

**FIFTY YEARS  
OF  
EUROPEAN OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS  
1960-2010**

**An Overview of ECOO and its Predecessor Bodies**



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## President's Foreword

*Anyone who is going to make anything out of history will, sooner or later, have to do most of the work himself. He will have to read, and consider, and reconsider, and then read some more.*

Geoffrey Barraclough (1908–1984)

The history of ECOO goes back to the year 1960, when very motivated and future-orientated colleagues in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands established the Groupement des Opticiens du Marché Commun (GOMAC). (The six countries were the original member states of the European Economic Community.) Subsequently, the Pan European Group (PEG) of the former International Optometric and Optical League was established. And, then, in 1992, GOMAC and PEG merged to create the European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) of today. During the last five decades ECOO has developed into an organisation representing over 75,000 practitioners in 30 European countries.

During our autumn meeting on 22-24 October 2010 in Dresden, ECOO will celebrate the 50th anniversary of European optometry and optics. For that reason I am very proud that ECOO can present in Dresden this short history which describes the last 50 years of our profession in Europe.

This booklet was written by ECOO's General Secretary, Richard Carswell, who has spent a lot of time studying the eventful history of ECOO. As President of ECOO, I would like to give him heartfelt thanks for his excellent work and I would like to congratulate him for the conception of this booklet, which documents the history of ECOO and the development of optometry and optics in Europe during this time.

It is my hope that this booklet will be read by many colleagues and that it will inspire members of our profession to continue the unification of optometry and optics in Europe.

**Wolfgang Cagnolati**

DSc, MS, MCOptom, FAAO

President, European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) 2008 - 2010

## **Introduction**

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2010, by virtue of the establishment of one its predecessor bodies in 1960.

ECOO itself was created in 1992 as the result of a fusion between GOOMAC (originally GOMAC) and PEG.

Other bodies, such as the European Society of Optometry, the European Federation of Optometry, the Association des Opticiens Européens and the European Super Optical Association, are outside the scope of this publication.

## **GOMAC (Groupement des Opticiens du Marché Commun**

GOMAC was established on **8 June 1960 in Luxembourg**. As its title implies, the members consisted of the optical bodies of the six founding member states of the European Economic Community (EEC), namely Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

GOMAC did not have a precise legal status. Membership was confined to countries which were part of the EEC. The working language was French.

GOMAC's first President was Léon Hauck (Germany), and its Secretary General was Jean Vanrullen (France). The headquarters of GOMAC were fixed at the offices of the Secretary General's organisation, UNSOF (Union Nationale des Syndicats d'Opticiens de France), 45 Rue de Lancry, Paris. (The organisation would subsequently change its name to GOOMAC, Commission des Organisations Optométriques et Optiques de la Communauté Européenne.)



*Léon Hauck*

Among the general purposes for establishing GOMAC was the desire:

- to harmonise professional training in order to achieve equivalence of qualifications
- to examine all problems relating to the rights and duties of the profession.

In **September 1967** GOMAC revised its constitution by establishing committees and by broadening its purposes to include:

- Representation of opticians and of their interests in relation to organisations of the EEC and other European organisations involved
- The defence of the interests of ametropes
- The establishment of principles of professional organisation for the purpose of obtaining equality in diplomas giving rights both to the exercise of the profession and thus to meet certain objectives of the Treaty of Rome
- Study and research into the solution of problems which may arise for the profession in the European context.

One of the first practical aims of GOMAC was to lobby the EEC for a directive to harmonise the optical profession and thus allow opticians to practise in other member states. Such a directive would be known in the jargon of Brussels as a sectoral directive. Such a directive was proposed by the European Commission. Later, it was considered by the Economic and Social Committee and by the European Parliament, which proposed that, provided a certain level of training was reached, opticians should be allowed to perform subjective and objective refraction and to prescribe corrective spectacles – but without detecting pathology and, in the case of patients under the age of sixteen, only on the basis of an ophthalmological examination which was no more than six months old.

Following the arrival of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom in the EEC on **1 January 1973**, progress towards adopting the draft directive slowed down, until eventually the Commission withdrew its proposal, apparently at GOMAC's request, but more likely because of the failure to reach unanimity in the Council of Ministers. Differences of views reflected not only the different structures and levels of the profession in the member states, but also national developments which were independent of each other, for example the introduction of payment for refraction by sickness funds (health insurance companies) in Germany.

