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## Message from the President

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Dear Members,

Thank you all for attending our General Assembly in Malmö, Sweden on 19-21 October, which was a very well attended and successful meeting. We held elections for the Vice President, Committee Chairs and Committee member and I took over the role of President from Peter Gumpelmayer - a hard act to follow!

We welcome two new members to our Executive Committee - Massimo Revelli (Italy) as Vice President and Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak (Poland) as Chair of the Professional Services Committee. It was good to see that we appointed members to the full capacity of our Committees, and the Optics Sub-committee presented an ambitious work programme, so I look forward to its fruitful output.

We have already started to look at the Blue Book in readiness for a new edition in 2020 and we will work with Pelle Knudsen (Norway) to update our questions in order to produce a resource that will continue to help us engage with policy makers and advocate for professional development and educational harmony across Europe.

I feel that I have hit the ground running and I am really looking forward to bringing my experience and contributing to the work of ECOO for the next two years. There are some big issues to deal with, but I am confident that, with the support of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, we will continue to make progress in these areas and serve ECOO members to the best of our abilities.

*Cindy Tromans*

## Recent developments

### Highlights from the General Assembly in Malmö

- ECOO 2018 elections: ECOO members voted in the ECOO elections, electing Massimo Revelli (Italy) as their new President-elect and re-appointing Jesús García Poyatos (Spain) as Treasurer. Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak (Poland) was newly elected to the Executive Committee as the Chair of the Professional Services Committee and Per Michael Larsen (Denmark) was re-elected as chair of the Public Affairs and Economic Committee. Cindy Tromans (United Kingdom) succeeded Peter Gumpelmayer (Austria) as new ECOO President.
- The ECOO members also welcomed Ocuspecto Oy (Finland) as a new affiliated member to ECOO.

- A workshop on lobby practices and messaging took place 20 October 2018. As a follow-up, a “Lobby toolkit for ECOO Members”, containing relevant templates on messaging and outreach was shared.



- President of the World Council of Optometry, Scott Mundle, joined the ECOO members for a constructive exchange of views on the professions. He also presented the activities and workstreams of the WCO.

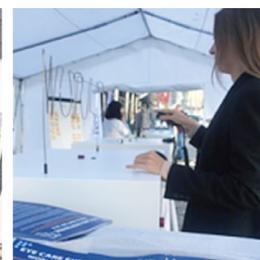
- The General Assembly featured two engaging guest lectures on vision and healthy ageing. Dr Johan Semby spoke about glaucoma and the role of optometrists in Sweden, and Dr Klaus Wehmeyer presented on the role of opticians and healthy ageing, focusing specifically on multifocal lenses and glasses and on common challenges for opticians around offering patient advice.



### World Sight Day

11 October 2018 marked World Sight Day. To raise awareness of eye health including preventable sight loss and the importance of regular eye checks, ECOO cooperated with the European Coalition for Vision (ECV), led by David Hewlett (United Kingdom), and MedTech Europe (MTE) on this year’s event. The event included a “buzzer game”, the publication of a leaflet, a blog, and a twitter campaign.

Several policy-makers joined the event, including Member of the European Parliament Karin Kadenbach from Austria (S&D).





## On the EU agenda

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### Medical Devices Regulation

The European Union's medical devices regulation will enter into force on 26 May 2020. Since its adoption in May 2017, various challenges emerged around the implementation of the regulation, which is currently on-going. For instance, there are challenges around the time it takes to put in place special notified bodies for the conformity assessments. Moreover, the Medical Devices Regulation does not contain "grandfathering" provisions, meaning that all currently approved devices must be re-certified. The regulation also requires that a Unique Device Identification (UDI) is applied on every medical device by the manufacturer. ECOO follows this file closely to assess the impact of the regulation on the professions.

### VAT

On 3 October 2018, the European Parliament [adopted its position](#) on the European Commission's [proposal](#) to introduce more flexibility for Member States to change the VAT rates they apply to different products (January 2018). The Council of the European Union's Working Party on Tax Questions and the European Parliament's Committee Economic and Monetary Affairs committee (ECON) is still assessing the proposal in view of reaching a presidency compromise text. The institutions follow the so-called Consultation procedure, which means that the Council is not bound by the position of the Parliament (which is usually the case under the ordinary legislative procedure). Given that this proposal pertains to VAT, its adoption requires unanimous approval by all EU Member States. At this point, it is unclear exactly when the Council will reach an agreement.

