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EFIS on Tour - getting to know our members

For many years now, the EFIS Board of Directors [1] has been holding its periodic meetings (3–4 times per year) in different cities throughout Europe in order to meet with as many member immunology societies as possible. Until recently, representatives of host societies were invited to attend the EFIS Board's Saturday meeting to give them the chance present their organization, its initiatives and goals, and to explore areas in which interaction with EFIS could be enhanced. These encounters were generally limited to a select few local society representatives and only lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. While the meetings were — as could be expected — always quite cordial, they could also be insular, with the EFIS Board rarely in the position to know if the meetings had any true

impact, especially among societies' membership ranks.

To enhance interaction with its member societies and their local immunology communities, in 2016 EFIS launched the *EFIS on Tour* Symposium series [2]. Conceived and proposed by EFIS President René van Lier and enthusiastically embraced by the EFIS Board, these half-day seminars take place on the Friday afternoon preceding the Board's traditional Saturday meeting. *EFIS on Tour* features talks by a mix of EFIS Board Members and invited speakers who are members of the hosting societies. Beyond providing a receptive setting for societies to present their most important research areas and to showcase their emerging young talents in an open scientific exchange with the EFIS Board, the

far-reaching goal of the *EFIS on Tour* Symposium is to engage national societies at the grassroots level and to increase awareness of how EFIS supports the European community of researchers and clinicians working in immunology and related fields. This forum is especially important bearing in mind that EFIS does not have direct contact with societies' membership bases.

The inaugural *EFIS on Tour* Symposium, co-organised by former long-standing EFIS Secretary General Anna Erdei on behalf of the Hungarian Society for Immunology (MIT), was held at the prestigious Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest in July 2016. Telling of the event's success was the participation of no fewer than 90 attendees (from Budapest, Pécs, Szeged and Debrecen), a remarkable turnout given that the event coincided with midsummer holidays for Semmelweis Medical University staff. Talks by EFIS Directors René van Lier ("Lymphocytes in the frontline: properties of human tissue-resident T cells"), Andreas Radbruch ("The resting and the restless immunological memory"), Lorenzo Moretta ("Human NK cells: from biology to clinical applications") and Pablo Engel ("Viral hijacking of cellular genes to subvert host immunity") were complemented by presentations by then-MIT President Imre Kacsukovics ("Accelerating antibody discovery using transgenic animals overexpressing the neonatal Fc receptors as a result of augmented humoral immunity") and MIT Council representative Attila Mócsai ("Neutrophil signalling in inflammatory disease models").

EFIS on Tour next moved to Athens in October 2016, this time hosted by the Hellenic Society of Immunology (HSI). The symposium was again very well-attended, and appropriately featured two junior clinical scientists, Maria Mytilinaoui and



Figure 1. René van Lier, EFIS President, presenting at EFIS on Tour in Zagreb.

Aikaterini Stavropoulos-Gioka, whose respective talks on stem cells in autoimmunity and the immunopathophysiology of IgG4-related diseases reflected the strong clinical immunology vocation of the HSI. Representing EFIS were again Andreas Radbruch (“Adaptation of T cells to chronic inflammation”), and Winfried Pickl (“The role of T regulatory cells in health and disease”). The event also had the privilege of hosting two EFIS guest speakers: the President of the Fifth European Congress of Immunology (ECI 2018) Marieke van Ham (Sanquin Blood Foundation, Amsterdam), who spoke about induction and termination of T-cell-mediated B-cell responses, and the Chair of the European Network of Immunology Institutes (ENII) Paola Castagnoli, who presented her work on the control exerted by CD103⁺ dendritic cells on Th17 cell function in the lung.

