

EBSA - the early days

It is more than 25 years since the stirrings of the movement which led to the establishment of the European Biophysical Societies' Association. Prior to that time, there had been one European Biophysics Congress in Baden (in 1971) on nuclear medicine and radiation oncology, co-sponsored by the Austrian Society for Biophysics and IUPAB, and published in the Verlag der Wiener Medizinischen Akademie. This event appears to predate the wider adoption of the newer developing areas of Biophysics with which we are nowadays familiar. By the end of the 70's decade, several specialist meetings had been held between the existing national Biophysical Societies on a range of molecular and structural subjects distinct from the medical physics disciplines. From one of these, a joint meeting of the Biophysical Societies of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, held in Aachen in October 1980, a proposition emerged to create a more formal and wider Federation or Association of related European Societies. As a result an invitation was issued by the German Biophysical Society for a preliminary meeting in Frankfurt in November 1981 that was attended by representative officers of the Belgian, British, Danish, German, Italian, Netherlands, Swedish and Swiss Biophysical Societies (or corresponding subgroups). The representatives were Drs. Clauwaert (B), Bayley (GB), Michelsen (DK), Kreutz (D), Müller-Broich, Chairman (D), Rüterjans (D), Strom (I), Versprille (NL), Greve (NL), Ehrenberg (S) and Wüthrich (CH). The concept of the European Biophysical Societies Association was unanimously confirmed and was duly accepted by the national Member Societies.

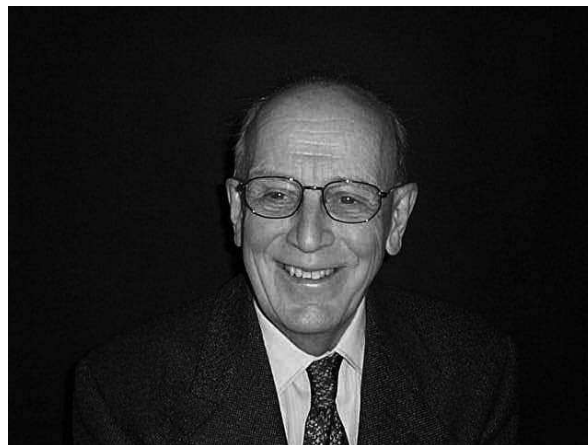
At the Frankfurt meeting, the future aims of the Association were agreed in outline, namely to promote scientific contacts and co-operation with the organisation of joint meetings, initially on specialised biophysical subjects, and with open access to members of all adhering Societies. The priorities were to establish a formal European body, eligible for financial and other support. The question of a Journal associated with EBSA was also proposed as an eventual objective. An acting Executive Committee was constituted under the presidency of Prof. Anders Ehrenberg (Stockholm) with Prof. W. Kreutz (Freiburg, Vice President), Dr Julius Clauwaert (Wilrijk, Secretary) and myself as mem-

bers. The task was to work towards the formal organisation of EBSA, to be confirmed during the IUPAB Congress in Bristol in July 1984, at the first meeting of the Council (or General Assembly) to which representatives of all the European societies would be invited.

The next years saw considerable co-operative activity between members Societies with many joint specialist meetings that were also publicised through the EBSA Newsletter. In addition, several pre-existing national groups were formalised, and new Biophysical Societies were created. EBSA also had an educational brief, and the Netherlands biophysical community led the way with the organisation of postgraduate Biophysics courses open to the community. Early 1984 saw the emergence of the European Biophysics Journal (EBJ) as a publication of Springer-Verlag, being the continuation of their journal *Biophysics of Structure and Mechanism*, of which Professor Hennig Stieve of Julich was the founding Editor. The new title of the journal was eventually adopted after some local difficulties due to the coincidence of the initials of the provisional name 'European Journal of Biophysics' (that had been mooted as early as 1980 in Aachen) with another Springer Verlag journal of the same EJB acronym. The issue was eventually settled in discussion with Professors Tom Goodwin and Prakash Datta representing FEBS and Gordon Roberts and myself representing the European Biophysics Journal, (EBJ). Over what became a memorably convivial lunch, the issues of identity and spheres of activity were amicably resolved. The new format of the EBJ appeared in mid-1984 published by Springer "in collaboration with the European Biophysical Societies' Association". For many years the Journal carried the 'EBSA Calendar of Events', compiled assiduously by Dr Clauwaert, who also produced the Newsletter on a regular basis. He was also a major contributor to the evolution of proposals for the EBSA Statutes, conceived, with the benefit of advice from officers of existing comparable supranational professional bodies to 'keep it simple', but with precision and flexibility. At times it seemed as though we were taking on a Herculean task equivalent to the foundation of an outpost of the European Community. Hopefully, we succeeded in keeping bureaucracy at bay. The EBSA logo dates from 1984, and in researching this article I found what appears to be the original 'doodle' for it, transformed into a thing of beauty by Stephen Martin, my long-term colleague who also provided assistance and outstanding support for the Journal throughout my time as its Managing Editor.