Not only was there disagreement about how the profession could be harmonised at European level, there was uncertainty about the position of optometry in Europe and about national developments in general. For those, such as Manfred Müller (Germany) of the WVAO (Wissenschaftliche Vereinigung für Augenoptik und Optometrie), who in 1979 wanted to receive more information than GOMAC was able to supply, it was necessary for a European congress to be initiated and held regularly thereafter, organised in each case by a national organisation which would act as host of the congress. (By now the professional bodies of the three German-speaking countries were meeting regularly.)

Furthermore, optometry was a relatively new concept. Thus, for example in Belgium in 1979, according to a Mr van Wauvé, in addition to dispensing opticians, there were two views of optometry as a liberal profession: refraction only; and refraction plus dispensing of optical appliances. In Germany, the profession insisted on maintaining the 'Dreiklang' structure: prescription of

spectacles; fitting; and supply. In Denmark, there was talk of separating dispensing opticians and optometrists, as proposed by the ministry of education. The question of splitting the profession in two was clearly on the European agenda. But it also provoked much opposition.

GOMAC met in plenary on **26 May 1986 in Paris**; twelve countries participated. Wilfried Oberländer (Germany) was elected President; Jean Vanrullen was re-elected General Secretary for another three years. The outgoing President, Léon Hauck – who had held the office for 26 years – was elected as Honorary President. Organisations from Greece, Portugal and the United Kingdom were admitted into membership. Ian Hunter of the UK reported that the European authorities in Brussels were no longer pursuing the idea of legislation to harmonise professions and favoured instead a proposal for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications requiring training at university or equivalent level.



*Wilfried Oberländer*

At his instigation, a further meeting of GOMAC was held on **22 September 1986 in Paris**, at which this theme was discussed again. Twelve countries were represented. It was decided to create an education committee to study the proposal for a European directive on the mutual recognition of diplomas. The idea of a harmonising directive was rejected by a majority of the delegates. A proposal was also made by José Castivia (Spain) to include the word 'optometrist' in GOMAC's name. It was agreed to study the proposal. (He repeated his proposal in a letter dated **14 April 1987**, addressed to the Secretary General, in which he also linked the idea of a developing a common qualification based on the three years' study post-secondary schooling, the level set by the draft directive on the mutual recognition of diplomas.)

These issues highlighted the difficulties of comparing the different practice of the profession between the countries of Europe. As Professor David Pickwell (United Kingdom) pointed out in his report for GOMAC's Education Committee, meeting on **29 November 1986**, there were 'no agreed definitions' relating to the profession. Thus, there were 'inherent difficulties' in making comparisons. His report sought to give an overview of national situations regarding:

- restrictions on practice
- restrictions on contact lens practice
- restrictions on supply
- restrictions on setting up practice
- financial assistance for optometry
- professional organisation
- age of entry to optometric education
- duration of studies
- continuing education.

By this time, it was clear that the EEC had abandoned the idea of sectoral directives. At a meeting of GOMAC's executive committee on **5 April 1987 in Paris**, there was a debate on the relative merits of mutual recognition of national qualifications, in comparison with the idea of a European directive harmonising the training and scope of practice of opticians. While the latter was supported strongly by Vanrullen, the British delegate, Ian Hunter, argued for mutual recognition. The President, Oberländer, insisted on the handicraft element of the profession being preserved. It was agreed that GOMAC should enquire with the European Commission in Brussels about the way forward, after agreement had been reached within GOMAC, due to meet in June 1987 in Lisbon. (The meeting was held on **20-21 June 1987 in Paris**.)

And, at the beginning of 1988, GOMAC was told first hand by the European Commission of the latter's re-thinking of the issue of the free circulation of working persons within Europe, in particular professional persons who wished to exercise their profession in another member state. At a meeting on **25 January 1988 in Brussels**, to a GOMAC delegation consisting of Oberländer, Vanrullen, Castivia, Carlier, Kever and Denis (the latter three from Belgium), it was confirmed by the Commission that there would be no more harmonising sectoral directives, such as those on doctors, pharmacists and so on. Instead, as the officials Mr Beuve-Méry and Ms Jackie Mynors explained, the Commission was promoting the idea of the mutual recognition of professional qualifications of regulated professions requiring completion of secondary schooling and three years' further study at university or equivalent level. There was no question of the EC agreeing to a sectoral directive to harmonise the training and qualifications of optician-optometrists. That approach had now been abandoned. Any qualification harmonised privately by the profession at European level would have to be recognised by the individual member states and not by the European institutions. Scope of practice and professional regulation and training would remain the responsibility of the member states.

