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## Message from the President

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Dear Members,

We have just returned from our successful Spring General Assembly in Rome, where the General Assembly approved our business plan and budget for the next two years, so we have a lot of issues to think about and progress.

It was my first General Assembly as President and for me it was good to meet and speak to members to understand the issues facing the professions in their countries and how the work of ECOO can be targeted to support their needs. I was very pleased that the Hungarian Optician Association and representatives from the Organisation of Watchmakers and Opticians in Denmark attended the General Assembly and I do hope that they recognise the value of ECOO and become members of the ECOO family in due course. It was also a pleasure to meet Kerstien Gabarretta of the Malta Association of Optometrists. He has written an article for this newsletter on the landscape of the profession in Malta.

The European Academy of Optometry and Optics (EAOO) also elected a new President in Rome, Nicholas Rumney, as well as a Vice President, Berndt Schwenson. I look forward to working with them and to build our partnership. ECOO continues to be a supporter of the EAOO and we are looking forward to further enhancing our cooperation through the joint meetings in the spring every year and on other topics of interest, such as the myopia work that was started with our Professional Services Committee in Rome.

I hope that you will all remain engaged with the work of ECOO. It won't be too long until we meet again for our next General Assembly in Athens!

*Cindy Tromans*

## Recent developments

### Highlights from the General Assembly in Rome

ECOO's 2019 Spring meetings took place in Rome from 16 to 18 May 2019. We are pleased to share some of the highlights in this newsletter:

- ECOO proudly presented its latest graduates Ms Camille Schmitt, Ms Myrtille Tusseau and Mr Martin Lacour with their European Diploma in Optometry, ECOO's gold standard in Optometry.



- An ECOO workshop on the impact and requirements of the Medical Devices Regulation took place on 17 May 2019 with a live streaming from the European Commission.

- ECOO's 2019 Spring General Assembly took place during Myopia Awareness Week 2019. In this context, the Professional Services Committee explored, together with the European Academy of Optometry and Optics (EAEO), how awareness on myopia can be raised among professionals and the wider public.



- During the General Assembly in Rome, Professor David Elliott from the University of Bradford in the United Kingdom held an engaging guest lecture on the role of opticians and optometrists in preventing their elderly patients from falling. He also presented the evidence-base that has been used for the development of recommendations on the prevention of falls.



### ECOO Position paper on digital imaging

The ECOO Professional Services Committee adopted a [position paper](#) on digital imaging, which has also been published on the ECOO website. The paper comes at a time in which eye care professionals increasingly use new instruments that enable them to examine both the internal and external eye, like Digital Fundus Photography, Ocular Coherence Tomography (OCT) and Corneal Topography. In this context, the position paper outlines ECOO's position on the topic, highlighting that it is the responsibility of an optometrist to carry out a comprehensive internal and external examination of the eyes using the appropriate range of techniques.



## On the EU agenda

### Special update on the 2019 European Parliament elections

The European Parliament elections took place across the European Union from 23-26 May 2019. ECOO has closely followed the elections as the elections will shape the course of EU policy until 2024.

Given that several non-legislative and legislative initiatives at the EU level have impacted the professions of optics and optometry, the changes at the EU level are of direct relevance to ECOO's workstreams, activities, and relations with policy-makers.

Within this framework, ECOO prepared a European Parliament elections [manifesto](#) for the elected Members of the European Parliament to introduce the importance of the vision sector, harmonised educational and professional standards and the need to raise awareness of eye health.



