



## Message from the President

Welcome to the first ECOO Newsletter of 2014.

I have been thinking back over the past year as President and am proud of the impact, work and progress ECOO members are making on several fronts.

The Secretary General, Armin Duddek, Mark Nevin and I met with members of the European Commission to press the need for the resolution of the Fluorescein classification issue in January. The EU Medical Devices expert group on Borderline and Classification issues met in March 2014 and ECOO and others continue to lobby for a reasonable conclusion to this issue. We will update members at our Spring General assembly.

ECOO continues to work with other parties under the EFAB banner and thanks to our Polish member, Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak for her support at a Polish roundtable event in January. This EFAB event was the largest to date, and was an excellent opportunity to promote eyecare issues. In further activities, I attended the launch of the European Vision Coa-

lition manifesto at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. This event engaged with MEPs on the important issues of visual impairment due to uncorrected refractive error and the need for accessible eyecare for EU citizens.

Finally, I had the pleasure of speaking at the Swedish optometric conference in Gothenburg in February. Our president-elect, Paul Folkesson, organised a very large and successful meeting and as always it was interesting to meet optometrists and opticians from across Europe engaging in professional activities and development.

I hope to see you all in Warsaw for our Spring meeting.

Best wishes,



Julie-Anne Little

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## Regulatory Updates

### Fluorescein – the discussion continues

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The classification of Fluorescein as medical device versus medicinal product remains a critical issue. The question around Fluorescein has caused uncertainty and has had a significant impact on the supply, with several manufacturers having ceased production. To remedy this situation, ECOO met with the Euro-

pean Commission in January to clarify the situation and to provide further information on the use of fluorescein amongst eye care professionals. The relevant EU-level Expert Group met on 13 March 2014 for the first time in one year, as the autumn meeting had been postponed. Since the last meeting, a working group had been

tasked to draw-up the definition of “medical diagnosis”, which will have an impact on the classification of visualisers such as Fluorescein. A first draft has been discussed at the Expert Group meeting. ECOO will seek to submit its comments to the definition and will continue to feed into the decision making process.

### Medical devices legislation – moving slowly

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Judging by the slow pace at which discussions have been advancing on the EU Medical Devices legislation, a Council agreement on a common text that would allow the Presidency of the EU to begin negotiations with the Parliament seems unlikely in the near future.

The European Parliament, and especially Rapporteur Dagmar Roth-Behrend (a German Member of the European Parliament, from the sec-

ond-largest political group of Socialists and Democrats), have been trying (with little success) to put pressure on the Council of the European Union to finish discussions at Working Group level, reach a common position and allow the Presidency to enter the so-called trilogue negotiations with the Parliament and the Commission.

As the situation presents itself now, what can the European Parliament do? On the one hand, it can pro-

ceed to a formal first reading vote in its plenary meeting in spring. This would set its position in stone for the new Parliament to take up work as soon as the Council has reached an agreement. On the other hand, it can decide to begin work from scratch on amending the Commission’s proposal in September 2014. It is quite likely the Parliament will go for the first option, in order not to lose all the work done so far. A vote in plenary is scheduled for 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014.

### ECOO attends high-level conference on RPQ

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ECOO representatives attended a high-level conference on the **Modernisation of the Professional Qualification Directive (RPQ)** in February. The session dedicated to the **Common Training Framework (CTF)** addressed this potential route to achieve the automatic recognition in the EU. According to the European Commission official chairing the ses-

sion, Mr. Frohn, the time for overarching regulations governing the free mobility of professionals is over and a more bottom-up approach is needed, which will hopefully be enabled via the CTF.

The European Parliament also has high hopes for CTF to enable many specialties to receive automatic rec-

ognition. This new framework based on common competences rather than duration of training better meets the modern requirements, according to Dr. Romulad Krajewski, President of the European Union of Medical Specialties. Representatives of some professional associations asked the European Commission for more support to help them use this framework.

# Launch of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) & the ECV Elections Manifesto



On **4 February 2014**, the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) launched its **Manifesto for the European Parliament elections**. The event took place in Strasbourg (France), at the European Parliament, and was hosted by Irish Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Marian Harkin, from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe political group (ALDE).

The ECV Manifesto urges the European Parliament to use its significant powers to improve the lives of people affected by vision impairment or at risk of vision loss. It calls on MEPs to:

- **Encourage** the European Com-

mission and EU Member States to prioritise vision and eye health as part of their public health strategies;

- **Adopt** an EP resolution to encourage Member States to ensure fair and equitable access to eye care, including free sight tests and treatment, for the most at risk and vulnerable groups (including those on low incomes);
- **Ensure** all relevant legislation and regulations improve access to and use of eye care services and promote an inclusive society that supports the rights and independence of blind and partially sighted people.

