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Message from the President



Dear members,

The landscape for optometrists and opticians is changing. Two days before World Sight Day on 13 October, The Lancet published "[Global causes of blindness and distance vision impairment 1990 – 2020: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#)", a report outlining contemporary data for causes of vision impairment and blindness.

The data constitutes an important basis for developing public health policy recommendations, and can be used as a tool in the process of securing public sector recognition of the optometry and optics professions. Please read this article, as it is vital for our future work!

Europe is faced with a shortage of eye care practitioners. The classical model of ophthalmology is not coping with the demands. This has led to discussions on a more prominent role of orthoptics in supporting the work of ophthalmologists in some countries. In other countries, like Switzerland, Greece, and the Scandinavian countries, the public health system is looking into the autonomous professions of optometry and optics as a solution.

The ECOO-European Diploma in Optometry is the right strategy to position optometrists and opticians as primary eye care providers. I would like to remind you that the European Commission recognised this position in the mutual evaluation of regulated professions in 2015. Members, it is on us to interact with our national competent authorities in order to achieve harmonisation of the Optometry and Optics professions in Europe.

Through contact programmes in Brussels, ECOO's Executive Committee is engaging with members of the European Parliament, the European Commission, and other stakeholders to advocate for good sight. In July 2017, we met with WHO Europe, the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU), and with the office of MEP Andreas Schwab (Rapporteur for the proportionality test directive), to name just a few.

I would like to motivate you to do the same at the national level, as direct engagement really does make a difference. We would also urge you to report back to us, so that we can feed your national efforts into the work ECOO does at the European level.

Another big issue concerning Optometry and Optics is the merger between Essilor and Luxottica. Practitioners around Europe have been invited by the European Commission Directorate General for Competition to share their views. For our profession, this investigation is the first of its kind. We are following this process closely.

*Season greetings,
Peter Gumpelmayer*

General Assembly

On 21 and 22 October 2017, ECOO Members gathered in Prague for the General Assembly. ECOO's General Assembly fostered constructive and lively discussions on the development of the professions of optometry and optics in the various European countries. In his regard, ECOO launched its [Blue Book Infographic](#), containing key insights on the professions in 30 European countries, the scope of competence and practice in these respective countries, as well as an overview of the regulatory and educational landscape.

The General Assembly also determined ECOO's strategy with regards to the regulatory agenda at the European level. The topic of healthy ageing in relation to optometry and optics was

discussed on the basis of two guest presentations, by Michael Bowen, Director of Research at the College of Optometrists in London, and Claus van Weezel, owner of Van Weezel Optometri and external lecturer at Aarhus University in Denmark.

Finally, against the backdrop of emerging online health services across Europe and the growing number of citizens moving from one country to the other, the meeting in Prague included a workshop on good online practices. The workshop will result in a guidance document that can be used by professionals and consumers when engaging in or using online services.

Photos from the General Assembly in Prague



Photos are kindly provided by Per Michael Larsen.



On the EU agenda

VAT

On 4 October 2017, the European Commission published the key principles on VAT. In a first instance, these principles pertain to business-to-business cross-border transactions, and aim to simplify the procedures for cross border sales. The principles should for instance facilitate the compatibility between invoicing rules and a country's own rules, which should in turn enhance consistency, and contribute to tackling fraud. This is the first in a series of Commission proposals on modernising VAT system. Three further proposals are still expected to be launched this year. The technical adaptation of the VAT Directive is expected in 2018.

Digital Health & Care

ECOO has submitted a response to the European Commission's public consultation on the "Transformation of Health and Care in the Digital Single Market". The consultation focused on online health records and ECOO highlighted its views on digital health literacy. As not everyone has sufficient digital capabilities, ECOO underscored the need to put in place adequate structures to ensure digital inclusion. ECOO also made strong point about ensuring data protection.