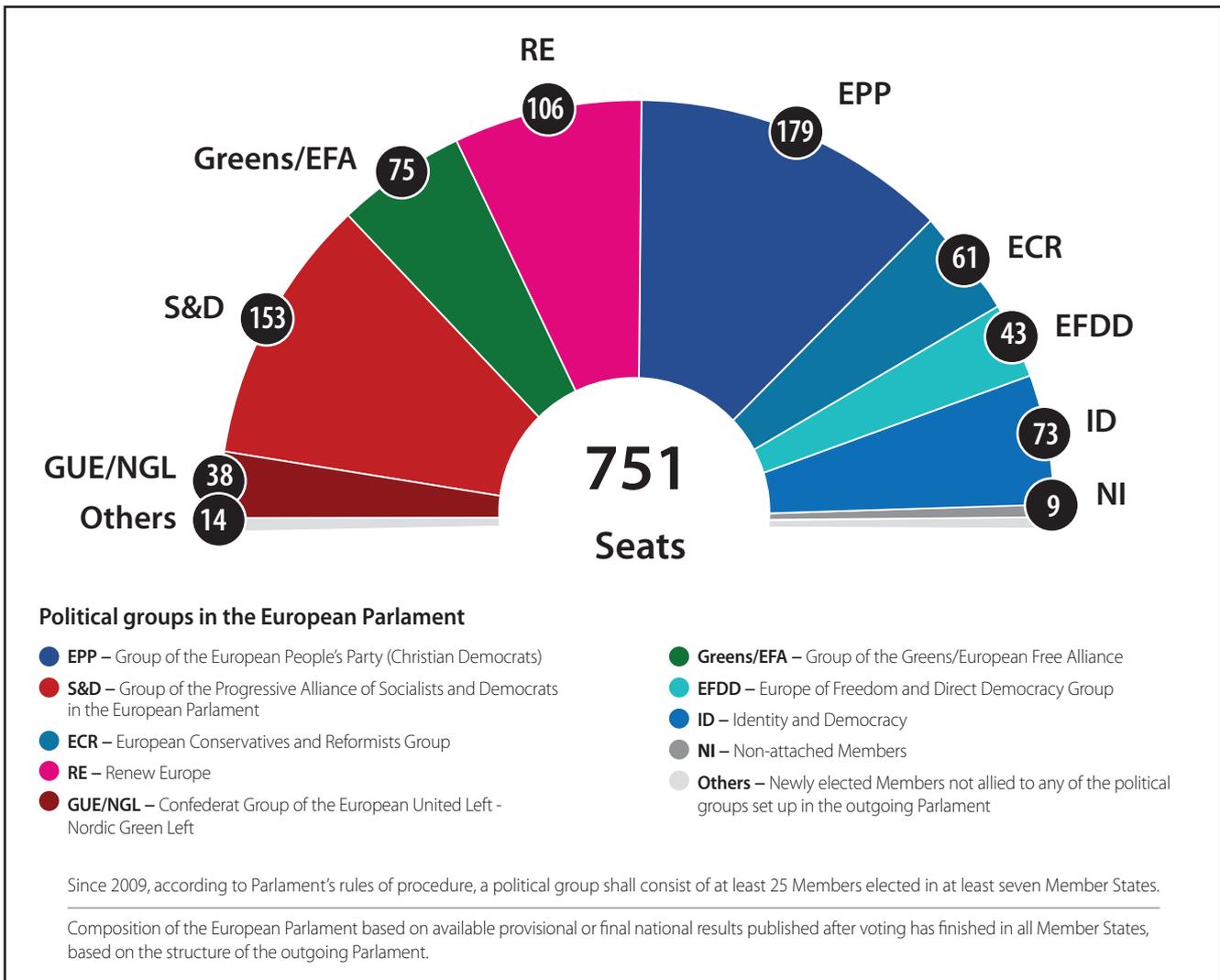
### What is changing with the 2019 European Parliament elections?

The results of the 2019 European Parliament elections reveal that the composition of the European Parliament changes considerably.

Not one political party secured a majority and the centre-left and centre-right no longer have enough seats to form a "grand coalition", as was the case during the previous mandate. A workable majority would likely have to include the Liberals and Greens. The latter in fact realised their ambitions by gaining a total of 70 seats, which will see a stronger influence on environment-oriented topics.

63% of the elected MEPs are new and many familiar faces will not be returning, including several of the champions of preventable sight loss and visual impairment ECOO worked with during the 2014-2019 mandate of the European institutions. These include Heinz K. Becker (Austria, European People's Party) and Marian Harkin (Ireland, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), who hosted a number of events and initiatives that ECOO co-organised at EU and national level on eye health.