Among other recommendations concerning the future of the profession, the Commission suggested that GOMAC develop a European logo for use by optical retail outlets in the member states. It also urged the profession to keep its prices for optical appliances as low as possible. (The problem of ready-made reading spectacles was already of great concern to the profession.) Privately, GOMAC expressed its disappointment with the outcome of the meeting with the European Commission, especially with regard to harmonisation.

The European Community (as it became increasingly known) adopted its first directive for a common system of mutual recognition of professional qualifications at the end of 1988. It was published in the EC's Official Journal in January 1989. Member states were given until January 1991 to transpose the directive into their national legislation.

GOMAC considered the practical application of the new directive at its meeting on **25 September 1988 in Venice**. The fact that the directive covered post-secondary school training of at least three years drew attention

to the different training periods for optometrists and opticians in Europe. To which member states would the directive apply? Who would benefit from it, individual practitioners, chain stores or both? Member organisations agreed that it would take time to understand the full implications of the directive.

In reply to a proposal from Jean-Paul Roosen (France) of AESCO (grouping schools and universities) for a European diploma, GOMAC formulated a favourable consensus around the principle of a diploma. More problematical was the content of such a diploma. For example, it was agreed that it should contain the prescription, production and fitting or dispensing of optical appliances. But should the diploma also include diagnostic drugs, which optometrists in the UK were permitted to use? The debate began.



*Giuseppe Ricco*

At its meeting on **22-23 September 1989 in Torremolinos**, GOMAC elected Giuseppe Ricco (Italy) President and Ian Hunter Secretary General. Later that year, Richard Carswell (UK), a former official of the European Commission and European Parliament and now working for a consultancy in London, proposed a programme of European public affairs to GOMAC for 1990 onwards, specifically in relation to European legislation.



*Ian Hunter*

GOMAC met again on **19 January 1990 in Lisbon**, where Manfred Müller was elected Vice President, Richard Wilshin (UK) Treasurer and José Castivia a member of the Executive Committee. For the first time, an annual budget was prepared. GOMAC changed its name to GOOMAC. It was agreed that GOOMAC and the Pan European Group of the IOOL should cooperate on the development of a European diploma.

The issue of European legislation on the recognition of professional qualifications continued to preoccupy GOOMAC, now that the European Commission was considering proposing a second directive for lower level qualifications. The issue was whether GOOMAC should ask for a directive on paramedical professions. However, the question arose as to the precise meaning of 'paramedical', particularly in terms of the relationship between optician-optometrists and medical doctors.

GOOMAC's executive committee met on **30 June 1990 in San Sebastian**, where a discussion was held with the representatives of AESCO, Jean-Paul Roosen and Hilmar Bussacker (Switzerland), about European optometric training.

## PEG (Pan European Group)

PEG, the Pan European Group of the International Optometric and Optical League (IOOL), held its inaugural meeting on **21-22 November 1986 in Munich**.

Wilfried Oberländer was elected President; Per Söderberg Vice-President; and Ian Hunter Secretary General. To this executive committee was later co-opted José Castivia.

Membership of PEG was open to IOOL members and associate members in European region of the World Health Organisation. After some discussion, the official languages of PEG were agreed to be English and French. PEG decided that it would not deal with matters which were the sole concern of the EEC; and thus its functions would not conflict with those of GOMAC.

PEG's interest was quickly stimulated by the work being done by the British College of Ophthalmic Opticians (Optometrists) to develop a European diploma of optometry and optics. This work had been reported to AESCO. At an informal meeting of PEG on **8 May 1987 in Vienna**, the British College's representative, Tom Collingridge, presented a paper on a method of measuring the various qualifications in European countries against a standard European Optometric Diploma by means of identifying the contents of such qualifications and relating them to a set of modules.

At PEG's second formal meeting, on **4 December 1987 in Cardiff**, Jean-Paul Roosen gave details of AESCO's proposal for the examinations and subjects envisaged for the European Optometric Diploma.

For some countries, the existence of two European organisations was unwelcome, insofar as they required the payment of two subscriptions. Moreover, it could be argued that having two organisations was an unnecessary division of labour. Consequently, as Jean Vanrullen told a meeting of



*Per Söderberg*

GOMAC on **25 January 1988 in Brussels**, his national organisation (UNSO) would not join PEG. On the other hand, GOMAC welcomed the work being done by AESCO to develop a European diploma. (It seemed to GOMAC to be an optical, rather than an optometric, diploma.)



*Jean Vanrullen*

At PEG's meeting on **23-24 September 1988 in Venice**, Per Söderberg (Sweden) was elected President, José Castivia Vice President, while Wilfried Oberländer and Jean-Luc Dubié (France) were elected to the Executive Committee. Among the themes discussed were deregulation and the growth in sales of ready-made reading spectacles. For the first time, PEG and GOMAC had a joint session (on 25 September).

