

Editorial

25th Anniversary of the foundation of the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery

Keywords: European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery; Foundation; Anniversary; History; EACTS

It was on May 17th 1986 in one of the lounges of Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris that a group of 12 cardiac and thoracic surgeons decided to found the EACTS after two prior meetings on March 1st 1986 at Amsterdam airport and on April 12th 1986 at Frankfurt airport, during which the advisability of creating such an association was debated (Fig. 1).

Three or four of us already were convinced that, despite the existence of excellent national societies, the field of cardio-thoracic surgery in Europe was not sufficiently represented and that it was something of an aberration if the best European scientific studies needed to be presented outside Europe to be recognized by the international scientific community at conferences to which many of us did not have access for reasons of geographical distance or financial constraints, young surgeons in particular. We had been in contact with other European colleagues, highly reputed in their respective countries and throughout Europe, who had accepted to join us to examine the project.

Some of us were meeting each other for the first time but quickly, right from the outset in Amsterdam, we understood that we all thought the project interesting and that we needed to go forward. There were 12 of us initially, rapidly enthusiastic, confident in the future and with a strong conviction that we would succeed because the need for such an Association existed in Europe, with its hundreds of high level cardiothoracic surgery departments with regard to scientific qualities and intellectual creativity.

We agreed on the fact that a fair proportion of cardiac and thoracic surgeons needed to be present in the Council. We decided that the Council would consist of 11 members, 5 officers and 6 councillors: President: Francis Fontan, Vice-President: Keyvan Moghissi, Secretary General: Marko Turina, Editor: Hans Borst, Treasurer: Ingolf Vogt-Moykopf, Councillors: Maurizio Cotrufo, Louis Couraud, Hans Huysmans, Ramiro Rivera, Bjarne Semb and David Wheatley, most of them became Presidents in the following years.

The Constitution and the By-Laws of the Association were drawn up mainly by one of us in particular (Keyvan Moghissi) and were largely based on those of the AATS.

A fundamental aspect of our project was the founding of the Association's scientific journal essential for the publica-

tion of scientific papers presented at annual meetings along with any other paper that would be submitted for publication. Hans Borst who had already experience as Editor of a journal of cardio-thoracic surgery accepted to attempt the adventure with enthusiasm. So he became the first Editor and founder of the '*European Journal of Cardio-Thoracic Surgery*' which is now one of the top three journals in cardio-thoracic surgery rated by impact factor, after the personal efforts of Hans Borst and his successors as editor: Marko Turina, Ludwig Von Segesser, Friedhelm Beyersdorf and their respective collaborators.

Of course we knew that it would be essential to be vigilant as to how the Association would be run, in particular with the scientific aspect and the daily management. There were certainly in the first years some hesitations and some trial and errors as with any human enterprise, but the features of this period of emergence of the Association were hard work, dedication, devotion even, by most of us around the fragile newborn entity which has now, in 2011, reached adulthood.

Each of us had drawn up a list of colleagues in our respective countries and/or region in Europe whom we invited to join us. The responses of acceptance were numerous and thus even before the first conference in Vienna we already had several hundred active members.

The working currency chosen for the Association was the Swiss Franc since the Euro did not yet exist. It was subsequently replaced by the Euro.

From the beginning we decided that in addition to the Presidential Lecture there should be an Honorary Guest Lecture during the annual meeting. The greatest names in our field accepted our invitation year after year. After a number of years we also added a Scientific Lecture of general interest, outside our own particular field and many well-known names also accepted our invitations.