Among the elected Members of the European Parliament are six former Health Ministers, including Ivan David (Czech Republic, S&D), Ewa Kopacz (Poland, EPP), Bartosz Arłukowicz (Poland, EPP), Anne Widcombe (United Kingdom, EFDD), Juozas Olekas (Lithuania, S&D), and Dolores Montserrat (Spain, EPP).



Source: European Parliament

### What can we expect in the next couple of months?

From now until September 2019, the European institutions will be concerned with the European Parliament and European Commission appointments. First, during the European Council summit on 20-21 June 2019, the Heads of State and Government of the EU Member States will agree on the candidates for top EU jobs, including the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council.

On 24 June 2019, the political groups will notify the European Parliament of their composition before the first European Parliament plenary session in Strasbourg will take place from 2 to 4 July 2019. During the session in Strasbourg, the European Parliament will appoint a new President and agree on the composition of the European Parliament Committees, of relevance

to ECOO for instance the European Parliament’s Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and the European Parliament’s Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE).

After the summer recess, the European Parliament will hold hearings of the new European Commissioners, after which the European Parliament is scheduled to confirm the new European Commission during the 20-24 October plenary session in Strasbourg. The new European Commission will then take office on 1 November 2019.

## Country Updates



### Belgium — Recognition of the orthoptist and optometrist profession

*By Viviane De Vries*

Since 22 April 2019, a new Royal Decree relating to the recognition of the profession of orthoptist-optometrist has come into force in Belgium. This new Royal Decree was necessary to create a legal framework for the profession. It also responds to the need to collaborate constructively and with a multidisciplinary approach between professionals (ophthalmologists, opticians, optometrists, orthoptists ...) in order to further improve eye care.

The different professional associations in Belgium (the Association Professionnelle des Opticiens et Optométristes de la Belgique (APOOB), the Belgian Federation of Optometrists (BFO) and the Union pour Opticiens et Optométristes Indépendants (UZOOi)) were closely involved in the negotiations, both at the Federal Council for Paramedical Professions and at the Public Health Office.

However, work is only beginning now that the Royal Decree is put into practice. Currently, graduates or bachelors with a degree in eye care (level 6) can already apply for recognition and obtain the professional title of orthoptist-optometrist. On the other hand, those who are not qualified in this way will have to demonstrate their experience and expertise by applying for a certificate at one of the schools with the required professional level or through an ophthalmologist.

Another legal debate may, however, hinder the implementation of the Royal Decree. The Belgian Professional Union of Specialist Physicians in Ophthalmology and Ocular Surgery and the Ophthalmological Syndicate are contesting the Royal Decree. The different professional associations follow the developments very closely in order to inform and support opticians and optometrists as much as possible.



### Malta — The Landscape of Optometry in Malta

*By Kerstien Gabarretta*

Optometry in Malta is a relatively new profession and has been regulated since 1990. There are currently 23 optometrists registered with the Council of Professions Complementary to Medicine (CPCM), which is the body responsible for the regulation of the profession of optometry and for the regulation of 19 other professions, including physiotherapists, radiologists, and also orthoptists.

The University of Malta does not offer courses in optometry and all prospective optometrists therefore have no choice but to pursue their education overseas. Most of them go to a university in the United Kingdom, considering that, historically, Malta is a member of the Commonwealth. The health system in Malta is traditionally also linked to the British health system. In view of this, the standard set by the CPCM for registration is that of a BSc in Optometry followed by a minimum of six months working under supervision.

Optometrists are allowed to examine the health of the eye using investigative techniques which may include the use of diagnostic drugs. They may refract and prescribe optical devices including spectacles and all forms of contact lenses. Binocular vision assessment, low vision assessment and visual ergonomic assessment may all be performed too.

Optometrists have an excellent working relationship with ophthalmologists and orthoptists. Most optometrists work solely in the private sector, in optical outlets. The National Health Service offers optometric services at the principle hospital Mater Dei as well as at some of the health centres spread around the island. This service is offered at no cost to all Maltese and EU nationals bearing an E111 card. Considering that tourism is the largest industry in Malta, the population may spike to well over 500,000 at any time, and this means that the optometrist-patient ratio is extremely high. Very often, this puts a strain on the National Health Service.

