

EDITORIAL

A story of cooperation and friendship in Europe with good outcomes

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I am a retired academic, an Emeritus Professor. I am also a retired editor-in-chief of Platelets. For some 40 years, I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching and research at the University of Nottingham. I am still welcome at the university as a director of a spin-out company that resulted from the research performed. I also thoroughly enjoyed my association with the journal, which catered for, and still caters for, scientists who live and work all over the world.

A focus for my university was “internationalization”, and for all those who worked there, presentations of research findings at meetings in many locations around the world became the norm.

One such meeting was in Vienna in 1979 where I met a professor from the Medical Academy of Erfurt in the then East Germany. It turned out that we shared a research interest in platelets, and Klaus Thielmann invited me to visit him and his colleagues in his “Department of Pathobiochemie” in Erfurt.

At that time, Erfurt was behind the so-called Iron Curtain and I remember going there with some trepidation. I had no idea what I would find. What I actually found were pleasant, welcoming people, with whom I was to collaborate and share friendships for many years to come.

The collaboration was on many different levels. The main focus was on research, and many projects developed between Klaus and his colleagues and my colleagues in Nottingham. These involved frequent visits to each other’s departments to work together and exchange ideas. The work attracted the attention of the British Council and the Wellcome Trust which provided encouragement and financial support for the exchanges. Many publications and presentations at scientific meetings resulted from the joint research.

A consequence of the collaboration and of the enthusiasm of my new friends in Erfurt was a series of conferences known as the Erfurt Platelet Conferences on Platelets. These attracted researchers from throughout Europe, both east and west, and, uniquely at that time, included researchers from as far afield as the then Soviet Union. This enabled multiple sharing of experiences and ideas at a time when Europe was severely politically fragmented.

The conferences were held either tri-annually or bi-annually right up to 2010, and were occasionally held off-site in Nottingham or in Lodz. They are still fondly remembered by all those who took part. The proceedings of the meetings were published routinely in Platelets.

Teaching was another focus of the joint activity. For many years, indeed right up to the time that I retired, my German friends Wolfgang Lösche, Peter Spangenberg and Beate Kehrel visited Nottingham annually to give lectures to third year medical students at the University. In return I gave lectures in Erfurt. Later on, when Wolfgang and Peter moved to the University of Jena and the Fachhochschule Jena respectively, I was engaged in lectures in Jena as well.

A further outcome was 25 or so students from Germany each spending periods of up to six months in Nottingham performing research, improving their English and making new friends. Such exchanges were made possible through the Erasmus scheme. There were also exchanges of medical students and PhD students.

Why am I recounting all of this? I am doing so because I believe that all of the matters described above are examples of how shared activity can have many beneficial outcomes. It is a story of Europeans coming together, working together and studying together in an atmosphere of cooperation and friendship.

I am writing this in the days after we in the UK voted to leave the European Union. In the run up to the referendum I had a REMAIN poster in my window and I was in regular contact with my German friends trying to reassure them that sense would prevail and a vote to remain in the EU was inevitable. I was so wrong.

My story started when Erfurt was on the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain and then extended well beyond the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the time of reunification, we were all convinced that our working together had somehow contributed to east and west finally coming together. And we were delighted with that thought.

As we now enter a new phase in European relations in which the reasons for friendships and working together seem to have been forgotten, at least at the political level, my plea to all who read this is to remember that we are all better off together than apart. As scientists, let us continue to look for ways to cooperate within Europe. My experience tells me that it really is the best way.

I for one will continue to attend conferences within Europe and beyond whenever I get the opportunity. And I will continue to enjoy regular visits to see my dear friends in Europe for as long as I am able to do so.