### Artificial Intelligence

The European Commission [indicated](#) that it will launch a "coordinated plan on the development of Artificial Intelligence in Europe" on 5 December. The expectation is that the Commission will introduce a timeline with actions, for instance for the creation of ethical guidelines and a regulatory framework on AI. The [European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence](#) is likely to share draft ethical guidelines around the use of AI by the end of this year. These will then be subjected to a public consultation, in view of finalisation by March 2019.

### Vision & Driving

An important issue on ECOO's policy agenda continues to be vision and driving. A study on the implementation of the Driving License Directive was published by the European Commission in November 2017 and the Commission is planning a report on the Driving License Directive by the end of 2018 or early 2019.

## Country Updates



### Bulgaria — A complex approach to meet the changing professional landscape in Bulgaria

By Mila Dragomirova

The number of optometrists in Bulgaria has increased over the past few years. Two universities now offer optometry programmes - the Sofia University since 2010 and the Medical University in Varna since 2016. Both universities have obtained state accreditation for their optometry programmes and, moreover, the bachelor programme of Sofia University is paid for by the state. About 260 professionals with a bachelor or master's degree in optometry already found employment in the country. However, there is no adequate legal framework to regulate the profession, and there are no provisions on the scope of practice of optometrists.

The Bulgarian Association of Optometrists (BAO) was established four years ago to work toward the full recognition of the optometry profession. The first thing the BAO set out to do was to prepare a proposal, in partnership with Sofia University, for the recognition of optometry. As a result, the optometrist was added to the National Classification of Professions as an independent profession with the minimum requirement of having obtained a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, the description of the scope of optometrist practice has been rejected.

BAO has consequently identified several priorities and strategies, which include the "First educate then legislate"- approach. BAO works to support the education of optometrists to gain the trust stakeholders and institutions, to promote optometry and its added value to society, to establish contacts and expand membership, and, finally, to lobby for an updated legal framework. As part of the efforts, the BAO has become a member of ECOO in 2016 and has been active in organising events. For instance, BAO organised the first Bulgarian "Optometry and Eye Health" Conference, 4-6 November 2016, and the second "Optometry and Eye Health" Conference, 4-6 October 2018, both in partnership with Sofia University.

The next step on the agenda is to establish a working group to prepare a proposal for a new regulatory framework for optometrists. The work done by the BAO over the past four years has laid the necessary groundwork.





## Spain —

### Supreme Court endorses compulsory registration of professionals

By Juan Carlos Martínez Moral

In September 2018, the Spanish Supreme Court has now [formally acknowledged](#) the legitimacy of the Colegios in demanding compulsory registration of professionals. In Spain, professionals practicing optics and optometry ought to have a recognised degree in the field. Furthermore, in order to comply with the ethics code of the Spanish System of Professional Associations, professionals are required to be registered at one of the “Colegios”. This practice is a legal requirement and non-compliance could be met with sanctions.

The enforcement of the compulsory registration has been legally conferred to the professional associations, and their members are bound by the obligations outlined in the professional code of conduct. Even though membership of the professional association was already mandatory, in line with the in accordance with the Act which regulates Health Professions (Ley de Ordenación de Profesiones Sanitarias, LOPS 44/2003), the new endorsement by the Supreme Court aims to reduce existing cases of irregular practice through which practicing professionals are not registered.

Irregular practise had already been addressed by case law and by the Spanish Supreme Court. In some of its decisions (STS of 11 November 1992 -RJ 1992/8667- and STC of 8 March 1996 -RJ 1996/2267-), the Spanish Supreme Court stated that “such disciplinary functions entrusted to professional associations should be broadly understood, so that they may represent a reinforcement of the authority publicly entrusted to the professional association.” This implies that the individuals who practise the profession without being members of the association still fall within the remit of the association’s authority.

The Professional Association of Opticians-Optometrists of Valencia (Spain) has played an important role in the case of irregular practice. After the association submitted its Internal Regulations for approval to the Spanish Internal Affairs and Justice Department, the Department issued a resolution (November 2013), in which it deletes article four of the Internal Regulations (which implies that, when an Optician-Optometrist practices “without being a member of the association, he/she shall become ex-officio member, so that, for the sake of the safety of patients, the interested party may legally exercise the profession, without engaging in illegal conduct”).