- **Improve** the consistency and standard of EU and Member State data collection on the status of vision and eye health and the inclusion of people with sight loss.

The ECV is an alliance of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations, trade associations representing suppliers and research groups. ECOO is a founding member of the ECV.

For more details, please visit <http://www.ecvision.eu/>



## Country News

**Finland - Finnish optometry in good progress** By Panu Tast – Managing Director at Suomen Optinen Toimiala SOT

### SUOMEN OPTINEN TOIMIALA



As Finland is a part of the Nordic countries, Finnish optometrists traditionally cover both optometry and optics in their daily practice. Optometry has historically always been a single profession in Finland.

The profession has been regulated since 1961. In the beginning there was a special legislation that combined both healthcare and optics. In 1994, Finnish healthcare legislation was renewed, and optometry started being treated as a self-standing healthcare profession. Diagnosing was enabled in 2010 by law, and the first optometrists were licensed in that sense one year later. Now every new optometrist (B.Sc.) has this right as well as the license for contact lenses and low vision aids once they complete basic education.

The Finnish Association of Optometry (FAO) conducted a study in 2011, based on which it published a business strategy for the profession in September 2012. All ongoing efforts are now somehow related to this new strategy (<http://www.optometria.fi/in-english.html>). The main idea of the publication is that it is a must to build up a service-based business alongside a product-based one. In 2012, provision of services amounted to less than 2% of total yearly turno-

ver. Until the end of 2013 the share of services had already doubled, and has been growing by around +10% every month.



New business strategy has already widened the range of services offered by optometrists. Digital retinal imaging services were introduced nation-wide during the spring of 2013 and spurred significant debate between optometrists and ophthalmologists. Some ophthalmologists saw these new services as a threat to

their profession and patient safety. As a result of media-covered debate, the Finnish National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health issued a public statement acknowledging the important role optometry has as a primary eye care profession in the Finnish national health system.

Consequently, the Finnish Optometry Council of Ethics, which gives professional recommendations and guidelines, decided to renew its recommendations for practicing optometry. They are based on ECOO and WCO guidelines, and will define in more details the type of optometric examination a patient can expect. These new recommendations will be published during March 2014 and they will cover refractive eye testing, contact lens fitting and eye health examinations.

In the near future, the most important issues for the optometry in Finland will be the upcoming accreditation processes for the bachelors' programs in Oulu University of Applied Sciences and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, as well as setting up a joint Oulu and Helsinki schools Masters' program. As for the business and practices, FAO is working hard to ensure Finnish optometry becomes connected with the national public healthcare services in the same as medical service providers became a decade ago.



## Serbia – The status of optometry

By Zora Sarac - President of Optometrists and Opticians Association of Serbia

Optometry in Serbia began to develop at the end of 2006, when a small group of 25 opticians started to attend lectures in Optometry. Zora Sarac was the main organizer and initiator of this project as the president of the Association of Opticians and Optometrists of Serbia. The lectures were held once a month for a period of three years in cooperation with the Slovenian Association of Opticians and Austrian College of Optometry from Innsbruck. Janez Gobec and Gustav Polttner were the lecturers. Total of 13 out of 25 participants have successfully passed the exam in Refraction at the College of Optometry in Innsbruck, took home their diplomas and started to work in their own optical centre.

As a result, Serbia has gotten its first optometrists who continued to fight for the development of the profession in Serbia. As the president of the Association, Zora Sarac, in cooperation with ECOO, has helped to establish the Department of Optometry at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, where the interest in this difficult project has existed. Influential people at the University were able to get accreditation from the Ministry of Education and started to educate the first students. In 2007, the School of Optometry was established in the Department of Physics, when the first students began this journey as Optometry has previously been unfamil-

iar in our country and the occupation itself has not been recognized by the state institutions.

In Serbia, there are about 650 ophthalmologists and about 30 optometrists. The optometrists are not allowed to work in the optical centres or elsewhere, but they still do. The Ministry of Health states that eye examinations can only be completed at the prac-



tices and that optician centres should not even have the appliances for examinations, since the examinations in Serbia, based on Health Care Law, can only be completed by medical staff or associates and the optometrists are neither of them and that is considered violation of the Health Care Law. As a representative of the profession, Zora Sarac was able to approach the

authority of the Ministry of Health that directly addresses this issue. The negotiations are ongoing for the past 6 years; there is a great desire in the Ministry for the recognition and definition of the profession, however, as they claim, they must find the best way to comply with Law. Aggravating circumstance is that the ophthalmological lobby is against the recognition of this profession as the same was stated to the requested opinion from the Ministry of Health.

