

The evolution of the Confederation of CEORL-HNS Congress: a conversation among presidents

BY MARC REMACLE, MANUEL BERNAL-SPREKELSEN AND FERHAN ÖZ

The Congress of the Confederation has come a long way since its first meeting in 2011. Three presidents – past and present – discuss how it has evolved.

AUTHORS



Prof Marc Remacle, MD, PhD,

Laryngology and Head & Neck surgery, Centre Hospitalier de Luxembourg, Luxembourg; President of the 5th Congress of the CEORL-HNS, 2019, Brussels.



Prof Manuel Bernal-Sprekelsen, MD, PhD,

Chair for ORL, University of Valencia, Spain; President of the 1st Congress of the CEORL-HNS, 2011, Barcelona.



Prof Dr Ferhan Öz,

Acıbadem Bakırköy Hospital, İstanbul; President of the 4th Congress of the CEORL-HNS, 2017, Barcelona.

Prof Bernal-Sprekelsen, you organised the 1st Congress of the Confederation of EORL-HNS in 2011 in Barcelona; Prof Öz, you then organised the 4th Congress, again in Barcelona. How did you feel during this process?

MB: Back then I was very excited, as it was the very first meeting of the Confederation. We were just coming out of old EUFOS times and many changes were happening, like the ‘fusion’ between EUFOS and the European Academy. But those challenges were perceived as very positive by those involved and, thus, I always felt I had the full support from those who believed in these changes. Also, we were aware that, with this new beginning, we were finally offering ENT colleagues worldwide a true alternative to the American Academy meeting. That is why the scientific programme committee took such meticulous care in setting up a superb programme, as it finally was. The participation of over 3500 colleagues was a marvelous beginning for our common European future.

FO: It was quite challenging, but also a real blessing and an extremely exciting experience to organise that prestigious gathering. It was originally announced at the previous European ORL-HNS Congress, in Prague, that the 4th congress would take place in Antalya, Turkey. We were very excited to host our guests in our country and to extend our hospitality and generosity. But due to some unfortunate events, we had to relocate the congress to Barcelona. I believe I was the first president to organise his congress in a different country; as you know, normally the elected congress president hosts the event in his own country. We were already anxious about being able to

successfully pull this off in a foreign country, and then, to top it all off, the Catalan independence movement coincided with our opening date, doubling our stress and worries! Thankfully, Barcelona was just like a sister city in which we all felt at home.

Prof Remacle, what are your feelings organising the 5th Congress in Brussels?

MR: After having worked for years, since 2007 with great colleagues like Jan Olofsson, Reidar Grenman, Klaus Janke, Karl Hörmann, and of course you, Manuel, first for the creation of the European Academy, then for the merging with EUFOS and the founding of the Confederation of European ORL-HNS, being the President of the first congress according to the new bylaws is, for me, a real achievement. The politics is behind us and we can focus solely on scientific issues.

Did you each have the full support of your national society? If so, was this essential for you and do you feel you could you have succeeded without this support?

MB: Fortunately, I had the full support of my society from the very beginning; first, when I informed them about the creation of the European Academy and its educational goals, and later, when the society decided to celebrate its national annual meeting together with the Confederation in 2011. The Spanish Society fully understood the need to have one big, officially registered body that would be able to represent all subspecialty societies and all national societies in order to offer a comprehensive biennial event that would mainly attract all colleagues from Europe, but also from

“The Catalan independence movement coincided with our opening date, doubling our stress and worries!”



The present Presidential Council of the Confederation during a brain-storming meeting, planning further activities for the future in November 2018.

overseas. Bilateral agreements have meanwhile been signed in that direction.

I have to admit that the timing of creation of the European Academy was critical; some thought it was competing with EUFOS when, in fact, it was just adding educational goals. During this time, my society backed me up. It was crucial on a personal level feeling that I wasn't alone, but also important for other national societies in understanding the process of Europe coming together.

FO: I had the support of the Turkish ORL-HNS Society and the Turkish ORL-HNS Foundation for the 2017 congress. This support was based on organising the National Congress and the Confederation of EORL-HNS Congress together. After the relocation of venue from Antalya to Barcelona, however, I lost that support. So I can say in fact, that the 2017 Barcelona congress did not have the backing of a national society. After the successful organisation, the 2017 Barcelona congress proved that the Confederation of EORL-HNS Congress doesn't need the support of a national society. Confederation of EORL became a brand name in Europe and is becoming more popular all over the world.

The best way to ensure our Confederation Congresses remain successful is having reliable support from all partner organisations, from industry and from a professional PCO. I am glad to say that I had all the necessary support. I believe that the 2019 Brussels Congress will be very successful, with the increasing popularity of the Confederation of EORL.

MR: I didn't have that chance. The Belgian Society was more reluctant to help: the board didn't clearly understand what the Confederation was and they had a poor experience some years ago with a candidature with old EUFOS that cost them some money. Fortunately, we decided to

combine the meeting with the Benelux and my best idea so far has been to ask Elisabeth Sjögren from Leiden to help me. She is a fantastic Head of the Scientific Committee. The lesson learned for me is that we need to promote the Confederation and make sure that all the countries understand what it is.

How did you organise the scientific framework of the congress? Who helped you?

MB: The key for the success of the scientific programme was established in one of the last EUFOS meetings that took place in Vienna, organised by Klaus Albegger and Heinz Stammberger. It consisted of including representatives of the subspecialty societies, as well as some internationally renowned national representatives. Thus, the recommendation made for sessions, speakers etc. was always as updated as possible. For many sessions, a thorough PubMed search was very helpful to identify the proper speakers. The latter was also sending out a good message for an objective selection: do clinical and basic research and publish it in order to be considered a potential speaker/presenter at these meetings.

FO: The organising committee communicated with nearly all the subspecialty societies while preparing the scientific programme. Each subspecialty society worked on their programme and suggested the topics and speakers, each one experienced in their own field. All of our subspecialty and friend societies, their presidents and members contributed their efforts to this collaboration as indicated in our confederation motto: 'together we are creating one voice.'

MR: I am really happy from this point of view because, for the first time, the European scientific societies and the

"It was crucial on a personal level feeling that I wasn't alone, but also important for other national societies in understanding the process of Europe coming together."



European national societies have been invited to work together, equally, in the building of the programme. This is a success from the participation point of view. Once again, I would like to thank Elisabeth Sjögren for having coordinated all these propositions.

But of course, there are a lot of shortcomings with such a new process. We have to learn from our mistakes. The board is working presently for a better organisation, making sure that the all the societies will be equally represented. But what I particularly like is that, for the first time, the Confederation is in charge of the programme, not a single man and his local team.

Do you feel the Confederation is on the right track? What could be done better?

FO: The Confederation of EORL-HNS Congress is getting more popular every year and has become the biggest event in Europe. Out-with the congress, the Confederation must be in a close contact with the national societies and the subspecialty societies. This close relationship will bring new ideas to the board.

MR: I fully agree. But the Confederation is not an organisation solely devoted to organising congresses. In close cooperation with UEMS, we want to promote the different logbook for training our residents, and the European board exam that is more and more recognised.

We have already sponsored fellowships and travel grants and we will continue that way. Courses, workshops and webinars should be developed in the next few years.

So, there is a lot of work to do but the future looks bright to me!