The Malta Association of Optometry is still in its infancy and, as there is no academic institution for optometry in Malta, it faces many challenges. This is also because optometrists from different parts of the world are starting to consider practicing optometry in Malta, mainly due to the very high standards of living and excellent quality of life that the country has to offer. However, the Association is very hopeful that, in building good ties with other European associations the obstacles it is currently facing may be overcome and that, hopefully in the very near future, it will become a fully-fledged member of ECOO.



## Slovenia — Update on Optics 2019 and the recent developments in Slovenia

By Matjaž Mihelčič

In the last weekend of March 2019, the Slovenian Optical Association (DOOS) invited national and international members to Portorož (Slovenia) for the bi-annual Optics 2019 conference and fair. Over 200 visitors joined the event, an accomplishment for a country like Slovenia, which has a population of only two million people. A wide range of international speakers enriched the conference programme and lured professionals into the fruitful discussions. Among the invited speakers were Andreas Berke, Tony Cavallerano, Anna Nagl, Klaus Wehmeyer, and Michal Krasnansky.



The Doos team at Optics 2019

The focus of the conference was on visual perception, the digital age, telemedicine, and on finding solutions for problematic cases around the fitting of glasses and contact lenses. The local speakers, Manja Sevljak and Jaka Kukovič, gave lectures on hidden ocular conditions that could lead to sight loss, or that could even be life-threatening, while Matjaž Mihelčič provided a lecture on nystagmus–silencing with rigid contact lenses and on education in the digital age. Matic Vogrič held a lecture on Ortho-K, and also presented his master’s thesis in a lecture on visual therapy in amblyopia based on categories of binocularity. As usual, the event ended on Saturday evening with a gala dinner, followed by the traditional DOOS club party in the News Caffè on the Portorož beach.

However, not everything is perfect in Slovenia. The non-transparent reimbursement system has paved the way to the development of a system that allows only certain optical companies to hire specially appointed ophthalmologists, which then prescribe glasses in the stores owned by those companies. This allows the companies to offer customers a “free” exam and to get a generous subvention from the state. The amount of this compensation ranges from €40 to €300 per two years, depending on the prescription. Recently, also private practice ophthalmologists started opening optical stores adjacent to their medical offices, availing of the same benefits.

The approximately 70% of the remaining optical stores will have to charge their patients for eye exams without the option of reimbursement, and they can only bill the health insurance for glasses if the prescription was made by an ophthalmologist. Moreover, whereas the Slovenian economy is not doing poorly at the moment, traditional companies increasingly witness the unfavourable impact of emerging online practices. New online players have started to sell glasses in a more aggressive way, advertising their products on TV and radio channels.

There is much work to do, and, meeting on a monthly basis, DOOS continues to closely monitor the situation.

## Update from the European Academy of Optometry and Optics

### Challenges and opportunities for optometry and optics in Europe debated at ROME2019 conference

By Ana-Maria Nia

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More than 700 delegates attended the 11th annual conference of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics, which was co-organised with Federottica, together with AdOO, ALOeO and SOPTI in Rome, on 18-19-20 May 2019. The conference was held at the same time as the ECOO Spring General Assembly.

[“Challenges and opportunities for optometry and optics in Europe”](#) was the broad theme that set the scene for forward-looking and solution-oriented discussions involving key opinion leaders, practitioners and researchers. The conference offered a platform for specialists from over 20 countries to discuss and share the latest research, education and clinical practice in optometry, optics and dispensing, and vision science. This theme was reflected throughout the conference [programme](#).

Evidence is mounting that myopia is on the rise around the world. Keynote speaker Professor Ian Flitcroft explained that many clinical trials have been conducted over the past decade, which show that the progression of myopia can be reduced by 30-70%. For him, active management of myopia progression requires new clinical approaches and a thorough understanding of both how myopia develops as well as available treatments.

Professor David Elliott, from the School of Optometry & Vision Science, University of Bradford (United Kingdom) focused on visual impairment as a significant risk factor for falls in the elderly population. He gave guidance on how optometrists and dispensing opticians can identify patients who might be at increased falls risk and how they can play their part in preventing falls in the first place – particularly in relation to the type of spectacle lens and refractive correction prescribed to elderly frail patients.

