

2009 Florence, Italy

13th EFNS Congress, Florence, Italy, 12 - 15 September 2009

Welcome Address of the President

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all in this wonderful city of Florence for the 13th Congress of the European Federation of Neurological Societies. We expect the most important attendance in the history of the EFNS, more than 5000 participants, although this congress takes place in a period of a worldwide economic crisis.

However, I hope that the interesting scientific programme and the social events in this historical environment will make you remember this event as one of the highlights of your trips during 2009.

Your travel to Florence offers you also the possibility to explore Toscana and Umbria, by visiting in an easy way the different surrounding cities such as Pisa, Siena, Perugia and Assisi. Also, tasting the delicious wines and food must increase your marvellous feeling to be in Italy.

This congress would not be possible if we did not have a perfect organization. First of all, I wish to thank Professor Antonio Federico and the local organizing committee for their kind hospitality and their excellent collaboration making this congress a great event.

Ms. Lisa Mueller and the whole EFNS staff of the offices in Vienna, Florence and Prague have done a great job in order that everything, up to details, is running smoothly.

The organization of the congress by Kenes International is, as always, spotless.

As you know the EFNS organizes successful regional teaching courses in East European countries and last year for the first time in Sub-Saharan Africa. The first one was held in Dakar, Senegal, hosted by Prof. Gallo Diop. The second Sub-Saharan regional teaching course was held this year, in June, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Both events were a great success due to the excellent organization by our chairperson of the African Committee, Prof. Jean-Michel Vallat, and our liaison officer, Mrs. Evelyn Sipido.

The EFNS has developed a new 5-year action plan in order to improve the relations with the national and international neurological societies, to increase the quality of our congresses, to create a European Academy of Neurology, to initiate and revise guidelines for the major neurological disorders and to develop a corporate identity programme and an interactive website.

As usual, the President of the EFNS in his opening speech has to develop a topic of general interest. As this is my last presidential address, I would like to honour all women who have significantly contributed in the past to neurological sciences. Although their contributions were of high scientific value they were not always rewarded accordingly and did not received the attention that they really deserved. In order to illustrate this underestimation of the scientific work of female medical doctors in the past, I would like to tell you the rather sad story of Bertha De Vriese, a neuroanatomist, who worked at my University in Ghent, more than 100 years ago. Bertha De Vriese graduated as first female medical doctor with 'maxima cum laude' on the 20th of July of 1900 at the Ghent University, at a time that the only official language in Belgium was French. In 1901 she won the inter-university competition for biological sciences with an anatomical essay on blood vessel distribution in human extremities.

During 1902, she travelled with the obtained bursary to different laboratories and hospitals in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and United Kingdom. In 1903 she obtained a temporary mandate of assistant for two years at the Laboratory of Human Anatomy of the Ghent University. The mandate was only one time renewable. During her two mandates, Bertha De Vriese dissected the arteries at the base of several hundred post-mortem brains. Looking to the several variations of the circle of Willis, she described a 'primitive type' of arterial vascularisation of the brain in which the cerebral hemispheres are completely supplied by the carotid system and a more 'developed type', in which the supply of the posterior cerebral arteries is taken over by the vertebral-basilar system. She also described several rare vascular variants of the arteries of the brain. This work was published in the 'Archives of Biology' in 1904. In 1905, Bertha De Vriese obtained the title of 'Special Doctor in Human Anatomy' with a thesis on 'Recherces sur la morphologie de l'artère basilaire'. Despite that the scientific value of her work was already universally recognized at that time, she could not obtain a permanent academic position at the Ghent University and had to start a private practice. She married at the age of thirty-seven years. Her marriage remained childless. She died in 1958 at the age of eighty years.

Her contributions are still cited until now in the scientific literature. The legacy of Bertha De Vriese has also inspired further research on the vascular anatomy of the brain at the Ghent University.

By attributing the name of the 'Bertha De Vriese Home' to a new student residency near the University Hospital in 2002 the merits of this extraordinary woman were finally recognized by the academic authorities.