At an informal meeting of PEG on **6 May 1989 in Luxembourg**, those present discussed the concept of a European diploma and whether it should be supervised by a European College of Optometry. The question also arose of seeking the European Commission's approval of the diploma, even though there was the danger of medical intervention in Brussels. The content of the diploma was another central theme. Based on a paper written by Jean-Paul Roosen (representing AESCO), it was agreed that 'any European diploma



*Per Söderberg and Wolfgang Cagnolati*

should be designed to cover all subjects at the highest level at which they are practised in any European country.' It was also agreed that 'the implementation of such a diploma should take account of national differences where problems exist.' Another subject of considerable debate was the sale of ready-made reading spectacles by unqualified persons (recently permitted in the United Kingdom).

A year later, on **22-23 September 1990** a doubly historic event occurred. PEG and GOOMAC, meeting jointly again, agreed officially to cooperate. Furthermore, the meeting took place in **East Berlin**, still part of East Germany, although the Berlin Wall had come down in the meantime.

Items which were discussed included the possibility of GOOMAC applying for membership of the European liberal professions organisations SEPLIS; the production of a 'white paper' on optometry in the European Community; and the initiation of a dialogue with ophthalmology at European level.

At the same meeting, PEG elected José Castivia President, Jean-Luc Dubié Vice President, and Ben Lewis (UK) and Ian Hunter members of the Executive Committee. Per Söderberg would remain a member of the committee. By this time, Ian Hunter was Secretary General of both organisations.

The Executive Committees of GOOMAC and PEG met jointly on **21 November 1990 in Paris** and on **21 January 1991 in Brussels**. At this stage, GOOMAC and PEG had 17 countries in membership, and five more countries were applying for membership. Nevertheless, GOOMAC had a

financial deficit, which had to be met by additional voluntary contributions from member countries. In Brussels, Manfred Müller made a proposal for calculating subscriptions to both organisations, based on national gross domestic product, population and the number of organised professionals in each country. This proposal became famous as the ‘Müller formula’.

The two organisations met for a third time jointly in plenary on **1 June 1991 in Cardiff**. The debate on European legislation continued at the joint meeting of PEG and GOOMAC held on **25/26 October 1991 in Athens**. In particular, they discussed the EC member states’ implementation of the so called first qualifications directive (see above) and the European Commission’s proposal for a second directive for professions requiring a lower level of training. The question arose whether the EC’s directives reduced – or even removed - the necessity of a European diploma. Nevertheless, the consensus within PEG/GOMAC’s joint education committee was that work on a European diploma should continue. This was approved by the joint General Assembly.

The two organisations also discussed the question of assembling spectacle frames and corrective lenses within the scope of the proposed directive on medical devices; the implementation of the directive on display screen equipment; the draft directive on liability of defective services; the second directive on driving licences; and rates of Value Added Tax (VAT) on optical products and services.

It was at the joint meeting of PEG and GOOMAC on **9 June 1992 in Granada** that the proposal was made to dissolve the two organisations and to create a single European organisation, which would march in step with the creation of the European Economic Area and the enlargement of the European Community. Already the name of the European Council of Optometry and Optics was suggested. It should be a regional organisation of the IOOL.

It was also decided by the joint general assembly of PEG and GOOMAC that a board of examiners should be established to create a European diploma of optometry.

## **ECOO (European Council of Optometry and Optics)**

ECOO was born on **14-15 November 1992 in Paris**. Manfred Müller was elected President, Kees Kortland (Netherlands) President-Elect, Jean-Luc Dubié Treasurer. José Castivia and Giuseppe Ricco were elected to the Executive Committee as Past Presidents of the predecessor bodies.



*Manfred Müller*

Representative organisations from countries of the European Economic Area were eligible for membership. Although Switzerland was not a member of the EEA, it was nevertheless agreed subsequently that Switzerland would continue to be a full member of ECOO and that the General Assembly was empowered to decide in future which countries would be eligible.

The first meeting of the Executive Committee of ECOO took place on **29 January 1993 in Amsterdam**. Present were Manfred Müller (President), Kees Kortland (President-Elect), Jean-Luc Dubié (Treasurer), Per Söderberg, Grant McLeish (UK), Giuseppe Ricco, Ian Hunter, Peter Gunkel (Germany), Giulio Velati (Italy), Richard Carswell and Anna Baczkowski (UK).