Proportionality Test Directive

ECOO published a position paper on the proportionality test directive over the summer 2017 and ECOO's position has been noted by policy makers. On 4 December 2017 the European Parliament will vote on the file, after which the trilogue negotiations between the EU institutions will commence at the end of this year or early in 2018. A key concern is the exemption of healthcare professions from the scope of the directive. The exemption has been proposed by Mr Schwab MEP (rapporteur on the file in the European Parliament) and is supported by a number of other MEPs. ECOO believes that the proportionality test would add an additional bureaucratic burden to healthcare professions, but considers it important that the professions of optics and optometry (or the combined profession in some countries) is not divide. The Council of the European Union has not yet presented its position on the proposed exemption.

Display Screen Directive

The Display Screen Directive is one of several European occupational health directives that will be subjected to an update by the end of 2018. The main thrust of the update is to align the Directive with the technological advancements of the past thirty years, which is necessary because some of the definitions, like "workstations" and exemptions in the Directive are outdated. In practice, this will merely come down to technical updates of some of the definitions in the Directive. The European Commission is currently going through a closed consultation process with the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) and with social partners.

Member Insights



Optometry is now a regulated profession in Greece

By Ilias Sapounakis, Panhellenic Association of Optics and Optometry (PAOO)

After years of anticipation and hard work by the Panhellenic Association of Optics and Optometry (PAOO) and its members, optometry is now an officially regulated profession in Greece.

In August 2017, the PAOO became a public legal entity, which implies that the PAOO is now the primary professional association for optometrists and opticians in Greece. Optometrists will fall under the supervision of the Greek Ministry of Health and anyone wishing to practice the optometry or optics would need to enrol as a member of the PAOO.

A new ministerial act (15 September 2017) regulates the scope of the optical and optometric practice. Optometrists and opticians are allowed to perform subjective and objective examinations for refraction and binocular vision assessments, colour vision evaluations, visual fields, and screening of eye health and integrity, if a number of conditions are met. They will also be able to use ophthalmic drugs for diagnostic purposes and first aid provision.

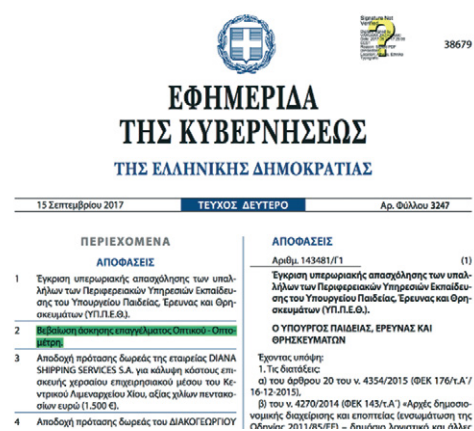
Other activities

In recent months, the PAOO has been especially active on research and work against counterfeited sunglasses and optical products. Counterfeited products pose a significant challenge to public health as well as to the Greek economy in general. In collaboration with government authorities, including regional offices, the police, customs and trademark companies, the PAOO is making an effort to control the production and distribution of counterfeited products.



A joint effort — Thomas Truckenbrod, President of the Central Association of Ophthalmic Opticians and Optometrists (ZVA) reflects on the association's political activities

The best way to summarise the current political activities of the ZVA is as follows: You can only make a difference if everyone is acting in concert. The law passed by the German parliament in April 2017 hit the ophthalmic opticians and optometrists in Germany like a shockwave. The law implies that insured adults with a short- or farsightedness of more than six dioptres or astigmatism of more than four dioptres receive a subsidy from their health insurance for their spectacle lenses. The law was endorsed despite the fact that visual aids for adults have been excluded from subsidisation schemes since 2004 in the wake of health care reforms. All parties had gotten used to this situation, and even learned to live well with it.



The new legislation is flawed in a crucial way, as it ties the subsidy for lenses to the prescription by an ophthalmologist. This has a direct bearing on the ability of ophthalmic opticians to perform eye tests, the core of the profession, and therefore on the scope of the ophthalmic optics profession in Germany.

Even if this law only applies to the minority of ametropic persons, this restriction should not be accepted. Therefore, the association decided to join forces and intensified its work on public relations work. With the support of the ZVA and the regional associations, independent companies and the big chain stores reached out to members of parliament with a clear message. Moreover, the ZVA Executive Committee approached the German Health Minister, all this with the aim of raising awareness of what is at stake and of conducting a critical review of the discriminatory treatment.