After the Association appealed against the resolution, the Supreme Court ruled in July 2018 that the association’s internal rules comply with the legislation, because they lay down rules to address ex-officio registration. In parallel, a bill was introduced in June 2018, to amend the Law of Professional Associations of Valencia. This bill is currently going through regional parliament.

## Update from the European Academy of Optometry and Optics

### Recognising excellence and innovation in optometry, optics & vision science: Fellowship programme of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics

By Ana-Maria Nia



New Fellows awarded at the EAEO annual conference in Pula, 2018

According to the [World Health Organisation](#), population growth and ageing could lead to a three-fold increase in the number of people with vision impairment. Demographic changes, coupled with changing lifestyles that increase the risk of vision complications due to chronic diseases such as diabetes, will weigh heavily on healthcare systems.

This calls for a better integration of eye care services into health systems, but also innovative solutions and collaborations between professionals, researchers, educational institutions to meet these challenges. With the [EAEO Fellowship programme](#), we want to capture these achievements and tell the story of how the future of eye care is being shaped today.

The Fellowship programme is open to individual members of the Academy who have made a significant contribution to optometry, optics or vision science at a local, national and/or international level. The application process is by a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates the achievements. There are four categories for which applicants may submit their files:

- **Clinical practice** – for a significant contribution to clinical practice and/or technical innovation on a national and/or international level. The applicant may have shared their experience as a presenter at national/international optometric/optical conferences and/or have published in peer-reviewed journals.
- **Research (optics, optometry, vision science)** – for a significant contribution to research and/or technical innovation, which has impact on a national and/or international level. The applicant has presented their work at national and/or international conferences and you have published in peer-reviewed journals.
- **Education (optics, optometry, vision science)** – for a significant contribution to optometric/optical education, by for example improving the system at national level, designing an innovative training programme, or supervising successful PhD students in visual science. The applicant has presented at national and/or international conferences, published in peer-reviewed journals and may well be an author or significant contributor to significant textbooks used in optometric/optical education.
- **Professional advancement and/or management of visual healthcare** – for a significant contribution to the professional advancement and/or management of visual healthcare. The applicant has made an impact on government policy and/or is a chairman (or has a major role) of an optometric or optical committee deciding on optometric/optical policy and/or is a president of a national/international optometric/optical body. They may be a specialist adviser to optometrists/opticians, and their work has made an important contribution to the standards of eye care (locally, nationally or internationally). They may have been involved in public communication via newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

Sounds like you? Detailed guidelines are available [here](#). We welcome applications until 14 December 2018. Interviews will take place at the next annual conference in Rome (18-20 May 2019). Applicants can receive guidance from existing Academy Fellows to help them compile a successful portfolio. For any questions regarding the process, please to write us at [fellowship@eaoo.info](mailto:fellowship@eaoo.info) or [admin@eaoo.info](mailto:admin@eaoo.info).

## Update from the World Council of Optometry



*WCO's Board of Directors in Marrakesh*

On 19 September 2018, the World Council of Optometry (WCO) held a productive Board of Directors meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco. The meeting was followed by the WCO's General Assembly.



*Dr. Timothy Fricke*

Dr. Timothy Fricke of Melbourne, Australia was recently granted a WCO fellowship to support emergent optometry programmes in Vietnam. His work for the fellowship started on 7 November 2018 and will come to an end on 1 December 2018. Dr. Fricke has been mentoring eye care educators in Vietnam since 2008.



The 3rd World Congress of Optometry, taking place from 23-29 October 2019 and co-hosted by the American Academy of Optometry, will be showcasing the latest advances in vision sciences, research in optometry, optics and contact lens cutting-edge technology.

## ECOO upcoming meeting

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The next ECOO General Assembly will take place from 16 to 18 May 2019 in Rome, Italy. Registration will open in 2019, and more information will become available on the [ECOO website](#).

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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 may be of interest to ECOO members, please contact the ECOO Secretariat:

E-mail: [secretariat@ecoo.info](mailto:secretariat@ecoo.info)

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