At its meeting on **12 April 1993 in Venice**, the General Assembly received a report from the European Diploma Working Group chaired by Per Söderberg on a timetable for the drafting of a syllabus and the holding of a trial examination for a European Diploma of Optometry, in collaboration with AESCO. These steps were agreed. (Tom Collingridge was replaced by Peter Leigh of the College of Optometrists as the rapporteur of the working group.)

The General Assembly also determined ECOO's goals and future activities, including the development of a common scope of practice and a code of ethical practice.

The Education and Legislation Committees had met the previous day. In the latter committee, European legislation was reviewed, and delegates also noted that the rates of Value Added Tax on eye examinations differed in some countries between optometrists and ophthalmologists. An informal meeting of an Economic Committee also took place.



*Kees Kortland*

Subsequently, on **8 June 1993 in Luxembourg**, the Executive Committee and representatives of AESCO met to discuss a draft written agreement between the two organisations, with a view to cooperating on the establishment of the European Diploma of Optometry by 1996.

On **22 November 1994 in Brussels**, the General Assembly elected Kees Kortland President, Theo Gumpelmayer (Austria) President Elect and Jean-Luc Dubié Treasurer.

Professional bodies from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia were admitted into membership of ECOO by the General Assembly at its meeting of **16 May 1995 in Bergen**. The General Assembly agreed to levy the equivalent of one year's subscription per member country, in addition to the normal subscription, as a contribution towards meeting the cost of holding examinations for the proposed European Diploma. Technical expertise would be sought from the National Board of Examiners in Optometry in the United States.

At the same meeting, the General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution against the supply of contact lenses by mail order because of the risk of serious eye infection or injury.

At its meeting on **6 October 1995 in Cascais**, it was agreed in principle to incorporate ECOO as a company limited by guarantee under English law. (Incorporation followed the next year.) Thus, as a corporate body, ECOO would be able to apply for public funds, for example from the European Commission.

Ian Hunter was re-elected Secretary General for a further three years. Peter Leigh became the secretary of the Education Committee and of the European Diploma Management Committee (now known as the Diploma Board of Management). A proposal for a European Certificate for Opticians was mentioned. A first draft of ECOO's White Paper on the profession in Europe was noted.

A perennial problem facing ECOO was the lack of adequate funds and the need to keep expenditure as low as possible. Thus, for example, discussion took place in the General Assembly on **2 June 1996 in Munich** on the use of cheaper hotels, the holding of meetings at weekends (when air fares would be lower) and the selection of venues which might be subsidised, such as the KölnMesse and Silmo in Paris.

One source of money was sponsorship and also the European Commission's Leonardo Fund, to which ECOO made an application for support for the European Diploma. (The application was successful.) In order to have an adequate vehicle for the handling of public money from European sources, ECOO was transformed into a company limited by guarantee in England.

At the same meeting in Munich, ECOO launched its White Paper, renamed the ECOO Blue Book, a description of optometry and optics in Europe. (A delegate called for the setting up of a website and private email network.)

As was reported to the General Assembly, part of ECOO's role was to help member organisations to communicate with national authorities and among themselves. Thus, when member organisations of two countries had differences about the interpretation of European legislation on the circulation of professionals, ECOO was asked to mediate. Another role was ECOO's lobbying of the European Commission to include plano contact lenses in the definition of medical devices in the directive of the same name, an issue which continues to concern the profession to this day.



*Theo Gumpelmayer*

A parallel development was the legal case brought by Belgian ophthalmologists against Vision Express in Belgium, alleging the performance of illegal medical acts by optometrists trained in the United Kingdom and

practising in Belgium. The case was referred to the European Court of Justice, which declared that member states were entitled to determine their own policies of professional scope of practice and to protect public health. However, any such protection should take account of technological and educational progress.

By now, a separate financial structure had been established for the European Diploma; and its income and expenditure, cash flow reports and projections and balance sheets were reported by Peter Leigh (on behalf of The British College of Optometrists) to ECOO's General Assembly on **19 November 1996 in London**. The British College had been entrusted with the administration of the Diploma.

At the same meeting, Theo Gumpelmayer was elected President, Georgia Toliou (Greece) President-Elect, Jean-Luc Dubié Treasurer, Tom Nosch (Germany) Chairman Education Committee, Bob Chappell (UK) Chairman Legislation Committee, Giulio Velati Economic Committee, and Manfred Müller Fund Raising Committee. Kees Kortland remained on the Executive Committee as the Immediate Past President.

In the meantime, ECOO had developed good relations with the contact lens industry at European level, resulting in the creation of the European Contact Lens Forum, which brought together not only optometrists, opticians and the industry but also ophthalmologists interested in contact lens. (Since, the Forum has continued to meet from time to time to exchange information and advice.)