Currently, there is a new Law on Drugs and Medical Devices waiting to be implemented in Serbia, and after that, we have promises that a new Regulation for the distribution of medical devices shall be created, which shall include activities and jobs in the optical centres and which shall try to include the occupation of the optometrist as the job position that would much facilitate the recognition of the profession in Serbia.

The Association of Opticians and Optometrists of Serbia, together with optometrists, continues the fight for development and recognition of Optometry in Serbia, successful contacts, negotiations with the authorities of the Ministry of Health, the organization of trade fairs and education in the field of Optometry, bringing eminent lecturers from the European countries and thus increasing the level of knowledge and professionalism of this profession.

## Update from the European Academy of Optometry and Optics

Learn and network with European colleagues at Warsaw 2014

Warsaw 2014 is the perfect opportunity for professionals within optometry, optics and dispensing, and vision science to gain new skills, network and learn from international experts.

In response to previous delegate feedback we have increased the amount of clinical content on offer at this year's conference. Workshops now last up to three hours each and include:

- Using ocular coherence tomography (OCT)
- Fitting multifocal soft contact lenses
- Binocular vision
- Using slit lamps

Other topics for discussion include AMD and macula analysis, myopia and refraction, and understanding glaucoma.

We have many international experts speaking at the conference, including our key note speakers:

- Professor John Marshall, Institute of Ophthalmology, UK - research and clinical implications of the ageing eye
- Stefan Bandlitz, Cologne School of Optometry, Germany - the anterior eye and tear film

**Member prices start from €225, with additional discounts for presenters and students.**

We urge delegates to book their accommodation now due to a large banking congress taking place at the same time as the conference. For more information and to book please visit [www.warsaw2014.info](http://www.warsaw2014.info).



## Tackling preventable blindness - the work of EFAB in 2014

Following its successful World Sight Day event and national roundtables in Italy and Germany in 2013, the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB) will continue its activities also in 2014. In the context of the upcoming European Parliament elections, EFAB will be engaging

with re-elected and new Members of the European Parliament to ensure that preventable blindness is considered a healthcare priority in the next legislature. Given that 50% of blindness is preventable, EFAB will continue to present evidence and make the case for the need

to address this growing challenge. These advocacy efforts will be taken forward at national level, with the organisation of roundtables in key European member states, and with the organisation of a summit on preventable blindness in Brussels later in the year

## Update from the WCO – a global perspective



The World Council of Optometry (WCO) approved its advocacy and fundraising strategies in its last Governing Board meeting to support growing collaboration and contribute to common strategic aims. WCO's advocacy work supporting the recognition and regulation of optometry across the world is increasing steadily. Besides working with Brazil WCO has supported Mexican optometrists to call for the modification of the Health Bill so a university degree will be required to practise optometry as with other health professions. After the unanimous approval of this modification by the Chamber of Deputies now it is at the Mexican Senate for approval.

ECOO along more than twenty WCO members and regional affiliated bodies proactively supported these efforts. Other countries that are receiving support include Peru, Korea and India. WCO's strategic role as chair of the Refractive Error and member of the Diabetic Retinopathy Working Groups of IAPB are also important for our international advocacy. Successful influencing requires solid evidence and WCO expects to use the information generated by the Scope of Practice Questionnaire more substantially in 2014.

The partnership with Verified Learning to facilitate access to optometric education by our members through the WCO Global Learning Platform is under implementation with initial results expected in June. Collaboration at regional levels is also evolving and WCO is assisting the African Council of Optometry (AFCO) and Universidade Lurio to organise a conference in Mozambique to discuss

the role of optometry in the provision of primary eye care in Africa immediately after our next Governing Board meeting. The membership survey was completed in December. Its results will inform WCO's future membership growth and retention strategy and provide a clear indication of the priority areas of work that members would like us to consider in our future work.



## ECOO upcoming meeting

### General Assembly in Warsaw (Poland), 15-18 May 2014

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The ECOO Spring 2014 General Assembly will take place together with the European Academy of Optometry and Optics annual conference on 15-18 May 2014 in Warsaw, Poland. The event is being organised by the European Academy for Optometry and Optics (EAOO) with the valuable support of the Polish Optometric Association. Registrations are open and information on the meetings including the schedule and logistics are available on the ECOO website.



## Save the date

### ECOO Autumn 2014, Limassol (Cyprus)

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The ECOO Autumn meeting 2014 will take place in Limassol, Cyprus, on 17-19 October 2014. Please mark your calendars accordingly.

## Newsletter

The Newsletters are sent to ECOO's members and contacts via e-mail. Please inform us of any additions to the mailing list or of staff changes in your respective organisations. Should you have any news or updates which

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