

# The European Society of Ophthalmology (SOE). The first 50 years and beyond.

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## **Background**

SOE was founded in 1956 as The Societas Ophthalmologica Europea (SOE), with the aim "to promote ophthalmology in Europe and to stimulate co-operation between European ophthalmologists and between their National Societies". A Latin name was chosen by our founding fathers to emphasize its supranational nature, an important issue in post-war Europe. Over the past 50 years, SOE has grown from a relatively small society into a conglomerate of the national ophthalmological societies of all the 40 European countries, representing more than 40,000 European ophthalmologists.

**Society's mission** While the original aims remain relevant, today's Society's mission is to become the central point of European Ophthalmology primarily through education but also by fostering closer collaboration with Sub-specialty societies and Supranational organisations within Europe and beyond.

## **Education**

### **SOE Congresses**

The SOE Congress is held every two years when numerous symposia and courses are given by leading lecturers from Europe, the United States of America and elsewhere. The meetings reflect the multinational nature of Europe, which has more than 36 official languages but the entire programme of the SOE Congress is in English. Over the years, the SOE Congresses took place in different European cities, such as in Athens, Hamburg, Milan and most recently, in Amsterdam in 2009. The 50th anniversary of the founding of SOE was celebrated in 2007, in Vienna.

### **Continuing Medical Education (CME) Credits**

Continuing medical education is an important issue both in Europe and in the US. The SOE Congresses are recognised for CME credits by all European countries and by ACCME in the United States.

### **Educational Grants**

SOE is very conscious of the considerable variation in the resources available in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. To redress this, SOE provides reduced congress registration fees for most East European ophthalmologists and each year, SOE offers Educational Travel Grants for East European

ophthalmologists-in-training. These grants help such young doctors not just financially, but they open the doors to sub-specialist departments in all the major European centres.

### **European Leadership Development Programme (EuLDP)**

Leadership skills are important for any ophthalmologist and in particular for those who are active in professional societies. Therefore, SOE has sponsored several European ophthalmologists to take part in the Leadership Development Programme organised by the American Academy of Ophthalmology. Recognising the complex nature of Europe, SOE has now set up its own EuLDP with the aim to identify future leaders of European Ophthalmology, to offer basic leadership training adapted for ophthalmology and to provide an informal network of peers.

### **EUPO**

The Association of the European University Professors of Ophthalmology (EUPO) holds yearly courses for Residents and SOE actively supports these: on odd years, the EUPO courses take place during the SOE Congress (a popular event with everybody as it is also open to all registered Congress delegates). SOE also provides support for EUPO courses in-between its congresses.

### **Pan-European collaboration**

**Sub-speciality societies:** SOE recognises the increasing tendency among European ophthalmologists to sub-specialise and has responded by inviting all the major Sub-specialty Societies to take part in the preparation of its Congresses, giving the delegates the benefit of the teaching and personal contact with the leaders in each branch of ophthalmology. The response from all the Sub-specialty Societies has been overwhelmingly positive.

**Supranational organizations:** In addition to its educational activities, SOE attaches a great importance to research and to training and examinations of young ophthalmologists and collaborates increasingly closely with the European Association for Vision and Eye Research (EVER) and the European Board of Ophthalmology (EBO).

### **Future**

SOE is conscious of the rapidly changing situation in European Ophthalmology and recognises the many challenges facing ophthalmologists in every European country. SOE is ready to face these challenges but its success depends on the support of each and every ophthalmologist.