At its meeting on **31 May 1997 in Prague**, the General Assembly observed a minute's silence following the death of Giuseppe Ricco, also former President of Federottica.

In the field of economic affairs, it was recognised that the collection of information about national markets for optical appliances (as well as consumer tastes) was uneven. Comprehensive statistics were available in some countries (for example, Germany) but were very sparse or non-existent in others. This was a problem that was to blight the work of the Economic Committee in the future.

The General Assembly resolved to refer henceforth to the "ECOO European Diploma of Optometry" in order to assert ECOO's full rights to the title. It was agreed by the General Assembly that ECOO would have to appeal to member organisations to raise extra funds for the Diploma. (For several years thereafter national delegations paid an annual levy towards to the cost of the Diploma.)



*ECOO General Assembly Athens*

The General Assembly, meeting on **2 November 1997 in Athens**, determined a fundamental criterion for the eligibility of candidates to take the exams of the Diploma, namely:

*anyone who in the view of ECOO possesses a recognised qualification enabling him/her to practise as a recognised optician or optometrist in his/her own country, or who is eligible to sit the final examination for entry into the profession in his/her own country, will be eligible to take any of the examinations of the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry.*

Perturbed by the unsupervised sales of contact lenses and the potential dangers to public health, the General Assembly called upon ECOO to cooperate with other organisations to influence European and national authorities to prevent such sales.

By the time of the meeting of the General Assembly on **6 June 1998 in Salzburg**, UNSOF (which had left ECOO) had become the Union des Opticiens (UDO). This organisation was now welcomed into membership of ECOO. (The Association des Optométristes de France had been, and continued to be, a member of ECOO.)

The General Assembly was told that the first trial exams for the Diploma would be held in three languages (English, French and German) in November 1998.

For the three years 1997-1999, it had been agreed to levy £125,000 on member organisations to pay for the Diploma. In addition, money was now being received from the European Union's Leonardo Fund. Nevertheless, as the Secretary of the Education Committee, Peter Leigh, explained to the General Assembly meeting on **7 November 1998 in Cologne**, the Diploma was a 'risk project' and it may be necessary to establish a separate vehicle for the Diploma, namely a subsidiary company, which could be called the European Academy or something similar. In the meantime, a contract would be formulated between ECOO and the College of Optometrists concerning the management of the Diploma.



*Georgia Toliou*

At the same meeting, the General Assembly adopted the concept of optometry formulated by the World Council of Optometry, the successor to the IOOL.

In the ensuing elections, Georgia Toliou was elected President of ECOO, Bernd Schwenson (Finland) President-Elect, Jean-Luc Dubié Treasurer, Jörg Müller (Switzerland) Chairman Education Committee, Bob Chappell Legislation Committee, Giulio Velati Economic Committee, Manfred Müller Fund Raising Committee, and Ian Hunter Secretary General.

By the time of the meeting of the General Assembly on **29 May 1999 in Brunnen**, the first written exams for the Diploma had taken place. Of the 76 candidates who took the exams, only four had passed all three parts of the exams. The results – together with the over-running of the budget for the Diploma – caused disappointment among delegates. The challenge facing the organisers of the Diploma was not only to set the standard at the highest level of entry into the profession in Europe but also to persuade universities and schools of optometry to adapt their teaching to the requirements of the Diploma. Only in this way would more candidates pass the exams.



*Bobby Schwenson, Georgia Toliou, Ian Hunter, Theo Gumpelmayer*

It is fair to say that the development of the Diploma continued to dominate debates in the General Assembly in its subsequent meetings, partly due to its cost and the difficulty of raising money and partly due to the structure and results of the exams.

At its meeting on **29 April 2000 in Cologne**, the General Assembly instructed the Executive Committee to prepare an invitation to tender for the management of the Diploma.



*Bernd Schwenson*

The General Assembly accepted the recommendations of the Education Committee concerning the structure of the Board of Management and the Board of Examiners of the Diploma at its meeting on **28 October 2000 in Paris**. By now the member organisations who were partners in the Diploma project had assigned their intellectual property rights in the Diploma to ECOO. At the same time, the project continued to be supported financially by the Leonardo Fund. In addition, as Jean-Paul Roosen of AEUSCO (formerly AESCO) reported, a teaching programme for the Diploma was available in English and French and would soon be available in German and Italian.