Jean-Philippe Sayag, entrepreneur and CEO of Acep, touched upon the challenges professionals face in finding new and exciting ways to engage the modern, “digital” consumer. Presenting different case studies – including from other industries such as fashion retail stores, he showed how new technologies have shaped new consumer habits. Optical retailers need to adapt and take into account new strategies in order to stay relevant. For him, owning the end-to-end customer journey is the key to success.

The conference also saw the first joint symposium organised between the European Academy of Optometry and Optics together with the American Academy of Optometry and Optics, on Evolving Eye Care for Children: Current Perspectives on Vision Screening, Amblyopia Treatment, & Myopia Control.

Young researchers were given a platform to present their latest research papers, and 60 [poster presentations](#) were also featured. For many researchers, this was their first experience presenting at a European conference.



Keynote speaker Professor Ian Flitcroft



Professor Elliott on vision and falls



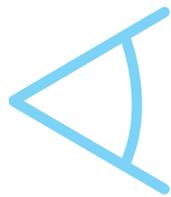
EAOO Fellows at Rome 2019

During the conference, the EAOO recognised and rewarded six individual members who have made a significant contribution to optometry and optics as part of the EAOO [Fellowship Programme](#): Marc Argilés Sans, Michael Baertschi, Mila Dragomirova, Peter Allen, Santiago Escandón-García, Timothy Wingert. The EAOO Fellowship is a mark of achievement to which all Academy members can aspire. Applications for the 2020 EAOO Fellowship Programme will open in summer of 2019.

Finally, ROME2019 marked a change in leadership within the EAOO, with Eduardo Teixeira handing over the baton to Professor Nicholas Rumney as President. The EAOO Annual General Meeting elected Bernd Schwenson as Vice-President, and we look forward to working with the Board of Trustees in its new composition!

### *Next EAOO meeting*

Mark your calendars! The next annual EAOO conference will be held on 15-16-17 May 2020 in Helsinki, and will be organised in partnership with the Finnish Association NAE ry. More information will be announced on [www.eaoo.info](http://www.eaoo.info).



# HELSINKI 2020

## 15. – 17.5.2020

Vision for the future:  
forum for optometry and optics

## Update from the World Council of Optometry

**Save the Date!**

**3rd World Congress of Optometry & Academy  
2019 Orlando**

**ACADEMY  
2019  
ORLANDO**

3rd World Congress of Optometry



**October 23-27, 2019**  
**Orange County Convention Center Orlando,  
Florida, USA**

### You are invited to the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of Optometry and Academy 2019 Orlando!

We hope you will join us for the 3rd World Congress of Optometry and Academy 2019 Orlando, taking place from 23-27 October 2019 in Orlando, Florida USA!

Attendees will enjoy over 200 hours of lectures and workshops! Building on the success of the last World Congress held in Hyderabad, India, the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of Optometry aims to strengthen the presence and impact of optometry globally by offering opportunities for education, collaboration and networking.

For information about registration, [click here](#).

#### Already registered to attend the 3rd World Congress of Optometry and Academy 2019 Orlando?

Don't forget to promote your attendance on social media.

[Click here](#) for more information.

**Students:** Apply for a World Optometry Foundation (WOF) Student Travel Fellowship.

Accepting Applications until July 31, 2019.

The WOF is pleased to announce the first WOF Student Travel Fellowships for optometry students from outside North America to attend the 3rd World Congress of Optometry.

The WOF Student Travel Fellowship Program was created to encourage students to further educate themselves about optometry around the world. Preference will be given to students who have a poster or paper accepted for the Congress although it is not mandatory. These six \$1,250 awards are available to registered undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at an optometry school or a graduate studying for professional qualifying examinations at an institution outside North America. The country where the institute of education is located or the institute itself must be a member of WCO.

[Click here](#) to learn more and apply.

## ECOO upcoming meeting

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The next ECOO General Assembly will take place from 18-20 October in Athens, Greece. Registration will open shortly on the [ECOO website](#).



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