Ernst Wolner, one of the 12 founding members, kindly agreed not to be in the Council limited to 11 members (he joined later on) and to welcome the first meeting of the Association in Vienna, which took place in 1987. The meeting was an encouraging success for the future meetings due to the number of participants (more than 800) and exhibitors, the scientific quality of the programme and the magnificent city of Vienna charged with history [1]. With this first meeting



Fig. 1. Founding fathers of the EACTS at the first meeting in Vienna, 1986. Front row, left to right: Marko Turina and Francis Fontan. Second row, left to right: Hans Huysmans, Ramiro Rivera, Hans Borst, David Wheatley, Keyvan Moghissi, Louis Couraud, Maurizio Cotrufo, Ingolf Vogt-Moykopf.

we had proof that we could succeed over the long term. The next meeting took place in Bordeaux with an even larger number of attendees and was a good success both scientifically and recreationally.

The founding fathers were fully aware that, to be successful, an association such as EACTS would have to address important issues as a matter of priority. These related to:

- Organizing a high-quality annual meeting, where scientific works would be selected anonymously by their scientific merits and which could be presented and discussed.
- Having own journal, to publish; papers presented at the annual scientific meetings, as well as other suitable articles submitted to the journal and accepted through peer reviewing.
- Making provision for an efficient administration, in order to meet the members' needs, supply necessary information, and manage correspondence.

There was one major hurdle for fulfilling the above plans of action; our new, association did not possess any funds. All founding fathers required individually to spend a considerable sum to cover the cost of the numerous meetings in different countries, which led to the foundation of EACTS. This continued well beyond the 'inauguration' meeting in Vienna and the early formative post foundation period, until the Association became financially self-supporting, which was only after the first 2–3 annual scientific meetings.

Considerable risks were involved, in spite of enthusiastic reception of the EACTS idea among European cardiothoracic community. The Editor and Secretary General worked for years with their own staff, without any financial support, until a more firm structure was finally (and slowly) introduced in late nineties. A permanent EACTS secretariat in Windsor was established through activities of Torkel Aberg, who succeeded one of the authors in position of Secretary General, and this secretariat enabled the expansion of EACTS and gave it the necessary professionalism.

Careful balance between various European nations and language areas had to be kept in mind in composition of the Council, and also a balance between cardiac and thoracic surgery, as reflected in Article V, Section 3 of our first constitution, and discussed in Moghissi's presidential address in 1988 [2]. This remained the problem in the early years of EACTS, and the dissatisfaction of some thoracic surgeons led to the formation of ESTS, which still coexists with EACTS, although several efforts at merging our activities were undertaken later: joint meetings, publication of abstracts and meeting papers in EJCTS, thoracic editors in EJCTS, etc.

The original founders' idea was to establish an organization similar to AATS, where the membership would be a distinction granted only to a certain number of properly qualified surgeons (Article IV, Section 5). We have decided not to limit the number of members, but we tried to establish an organization for surgeons established in active practice, with certain scientific record. This was because it had quickly

become evident that a small, elite society might neither be financially nor practically a viable entity in Europe. Therefore, membership criteria were interpreted more liberally, new membership categories were created, the necessity to practice in Europe and indeed for strict professional qualification were relaxed, to allow other scientists to join EACTS, and finally only two membership categories remained, active and honorary.

When starting EACTS, founders were fully aware of the shortcomings of European education, especially for cardiothoracic surgeons, with a wide variety of national rules, accreditations, and training programs. Following a distinguished European tradition of high levels of surgical training, as observed in pre-war years, and indeed the introduction of scientific methods in surgery by some of the leaders of the profession [3], our annual meetings strove for the highest level in scientific material, leading to only a small proportion of submitted abstracts being offered an opportunity to be presented in scientific sessions. Increase in size of our meeting – from one lecture hall to two and three parallel sessions, to introducing poster sessions and later interactive presentations, to the present meeting format where it can be difficult to select and find the session which one wishes to attend – is extremely gratifying to watch, but also needs a fully professionalized secretariat coping with a large amount of preparatory work. But these efforts bring us close to our stated goal of EACTS, to disseminate the knowledge not only

to our members, but also to the cardiothoracic community worldwide [4]; looking back at this first 25 years of EACTS, authors are not only satisfied, but also proud of the development initiated at our first meeting in Vienna in 1986.

References

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Available online 16 July 2011