The General Assembly unanimously elected Bobby (Bernd) Schwenson President, Janez Gobec (Slovenia) President-Elect, Jean-Luc Dubié Treasurer, Bob Chappell Chairman Legislation Committee, Jörg Müller Chairman Education Committee and Markus Miller (Austria) Chairman Economic Committee.

At its meeting on **4-5 June 2001 in Helsinki**, the General Assembly awarded a contract to manage the Diploma to the Zentralverband der Augenoptiker (ZVA). (The secretary of the



*Richard Carswell*

Board of Management and the Board of Examiners was to be Peter Schreiber, followed by Bärbel Scholtysik.)

It was at this same meeting that Richard Carswell was elected as Secretary General Designate of ECOO. He took office on **3 November 2001 in Madrid**. He continued to serve ECOO as European Affairs Adviser.

At its meeting on **9-10 November 2002 in Budapest**, Janez Gobec was elected President, Bob Chappell President-Elect, Tom Nosch Treasurer, Roger Crelier (Switzerland) Chairman Education Committee and Tone Garaas (Norway) Chairman Professional Services Committee (which



*Richard Carswell and Brigitte Denis (Belgium) with Czech delegation*

replaced the Legislation Committee). By now the Economic Committee had fallen into abeyance. (Nevertheless, contact was later established with the European optical manufacturers and importers' organisation, EUROM, to discuss the possibility of collaborating on the collection of statistics and other matters.)

Another aspect of the development of ECOO European Diploma of Optometry was the desire to encourage universities and schools of optometry to teach the Diploma. It was thus that at its meeting on **17 October 2004 in Prague** that the General Assembly followed the recommendations of the Education Committee that the following should take place:

- Autumn 2005 approval of European competencies
- Spring 2006 establishment of an accreditation agency
- 2006-10 accreditation of schools
- 2006-10 transfer of organisation of examinations from ECOO to accredited institutions.

At the same meeting, Bob Chappell was elected President, Feike Grit President-Elect, Tom Nosch Treasurer, Roger Crelier Chairman Education Committee, Tone Garaas Chairman Professional Services Committee and Richard Carswell Secretary General.



*Bob Chappell*

In **May 2005**, ECOO departed from its normal practice of holding two meetings of the General Assembly a year. Instead, it held a successful educational conference in **Krakow**. (A similar event was held in **May 2007 in Dubrovnik**.)

By the time of the General Assembly's next meeting, on **23 October 2005 in Paris**, ECOO has acquired its own website ([www.ecoo.info](http://www.ecoo.info)) and decided to reduce the costs of meetings by dropping simultaneous interpretation to and

from German (French having been dropped a few years earlier). Regarding the subscriptions payable to ECOO by member organisations, the British delegation requested that an alternative, fairer method be devised. (The Executive Committee was to struggle until 2009 to find an acceptable formula.)

In 2005 the European Union adopted a new directive on the recognition of professional qualifications. (It replaced the two previous directives.) Two innovative features of the new directive were potentially significant for the free movement of optometrists and opticians (and other professionals) in Europe: firstly, the freedom to provide temporary services in another member state (subject to safeguards); secondly, the possibility of a 'common platform', which offered another vehicle for the harmonisation of the education and training of the profession. A common platform, proposed by ECOO and accepted by the European Commission and the member states, would have the force of European law. It seemed an attractive prospect that was worth exploring.

An issue which was debated frequently within ECOO, both formally and informally, was the ideal structure of the committees and their relationship to the General Assembly. Since membership of the committees and the General Assembly were *de facto* the same, many delegates felt that there was too much repetition in meetings. On **5 May 2006 in Milan**, the General Assembly decided to reduce the membership of the committees which would be elected by the General Assembly. The intention was that the committees would thus be able to work more effectively and focus on specific issues.

The new committees were elected by the General Assembly at its meeting on **15 October 2006 in Dublin**. At the same time, Feike Grit (Netherlands) was elected President, Wolfgang Cagnolati (Germany) President-Elect, Jesus Garcia (Spain) Treasurer, Tone Garaas Chairman Professional Services Committee and Roger Crelier Chairman Education Committee. Six members each were elected to the two committees.



*Feike Grit*

A change introduced by the new President was the production by ECOO of regular newsletters.

It was also agreed in principle in Dublin that ECOO's Education Committee would be replaced by a European Academy of Optometry and Optics, to which the ECOO Diploma would, in due course, be transferred. Meanwhile, for several years, through the initiative of our Czech colleagues and under the rubric of TUPO (Twinning Universities Project), ECOO acted as the joint host of an annual conference in Brno, dedicated to helping optometric and optical educators in central and eastern Europe; and to bringing them into contact

with their counterparts in western Europe. The results have included a number of informal but fruitful partnerships between universities.