Following our joined efforts, the Ministry of Health requested clarification the committee in charge of the new legislation. Now it's time to wait.

To ensure on-going engagement and to establish protection mechanisms against regulatory adventures of this kind, the ZVA continues to promote quality assurance in its own pro-

profession. One result of this effort has been the development of a curriculum for the master craftsman examinations, incorporating optometric skills to match the existing master craftsman profile. In addition, the association is currently in the process of establishing a database of exam questions from which all committees conducting master craftsman examinations in the optician's trade will be able to retrieve material.

At the European level, the ZVA is concerned about the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is due to come into effect in May 2018. The GDPR introduces extensive regulations that may confront medium-sized companies with some problems. Common action is required here too, and the Central Association of German Crafts (ZDH) and the ZVA will therefore provide all the necessary information to German professionals to help them adapt to the changes. This will help them to avoid sanctions that may potentially jeopardise their practice.

All three topics – the new legislation, quality assurance and the handling of data protection regulations – show that changes can only be made through a joint effort, whether at the national or at the European level.



Optometry in Poland — An Update from the Polish Optometric Association

By Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak

There are around 1800 optometrists in Poland — 0.47 optometrists per 10,000 inhabitants-, a number that is enriched each year with 120 newly qualified optometrists. Even though optometry is recognised by the Polish authorities and is part of the National Health Reimbursement System for dispensing glasses and contact lenses (prescribed by ophthalmologists), optometry and optics are not regulated professions in Poland. Over the past twenty years, optometrists and opticians have been striving to change this situation.

Optometry as a profession in Poland was first mentioned in 1864, in a publication by Professor J. Majera from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. In his publication, „Przyczynki do Optometrii”, he stated that there is a type of activity called „vision measurement”. Consequently, what we know as modern optometry in Poland originates at the Medical University in Poznan. This is mostly thanks to Professor B. Kedzia and his cooperation with optometry schools in the United States.

The Polish Optometric Association is one of three professional organisations in Poland and, established more than 23 years ago, it is now Poland's leading organisation for optometry. With 350 regular members and more than 994 registered optometrists, the association is the only one that is entirely dedicated to optometrists.

There are seven universities in Poland that offer an optometry programme. All universities are autonomous in offering their curricula, which implies a great variety in terms of syllabi used and learning outcomes among optometry schools. Almost all universities offer an M.Sc. diploma in Optometry. Most of optometrists have qualifications in dispensing optics as this is usually the first level of education (B.Sc. in dispensing optics/dispensing optics and optometry).

In the autumn of 2016, the Polish Ministry of Health and the National Consultant in Ophthalmology expressed the willingness to regulate the optometric profession through the new

Medical Professions Act. The first step was to create working group, with the task to prepare a description of the optometrist's competences. This would be then accepted by all interested parties. The working group already agreed that the level of education in optometry should be an M.Sc. degree.

The process towards regulating the profession has only just started and the road ahead is long and complicated. The next working group meeting is scheduled to take place at the end of this year. We will keep the ECOO members updated on this matter.

ECV Members launch new "Vision Atlas" for policymakers on World Sight Day

On 12 October, members of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) successfully came together with colleagues from around the World to highlight World Sight Day and to show their support for cutting the prevalence of avoidable blindness. To mark the occasion, two ECV members – the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and the Vision Loss Expert Group (VLEG) – joined forces to launch a new «[Vision Atlas](#)» for governments and health policy makers which includes blindness prevention maps for every global region from 1990 to 2015, including projections into 2020.

Whilst demonstrating progress made towards meeting World Health Organisation Global Action Plan targets to reduce avoidable vision impairment by 25% by 2019, the data (which were sourced from VLEG in [Lancet Global Health](#)) also show clearly that, without more action, an ageing and growing population, combined with the increase in myopia and diabetic retinal disease, could lead to a global tripling of blindness by 2050.