July 1984 also saw the 8th IUPAB Biophysics Congress in Bristol at which the EBSA General Assembly witnessed the attendance of 8 adhering member societies, with new applications from Israel and France, and observers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, USSR and Yugoslavia., most of whom successfully joined EBSA soon afterwards. The acting group was confirmed to continue as the EBSA Executive Committee under the President and Vice-president. Both Prof Kreutz, and Prof Müller-Broich, two successive chairmen of the German Biophysical Society, made notable contributions in the earliest days, with their encouragement of the EBSA concept and with their assistance in ensuring its establishment.

The subsequent activities of the Association have involved the promotion of numerous EBSA Workshops and Meetings. Notable amongst these events was the First EBSA Workshop in 1986 at Saltsjöbaden near Stockholm. This was hosted by the Swedish Biophysical Society, under the chairmanship of Anders Ehrenberg, strongly supported by colleagues from the Karolinska Institute.. This meeting also had an unexpected or suspected external observer : an unidentified submarine was thought to be patrolling the adjacent waterway ; speculation grew that it was a delegation of Russian Biophysicists taking a short cut to the meeting. However, no international incident developed, thanks, not for the first time in EBSA affairs, to the exercise of Anders' calming influence and his dignified presence.



Anders Ehrenberg : First President of EBSA (1984) : a recent photograph, courtesy of colleagues at the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm.

This workshop also set the precedent of the appearance of reviewed papers from the meeting in the first volume of the ‘Springer Series in Biophysics’ entitled ‘Protein Structure, Dynamics and Function’. Other EBSA-supported workshops in the series were Vol 3 : ‘Cytoskeletal and extracellular proteins’, (Eds. J.Engel, U.Aebi) from the meeting in Gwatt in 1988, and Vol 7 : ‘Patterns in protein sequence and structure’ (Ed : W.R.Taylor) from an EBSA-EMBO meeting in Heidelberg in 1989. This series lapsed, but has recently been relaunched by the publishers in 2006.

The time up to the mid 1990’s was marked by a continuum of specialised meetings and workshops, largely at the initiative of the Member Societies, since at that stage, EBSA itself lacked any significant source of revenue or other financial support for promoting meetings. The period was marked by the EBSA General Assembly held at the IU-PAB Congresses in Jerusalem (1987), Vancouver(1990), Budapest (1993) and Amsterdam(1996). A major change in the affairs of EBSA occurred as a result of discussions held in 1995 with the publishers, Springer Verlag, so that ownership of the European Biophysics Journal was initially shared jointly between the two parties, and reverted to EBSA in 2000. This required a full revision of the original Statutes, coincident with the setting up of EBSA as a UK Charity, with consequent financial advantages and responsibilities. Membership of the Executive Committee was expanded, and regular meetings instituted peripatetically in different countries : in London, the Novartis (CIBA) Foundation has become a frequent venue.

The ownership of the Journal has provided a continuing financial base for EBSA, allowing an expansion of activities, and the development of the Congresses. The first EBSA European Biophysics Congress in 1997 held in Orleans, and organised by the French Biophysical Society, with Paul Vigny as chairman, established the working principles of future Congresses. These determined that they should be funded jointly by EBSA and one of the Member Societies who would carry a large responsibility with EBSA representatives for planning, and by providing co-chairmen in all sessions, for the management and presentation of the scientific programme. Most important has been the principle to make the Congress as accessible as possible to younger scientists by way of limiting registration and boarding expenses where practical, and with the possibility of providing bursaries to enable students to be full participants. The EBSA General Assembly (comprising the representatives of the Member Societies), is now routinely held

during the Congress itself.

