offers workable solutions. My thanks go to him and of course to our new president elect, Kennedy Lees, who will take over today.

Michael Brainin

ESO President

General Assembly, Nice, May 8, 2014