Although all European health care systems are struggling with growing need against a background of fiscal austerity, the Vision Atlas is a timely reminder of how all parts of the sector need to renew our efforts to reduce the prevalence of blindness across Europe, not least in the Eastern States. At the ECV, by bringing all players together, we strive constantly to provide data and share what works to 'Make Vision Count' for every European citizen.

David Hewlett ECV chair said: "Membership of the ECV is open and without charge to national and international bodies, associations and NGOs who shares these aims. Do join us and let's really make change happen even in these tough economic times."

High Income, Western Europe Population: 424 Million

Number Blind

1,157,884

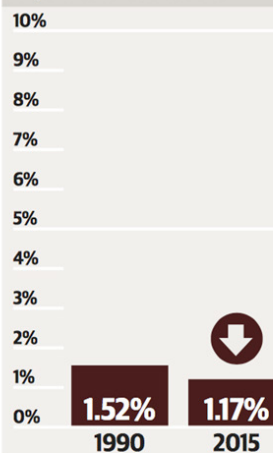
Number of Countries in Region: 25



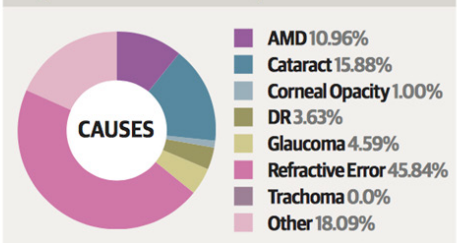
Number MSVI

9,610,821

Change in Prevalence of Visual Impairment 1990 to 2015



Regional Causes of Visual Impairment



Number with Near-Vision Impairment



Visual Impairment Gender Ratio



Data correct as of 12th October 2017

The number visually impaired, prevalence and causes all relate to distance-vision impairment. In order to enable comparisons between regions, over time and between men and women, the age-standardised prevalence (all ages, both sexes) is shown. The gender ratio is the age-standardised prevalence for women divided by the age-standardised prevalence for men.

Source: [IAPB Vision Atlas](#)

World Council of Optometry presents new leadership

During the General Assembly, Paul Folkesson, newly appointed President-Elect of the WCO, provided an update on the second World Congress of Optometry that took place in Hyderabad (India) from 11-13 September 2017. The congress gathered 1300 delegates and showcased how optometrists around the world deliver practical solutions for eye health.

Paul Folkesson highlighted the held elections and the new leadership of the WCO. The Presidency officers for the next two years are:

- President: Scott Mundle, Canada
- President-elect: Paul Folkesson, Sweden
- Treasurer: Pete Kehoe, United States

The ECOO representatives to the WCO Board of Directors are Christian Stebler, Jesús García Poyatos, and Cindy Tromans.

The WCO Secretariat recently moved from London to St Louis (USA), and is now registered as a 501c6 non-profit organisation in the USA. The new WCO constitution and by-laws have been decided upon and are inspired by ECOO's constitution. As ECOO's work on the Blue Book and the European Diploma have been presented to the WCO, there are some clear European footsteps at the global level.

Finally, at the second World Congress of Optometry, Chairman of the ECOO Board of Management, Dr. Bob Chappell, received the WCO Distinguished Service Award.



ECOO upcoming meeting



The next ECOO General Assembly will take place on **10-12 May in Pula, Croatia**, and is kindly organised by the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica. The General Assembly will coincide with the [4th Optometry Conference of Central and South-Eastern Europe](#) in association with European Academy of Optometry and Optics.

More information regarding the programme, registration and travel logistics is available on the [ECOO website](#).

PULA 2018
Optometry and Optics for Better Vision
11-13 May CROATIA

Optometry Conference
of Central and South-East Europe

eao
European Academy
of Optometry and Optics

Reasons why you should attend Pula 2018:

- Get new ideas for your business
- Follow latest trends and innovations – keep yourself up to date
- Get inspired by speakers
- Sessions and workshops - learn from the best
- Networking opportunities
- Learn beyond your field of interest
- Have fun!

Conference for opticians, optometrists, ophthalmologists and all those who want more!

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