The further evolution of the Congress programme shows the strong support from individual Societies in taking on this organisational task. From 1997 to the present this has involved (in sequence) the French, German, Spanish, French (in collaboration with IUPAB) and British societies. EBSA has continued to grow steadily since its formal inception in 1984, and now has some 25 member societies (see www.ebsa.org). It will be heading for the celebration of its 25th anniversary in 2009 at the 7th European Biophysics Congress in Genoa. This event will be organised by the Italian Society, and is keenly anticipated.



Three original EBSA Executive Committee members in London in 2002 (Heinz Rüterjans, Peter Bayley, Paul Vigny), planning the Munich congress. Photo courtesy of Laszlo Matyus, Secretary, 2001 - 2007.

It goes without saying that the developments outlined above reflect the commitment and determination of a large number of colleagues acting both for EBSA and for the European Biophysics Journal. I would most specifically like to recognise those who have served so valiantly on the successive EBSA Executive and EBJ Editorial Boards and Committees, as well as the previous Congress Chairmen. These individuals, and a huge number of their close colleagues, have succeeded in producing the EBSA European Biophysics Congress with consistent regularity since 1997. My personal thanks go to Anders Ehrenberg, Jürgen Engel, Rudolf Rigler, Julius Clauwaert, Erich Sackmann, Giuliano Colombetti, Philippe Devaux, Fritz Parak, Sandor Damjanovich, Paul Vigny, Heinz Rüterjans, Lennart Nilsson, Laszlo Matyus, Bernat Soria, Erick Dufourc and Michel Kochoyan for all they have contributed. And special thanks and appreciation to Manuel Cortijo, former President of EBSA 1993-96, for his unwavering leadership

and support through the uncertain but definitive months when the EBJ was seeking to become independent; also to the existing Executive Committee for their continuing commitment to EBSA, and to Tony Watts, my successor as Managing Editor of the EBJ who has brought the Journal into the electronic age with great verve and efficiency; and especially to Mike Ferenczi for his former key role as Treasurer of EBSA, acting with great competence to ensure the financial survival of EBSA through the all-important period of the Congresses since 1997. His enduring enthusiasm for the European concept, and his practical determination are perfectly characterised in bringing to full fruition this impressive 6th European Biophysics Congress at Imperial College, London. To all these, and many unmentioned here by name, my very grateful thanks for your support and friendship over the years in all these ventures, and likewise to everyone involved in contributing to the success of the present Congress.



EBSA Executive Committee in Pisa in 2005, hosted by Giuliano Colombetti in the Hotel Santa Croce convent, planning the London 2007 and Genoa 2009 congresses. Photo courtesy of Laszlo Matyus, Secretary, 2001 - 2007.

Biophysics, as its name indicates, is a wonderful and unique conjugation of diverse scientific subjects, often demanding in both its methods and materials, and hugely fertile in its impact in advancing human knowledge and practical applications. To those committed to seek a quantitative description and understanding of biological systems and their components, it is also extremely rewarding in practice. The advent of biotechnology, together with the recent development of nano-scale experimentation, is creating a remarkable scientific revolution. This promises an exciting future for the subject, to which, hopefully, a thriving EBSA will continue to make an enthusiastic and significant scientific contribution. I hope that this Congress will enable the personal contacts

and inspire the collaborations particularly amongst younger Biophysicists in order to provide impetus for such developments. And I offer my best wishes for the future growth and development of EBSA and its member Societies.

Finally, on a lighter note, reflecting the conviviality that has consistently perfused the activities of this Association throughout its existence: as well as being a hard discipline, Biophysics can also be great FUN, as demonstrated at the last Congress, with two of the Officers pictured in typical Gallic style.



Michel Kochoyan (Chairman) and Erick Dufourc (EBSA President) free-wheeling, post-reception, at the 5th Congress in Montpellier, 2005 (photo: pmb).

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