By now, as was reported to the General Assembly meeting on **13-14 October 2007 in Lisbon**, work had started on mapping the competencies of the Diploma against those of the World Council of Optometry and the UK's regulatory body, the General Optical Council, which by now had given provisional partial recognition to the Diploma as a suitable qualification for optometric practice in the UK. The work on mapping competences was led initially by Bob Chappell and Wolfgang Cagnolati, assisted later by Adrian Jennings (UK), Frank Buijs (Netherlands) and Andreas Berke (Germany). One purpose of the mapping exercise was to accredit university courses and qualifications in relation to the ECOO Diploma. For that, pilot projects would be required (and have since started). Ultimately it was intended that ECOO would establish an accreditation agency.

At this same meeting, Richard Carswell was re-elected Secretary General. Other developments which took place were the preparation of a new Blue Book and an ECOO code of professional conduct. (The new Blue Book was published in 2008. The code of conduct was published in 2009.)

At its meeting on **8-9 November 2008 in Istanbul**, the General Assembly approved the awarding of a contract to The College of Optometrists (of the UK) to manage the proposed European Academy of Optometry and Optics. (The European Academy began life in 2009 and held its first conference in May 2009 in Lausanne.)

In Istanbul, Wolfgang Cagnolati was elected President of ECOO, Armin Duddek (Switzerland) President-Elect, Jesus Garcia Treasurer, Roger Anderson (UK) Chairman Education Committee, and Tone Garaas Chairman Professional Services Committee. Six members each were elected to the two committees.



*Wolfgang Cagnolati*

The question of subscriptions remained a source of debate within ECOO. (Unfortunately the Association des Optométristes de France was required to leave ECOO after failing to pay its subscriptions for three years.) The matter was resolved in 2009 with the introduction of a new formula based solely on the gross domestic product of member countries. The new formula was applied in 2010. In the meantime, for the first time, ECOO's annual accounts (managed by Alan Lester of the secretariat in London) were inspected by members of the General Assembly. John Fried (UK) and Gerhard Gschweidl (Austria) reported their satisfaction with the accounts for 2007 and 2008 to the General Assembly on **16 May 2009 in Lausanne**.

During this period ECOO improved its website and introduced the publication of regular press releases and position papers on clinical subjects, commissioned from distinguished specialists.

At its meeting on **17-18 October 2009 in Budapest**, the General Assembly formally voted for the new subscription formula to take effect from 2010. It also received a presentation from Guido de Jongh of CEN (Centre Européen de Normalisation) on European standards for services. From this presentation was born the decision by ECOO to plan a European standard for optometric and optical services.

A similar and potentially important development was reported by President Cagnolati to the General Assembly on **15 May 2010 in Copenhagen**: the commissioning of a report from the University of Duisburg-Essen on primary eye care in Europe. Such a study would provide a relative assessment of the clinical and economic aspects in relation to the different models of delivery in Europe.

At the same meeting Dr Ulrich Adam (Germany) of Hill & Knowlton International Brussels, was elected Secretary General Designate, to replace Richard Carswell, who would retire in October. It is fitting that the handover will take place in Dresden, a city of reconciliation.



*Ulrich Adam*

## **Conclusion**

This brief overview does not purport to be a comprehensive history of ECOO and its predecessor bodies. (That task awaits a historian in the future.) Rather, it gives a chronological account of the main areas of activity exercised by GOMAC/GOOMAC, PEG and ECOO. It is a story of ever greater expansion. GOMAC started with six member countries. Today ECOO has member organisations from 30 countries. But it is also a story of growing ambition, both in terms of optometry and optics as professions, but also in terms of ECOO as a common voice in Europe.

It is a tribute to the presidents of GOMAC, PEG and ECOO that they harboured such an ambition and that their colleagues continue to pursue it today.

Finally, GOMAC, PEG and ECOO were – and are – grateful for the sponsorship which they received from many companies for their meetings and work.

## **Afterword**

Most of the text above has been written on the basis of official minutes of the three organisations, kept by ECOO's secretariat and Manfred Müller; and on the basis of internal notes written by the late Dr Peter Gunkel for the Zentralverband der Augenoptiker (ZVA).

Dr Gunkel was a true friend to European optometry and optics, as well as a person of great integrity.

This publication is dedicated to his memory; and to all those who have contributed to the development of European optometry and optics in a spirit of cooperation and generosity.

**Richard Carswell BA MA PhD**

**Secretary General ECOO 2001-2010**

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