

The European Congress of Immunology: An international success thanks to its cooperative structure

In only a few years, the European Congress of Immunology (ECI) has become the one of the most important meetings in the world for immunologists. The cooperative system of the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) that gathers the European National Societies of Immunology under the EFIS umbrella has been key to this success.

ECI: A positive outcome

The EEIG structure introduced for the first time in 2006 (ECI Paris) changed the organization of the EFIS Congresses completely; a bilateral organizational structure between EFIS and the single organizing National society was replaced by a structure in which all EFIS National societies were members of the economic group and/or were represented in all committees related to the Congress. Through this structure, all National societies became true drivers of the meeting. Most national societies participate in the scientific programme committee, with the aim of preparing a cutting edge and educational programme that has high numbers of oral communications. Importantly, the EEIG ensured that the ECI registration fees were kept to a minimum.

A direct consequence of the EEIG has been, to date, huge participation in recent ECI: 4800 participants in Paris during ECI2006 and 5000 in Berlin for ECI2009. The ECI has therefore reached the size of international congresses and is now one of the major congresses in immunology worldwide. Moreover, the resources offered by this organization of the ECI, such as participant and sponsor lists, are shared among EEIG members and transmitted for the next ECI reducing the organizational burden of the Congresses, at least to some extent.

The EEIG structure: A reason for ECI success

The EEIG, which is an EU-wide legal structure of cooperation (EU Regulation 2137/85), was, as already noted, created for the occasion of the first pan-European Immunology meeting that was held in Paris

in 2006. Since then, the EEIG (officially called “ECI-EFIS-EEIG”) has evolved and gained further experience through the organization of the second congress, ECI2009, which was held in Berlin last September. All the European National Immunology Societies that have more than 500 members are represented on the EEIG Board of Directors. In addition, the European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) represents all the single European national societies having less than 500 members on the Board.

The Grouping’s purpose is to organise and run a European Conference in the field of Immunology (ECI) every three years, in a different European city under the aegis of the EFIS. Importantly, all the European members agree not to organise their annual meeting in the years of the ECI.

The EEIG allows for the division of either the debts (if the Congress is not financially successful) or the benefits (if the Congress makes a profit) among its members in a taxation-friendly way.

The EEIG provides financial security for the organizing society of the ECI

The EEIG in itself, and not the organizing society, is responsible for the benefits or losses of the Congress. This means that, because the organising National Society is a member of the ECI-EFIS-EEIG, if anything goes wrong the EEIG will be responsible and not the National Society. Thus, the losses (or the benefits) will be shared by all EEIG members, thereby reducing the financial risk to host National Society.

This is a true advantage of a European umbrella organization – the ability to protect the small member Societies, and coordinate the efforts of everyone while, at the same time, preserving member Societies’ individuality.

The EEIG provides financial transparency for the ECI

According to EU law, it is not intended that the grouping should make profits for

itself. If it does make any profits, they are to be apportioned among the members and taxed accordingly per member, not per the EEIG *i.e.* the profits or losses of an EEIG are taxable only in the hands of its members; however, the creation of reserve funds is possible.

The EEIG is not discriminatory, according to the EU rules

One major issue is the role of small Societies in the grouping. Indeed, as for any member of the grouping, such Societies can apply to organize a future ECI. Bids to organise the next ECI are submitted to the general assembly of the EFIS, which votes on the received bids every three years at the current ECI, as has been always the case.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that the EEIG is not discriminatory as it follows EU law text, which is understandable to all and exists in every EU official language. This means that no organising Society would have to go through another countries’ company law.

What’s next?

EFIS are currently working with the European EEIG Information Centre (www.ewiv.eu, at LIBERTAS - European Institute GmbH), to see how National Societies that have less than 500 members can benefit from future ECI meetings, since they are represented by EFIS in the grouping. This issue will be presented and discussed at the ECI-EFIS-EEIG Assembly during ICI2010 in Kobe.

During the next ECI to be held in Glasgow (ECI 2012), which is chaired by Eddy Liew (past President of EFIS), I am confident that the guidelines for the scientific excellence of the programme, the pan-European representation in the committees, low registration fees, high numbers of oral communications to be selected from submitted abstracts, and the provision of grants dedicated to young European scientists will be maintained. These measures are unique to the ECI.

The creation of the ECI-EFIS-EEIG has allowed important changes to take place in European Immunology these past few years by increasing the cooperation between the National Societies and presenting European Immunology to a large community. We should all bear in mind that the ECI-EFIS-EEIG, is ours and that it can evolve according to our skills that can be explored in the coming years.

To Sum Up: Why an EEIG for the ECI?

- There is no other transnational, European way of managing the organization of the ECI.
- Any other organisational form would be more bureaucratic and costly;

furthermore, there is no other legal form in Europe which permits so much flexibility in running a business.

- This is the only legal structure for which no company income taxes have to be paid. An EEIG is a hybrid organization uniting the features of a non-profit organisation with those of a company which may make profits – in our case for the members and the next ECI. The EEIG has done a very good job in the past by partly paying out the surpluses of the Congresses to the members and partly keeping a reserve fund for its other activities.
- Today, there are today about 2300 EEIG that bring together some 15 000 members: Of these groups 95% have had positive experiences with this legal structure. Among the exist-

ing EEIG, many are set up for research and medical purposes, or for fostering public discussion and training.

Given these listed advantages the national Immunological societies and EFIS chose the legal form of an EEIG as a European cooperation scheme and we are proud of this decision.

Tell us your opinion about these issues! Come and visit us at the EFIS booth in Kobe during ICI2010!

Catherine Sautes-Fridman
EFIS and ECI-EFIS-EEIG President
E-mail: Catherine.Fridman@crc.jussieu.fr

Vaccinology 2010

1st Joint Vaccinology Meeting

French Society for Immunology and Institute for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases

22–23 November 2010

Palais du Pharo, Marseille

Abstract Submission: **September 2–October 4, 2010**

This a one and a half day meeting dedicated to all aspects of vaccinology and covering three major themes:

- Flu Vaccines
- Neonate Immunity
- Novel vaccines in Phase II/III development

KeyNote Speakers

Influenza Vaccines: **J. Wood** (UK)

New Vaccines: **M. P. Kienny** (WHO)

Innate Immunity and Vaccines: **B. Pulendran** (USA)

Invited Speakers

Influenza vaccines: **X. de Lamballerie** (France); **B. Combadière** (France); **M. Bublot** (France); **P. Londona-Arcila** (France); **O. Launay** (France)

Neonatal immunity: **C. Weil-Olivier** (France); **BR. Lo Man** (France); **A. Marchant** (Belgium); **F. Laurent** (France)

New Vaccines: **J. Lang** (France); **A. Serrutto** (Italy); **E. Grimpel** (France)

Executive Committee

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Vaccinology 2010 is a joint meeting with the Annual Meeting of the French Society for Immunology (November 24–26, 2010, Marseille, Palais du Pharo).

For more information, visit www.sfi2010ciml.com