

EFIS Strategic Retreat – March 2019, Berlin

On a rather cold and rainy winter's afternoon in Berlin, delegates steadily streamed into the German Rheumatism Research Centre Berlin (DRFZ) for the first EFIS Strategic Retreat (Figure 1). Hosted by EFIS President Andreas Radbruch, the retreat was the first of its kind: a meeting open to delegates from all 35 EFIS affiliated national societies to engage in discussion about what EFIS could do to meet the needs of the European immunology community, to identify challenges facing immunology researchers in Europe and, eventually, to assess the need to establish taskforces and structures to tackle these challenges on a European level. Held over two days, the retreat was attended by 23 out of 35 EFIS Societies, and commenced with a warm welcome from Andreas Radbruch, who outlined the

topics to be addressed, namely, support of the European Congress of Immunology, expanding EFIS Study Groups and Schools, financing of EFIS, and the changing landscape of scientific publishing (Figure 2).

EFIS Partners

As an event open to the entire EFIS “community”, the retreat would not have been complete without the participation of representatives from organisations with which EFIS enjoys longstanding partnership agreements and without which it could hardly fulfil its mission. As such, Cate Livingstone, Managing Editor of the *European Journal of Immunology* (EJI), Jenny Henzen, Publisher of *Immunology Letters* (IL), and Anne Hosmalin, liaison

of the *Fondation ACTERIA* were also welcomed to the retreat. Cate Livingstone first informed delegates about how the relationship between EJI and EFIS has evolved since partnering in 1993, how the EJI Editorial Board reflects the EFIS Society membership, and how EJI financially supports EFIS activities, through initiatives such as EFIS-EJI sponsored meetings and travel grants, and the EFIS-EJI Ita Askonas Award for early career stage female group leaders [1, 2]. Jenny Henzen recalled the nearly 40-year-long partnership between EFIS and IL, and also took advantage of the occasion to announce the recent appointment, following the untimely passing of Vito Pistoia and subsequent consultation of EFIS Societies, of Francesco Annunziato, outgoing Chair of the EJI Executive Committee, as new IL Editor-in-Chief. Delegates certainly appreciated the participation of both Official Journals, as this provided an ideal setting to discuss the changing landscape of publishing in Europe with a move towards more open access publishing and how this may impact on organisations such as EFIS that depend heavily on publishers for financial support.

EFIS History, support products and financing

EFIS Past President René van Lier delved into the history of EFIS, describing how the Federation was founded at a meeting in Amsterdam in 1975 by IUIS, and in 1995, became the EFIS we know today when it was registered as an independent legal body in the form of a society. During this time, there have been many EFIS landmarks: partnerships with the Official EFIS Journals and collaboration with the *Fondation ACTERIA*; establishment of the *Day of Immunology*; and the launch of



Figure 1. Attendees of the first EFIS Strategic Retreat in Berlin on March 2019.

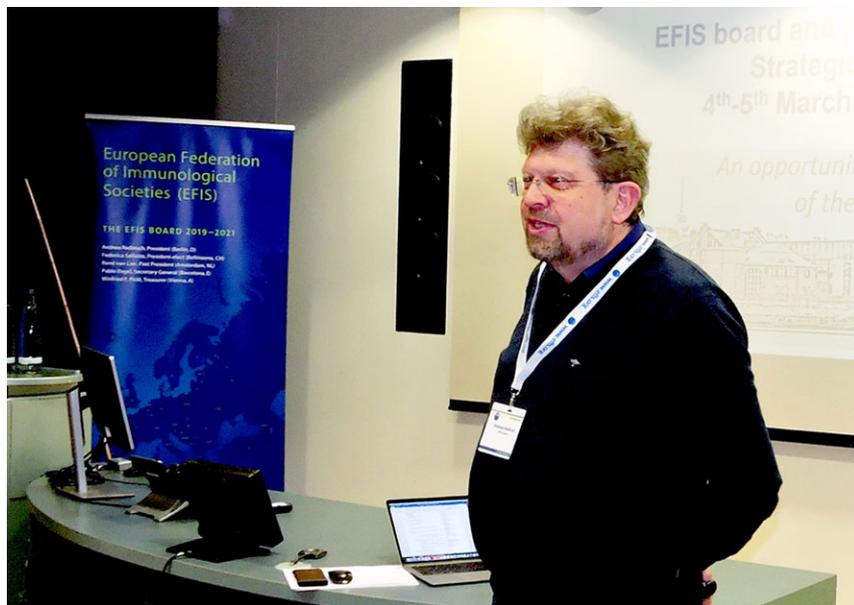


Figure 2. EFIS President Andreas Radbruch welcoming attendees in the opening session of the EFIS retreat.

the ECI congress, to name but a few. One of the newest EFIS initiatives - *EFIS on Tour* - launched in 2016, is a scientifically oriented symposium series hosted by EFIS affiliated national societies, with EFIS Board members featured alongside representatives of hosting society. The six *EFIS-on-Tour* symposia held thus far have been enthusiastically welcomed by all of the hosting societies, and the EFIS Board hopes to build on these meetings to encourage more active participation in the Federation by others in the future [3].