At the end of my talk, I am very happy to announce that the EFNS and the ENS have finally decided to collaborate and to work together to promote and further develop Neurology and Neurological Sciences in Europe. I am particularly grateful and honoured that the President, Prof. José Ferro, and the Secretary-General, Prof. Gustave Moonen, of the ENS have accepted to be present at this opening ceremony. I propose that we call the agreement between the ENS and the EFNS the 'Treaty of Florence' as the beginning of a fruitful collaboration, leading to a 'European Union of Neurologists'.

Jacques L. De Reuck
EFNS President

Dear Colleagues

Florence, on the 12-15 September 2009, was the capital of European Neurology. Here was the 13th Congress of the European Federation of Neurological Societies, with the participation of more than 5500 delegates from 99 different countries, including India, Japan, Syria, Iran, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Morocco, Australia, etc.

The host society was the Italian Society of Neurology that was honoured to have this important charge. The Congress Programme Committee was chaired by Prof. Gian Luigi Lenzi.

At the Congress 2500 contributions were presented as oral, posters, and main lectures. More than 2000 persons participated in the teaching courses. Of particular interest

was the course dedicated to the clinical methodology and clinical examination of neurological patients with tremors, coma and psychosomatic medicine.

The opening ceremony was short, but intensive, with the introduction of Prof. Jacques De Reuck, who discussed the new strategy of EFNS, and the role of the women in Neurology. He described the good relationships between EFNS and ENS, so that, he said, the Florence Congress, will be remembered as the "treaty of Florence" where the two societies decided to actively collaborate and perhaps to joint in a unique society (both President and Secretary of the ENS were present to the Opening ceremony and all, with Prof. J. De Reuck, exchanged EFNS and ENS ties. Prof. De Reuck also discussed interesting cooperative projects of European neurology with African countries, for facilitating the neurological training in these countries. And in this field the Italian Society of Neurology has a leading role, with its support for neurological training in Ethiopia.

In my short welcome address, on behalf of the Italian Society of Neurology, I reminded of the role of Florence in the history of Neurosciences, describing among others that the Babinski sign has already been reported in a beautiful painting by Botticelli 400 years before Babinski.

The main themes of the congress in the morning sessions were small vessel diseases, an interesting chapter of the cerebrovascular pathology; the use of monoclonal antibodies in the therapy of multiple sclerosis; the new cellular and molecular neuroimaging techniques enabling to perform an early diagnosis in many conditions and to evaluate drug efficacy; movement disorders; dementias and memory troubles, including the rare causes of dementia; the state of art on the use of stem cells in neurological diseases; headache; new treatment for epilepsies; new approach to neuromuscular diseases, etc.

We had many workshops, focused on the most recent and actual topics of the neurological debate, some of them discussing guidelines produced by the different EFNS panels, or on neurodegenerative diseases as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Wernicke's disease, late onset leukodystrophies, Huntington Chorea, mitochondrial dysfunction in the stroke pathogenesis, neuropathic pain, changes in carotid walls in the stroke pathogenesis, etc.

At the closing session the new EFNS President Prof. R. Hughes summed up the main events of the congress. The next congress that will be held in Geneva in 2010 has been presented by Prof. Hess;

I hope that you all enjoyed to visit the city of Florence, its museums and galleries, and to walk in the streets. The social event took place at Palazzo Pitti, where guided tours around the museums gave you the possibility to have an idea of the Italian Renaissance; here also live entertainment typical of this period had been organized.

It was a great privilege for the Italian Neurology to host this important meeting.

For me, as chairman of the Local organizing committee and vice-chairmen of the Congress Programme Committee, it was a great honour and a unique experience to collaborate with the Scientific and Secretarial EFNS staff as well as with Kenes International.

I hope to see you in Geneva the next year.

Yours sincerely

Prof. Antonio Federico

Chairman of the Local organizing Committee