2017 saw two *EFIS on Tour* symposia, the first of which took place in Lisbon in March. This event, hosted by the Portuguese Society of Immunology (SPI) at the Institute of Molecular Medicine, was very scientifically stimulating as evidenced by the lengthy discussion, meaning that the symposia ran nearly an hour over time. Prominent highlights included talks by SPI members Luis Moita (Gulbenkian Institute of Science), speaking on the importance of disease tolerance in the onset of sepsis, and Henrique Veiga-Fernandes (Champalimaud Research), who presented his work on neuroimmune regulation of mucosal physiology. Moreover, despite a very crowded agenda, there was even time for a presentation by the EC Liaison Officer for EFIS, Arnd Hoeveler, on the new directions for immunology in current and future EU research programmes. On behalf of the EFIS Board, René van Lier, Andreas Radbruch, Winfried Pickl and Pablo Engel presented their respective groups’ ongoing research efforts to an audience of over 100 interested scientists. Once again, the large turnout of group leaders, their associates and students from research hubs outside of Lisbon (namely, Porto and Braga) attested to the local immunology community’s appreciation of the initiative.



Figure 2. Winfried Pickl, EFIS Treasurer, discussing results with Kristina Vuković during a poster session at the Croatian Immunological Society’s Annual Meeting.

Accepting the invitation extended by the Croatian Immunological Society (HID), the EFIS Board travelled to Zagreb in October 2017 for its fourth *EFIS on Tour* Symposium (Fig. 1 and 2). In addition to the significance of this being the first time that an EFIS Board had ever directly met with the HID, the symposium gained greater prominence by being integrated into the HID’s 2017 Annual Meeting. Over one and a half days, the entire EFIS Board and its guests — Günnur Deniz, Ihsan Gürsel and Barbaros Oral of the Turkish Society of Immunology and former EFIS Treasurer Reinhold Schmidt — had the opportunity to share their cutting-edge findings with an audience of more than 120 meeting participants.

The fifth *EFIS on Tour* Symposium took place in February, hosted by another national society with whom the EFIS Board has not previously convened: the Bulgarian Society for Immunology (BuSI). Organised by the BuSI Co-President Andrey Tchorbanov (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), the symposium was held at the Medical University of Sofia and featured

talks by BuSI Co-President Maria Nikolova (“T regulatory cells in chronic HIV infection: guilty or not guilty”), and BuSI members Snezhina Mihailova (“T cell dysregulation and signalling in primary immune deficiencies”) and Dobroslav Kyurkchiev (“Indirect immunosuppression realized by mesenchymal stem cells”). Representing EFIS on this occasion were Andreas Radbruch (“Maintenance of immunological memory - cycling and circulating versus resting and resident memory cells”), Winfried Pickl (“Genetic restriction of antigen-presentation dictates allergic sensitization and disease”), Pablo Engel (“Immunoglobulin superfamily genes captured by viruses for immune evasion”) and René van Lier (“Regulation of tissue-resident T cells”).

The next stop of the *EFIS on Tour* Symposium series will see the EFIS Board travelling to Tallinn to meet with members of the Estonian Society for Immunology and Allergology (EIAS) at the Technical University of Tallinn. Scheduled for June 1st 2018, the nearly full day symposium will feature talks by prominent EIAS representatives (most of whom will be making the effort to travel from the principal immunology research community two and a half hours away in Tartu), including EIAS President Kai Kisand, Pärt Peterson and Raivo Uibo. They will be joined by Francesco Annunziato, Chair of the EJI Executive Committee. In keeping with tradition, this next iteration of the series again promises to be truly stimulating.

The EFIS Board is convinced that the *EFIS on Tour* Symposium series is an initiative that can effectively support European immunologists by fostering more interactions and a greater sense of community. It is hoped that more of EFIS’s national societies — especially its smaller ones — will take up on the opportunity to engage and share with EFIS by organizing a symposium in the near future.

References

- 1 Anon. EFIS elects its new Board. *Eur. J. Immunol.* 2016. 46: 10–12.
- 2 Wiley, T., EFIS on Tour. *Eur. J. Immunol.* 2016. 46: 1807–1808.