How exactly does EFIS carry out its mission to support immunological research and education, and strengthen scientific interaction amongst its members? EFIS Secretary General Pablo Engel explained that, by creating instruments to support immunology-themed meetings, to award travel grants for the European and International Congresses of Immunology (ECI and ICI), to offer seed funding to study groups, and to grant short-term fellowships and awards, EFIS can very effectively cover all angles of the goals outlined above. Furthermore, he illustrated that three EFIS Study Groups were launched in 2017, with an additional group forming in 2018, which receive three years of funding for scientifically orientated activities, designed with the aim to create European platforms on a topic-oriented, bottom-up level. Another very attractive scheme that many, especially younger, immunologists may be unaware of is the EFIS short-term

fellowship programme, which awards up to three months of support to qualified applicants for purposes of international scientific collaboration or advanced training. Last but by no means least, EFIS also awards several extremely generous prizes, together with its partner journals *EJI* and *IL*, or in collaboration with the *Fondation ACTERIA*. Society delegates were encouraged to inform their membership ranks to consult www.efis.org for full details on EFIS-sponsored opportunities.

EFIS Treasurer Winfried Pickl pointed out something that many EFIS members may not know: EFIS membership is free! The only prerequisite is to be a paying member of a European IUIS-affiliated national society. As such, EFIS relies on its funding solely from partnering with its official journals, the *European Journal of Immunology* and *Immunology Letters*, as well as through collaboration with organizations such as the *Fondation ACTERIA*. Funds are then distributed back to EFIS members through the provision of prizes and scholarships, travel grants and meeting support as outlined above.

The European Congress of Immunology

As the flagship event of EFIS, the triennial European Congress of Immunology (ECI) was a key talking point at the retreat.

The 2018 ECI in Amsterdam proved to be another successful congress, attesting to the fact that, twelve years after its launch, the ECI is still going strong [4]. Preparations for the 2021 ECI in Belgrade, Serbia are already underway. EFIS have shaken things up a little for this congress which will be the first of its kind: an ECI jointly organized by two EFIS Societies – the Turkish Society for Immunology and the Immunology Society of Serbia. The 2021 Congress President, Professor Günnur Deniz, outlined her exciting plans for the meeting that will reach out to engage all immunologists, no matter whether they are looking for an overview of the latest developments in immunological research, or if they have a specific topic that they are looking to explore in more detail. Make sure to mark 1–4 September 2021 in your calendars!

Communication with EFIS members

As an umbrella organization representing 35 national societies, EFIS has the task to disseminate information from the Board to all of its national societies. Part of the discussion at the retreat focused on how EFIS can improve communication with the individual members of its affiliated societies. Increasing the communication base via the website (www.efis.org), newsletter and via social media channels such as Twitter (@EFIS_Immunology), Facebook and LinkedIn were presented as good ways of distributing important EFIS information and to better reach more of EFIS' 14,000 members.

New initiatives coming out of the retreat

The second day of the retreat brought a little more sunshine to Berlin and with it, renewed enthusiasm for the discussions ahead. Much of the second day was reserved for discussion in smaller groups – so called breakaway sessions – focusing on topics chosen by the delegates: the changing landscape of publishing, immunology teaching in Europe, the ECI, and the future of the *ACTERIA* prizes [5]. The outcomes of the discussion groups were reported back to all participants at the end of the meeting, with the major new initiative coming out of the retreat being that

three EFIS affiliated taskforces would be established on education, vaccination, and diversity. Spokespersons for the taskforces will invite EFIS delegates to join these groups, and will present their proposals and primary actions to the EFIS Board in the coming months.

Closing remarks

Overall, the first EFIS Strategic Retreat was deemed to be a success, and ended with the promise that such meetings would be repeated in the future. The major discussion points from the retreat will be used as a framework for establishing an EFIS

Strategic Plan for the next three years. The EFIS Board thanks all those who participated in the retreat and will endeavour to use the information gathered to better support European immunological research and education. For further information on EFIS activities and up-to-date news, please visit www.efis.org or follow us on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The Day of Immunology – April 29th



- is rapidly approaching! Held every year on the same date since 2005, the Day of Immunology is **THE** day to celebrate immunology and increase public awareness of the importance of immunological research in our lives [6]. The topic for

this year's Day of Immunology is: cancer (checkpoint blockade). EFIS, together with IUIS, have a number of awards for participating national societies, including the International Day of Immunology Award, the European Day of Immunology Award, the Award for the Best Newcomer Campaign, and the Best 2017, 2018 or 2019 Theme Award. Please visit the EFIS website (www.efis.org) or the IUIS website (www.iuisonline.org) for details and conditions of the prizes.

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References

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- 5 Hosmalin, A., *Eur. J. Immunol.* **48**, 394–396.
- 6 Anon., *Eur. J. Immunol.* **47**, 606–606.

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