

2013

Evangelos Tsouroulis

Greece

My involvement in the affairs of the CCBE in the late 90s was a baptism of fire! Representing the Piraeus Bar, I was tasked with resolving with Jonathan Goldsmith, then Information Officer of the UK Delegation, the concerns about the proper “landing” or establishment of English solicitors in Greece. Following the time honoured tradition of (lunch) meetings this ‘dispute’ was amicably resolved and our English brethren became a fixture of the Greek legal community.

The mutual respect and appreciation for the principles of good faith, solidarity and comradeship Jonathan and I shared have guided me throughout my long service in the CCBE and is itself a testament to how our Organization works.

2013 brought one of our most significant challenges to date. The continued imposition of austerity measures by governments, EU Authorities and in particular the ‘troika’, aimed at staving off economic crisis, directly affected the citizens’ right to access to justice; the independence of the judiciary; and the independence and regulatory authority of the Bars throughout Europe.

My colleagues in the Presidency, Aldo Bulgareli, Maria Ślązak, Michel Benichou and I worked closely together to deal with the above issues and implement the aims and objects of our organisation through a more effective management. We were rewarded with the valuable support and trust of all the Delegations and it is with great pride and gratitude that all the important Resolutions of the Standing Committee and Plenary Sessions were passed almost unanimously.

We reinforced existing and established new ties with EU institutions, particularly with E.C. Vice-President and Commissioner of Justice Viviane Reding and Commissioner of Internal Market Barnier, both of whom recognised the role of the CCBE and the independence of the Bars. I represented the CCBE and spoke about ‘The Independence of Justice’ at the Assises de la Justice conference organised by the Directorate-General for Justice. Additionally many CCBE delegates

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were speakers at a Law Conference organised by the Directorate-General of Internal Market where Commissioner Barnier praised “Regulation” and the Establishment Directive.

In March we inaugurated our new premises in the European quarter of Brussels, leased through the valuable efforts of my predecessor Marcela Prunbauer. After due consideration the Presidency felt it better served the organisation’s finances and future to purchase these premises. The Finance Committee chaired by Alastair Rankin carried out a feasibility study that led to this decision. Peter Mc Namee, with his inimitable Irish style, successfully negotiated the purchase and the Secretary General Jonathan Goldsmith was authorized to execute the notarial deed of purchase.

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In reflection and recognition of our diverse membership, the CCBE became actively involved in the promotion of gender equality, particularly in the legal profession. A seminar on this subject, moderated by Birgit Spießhofer, was held in Brussels in November 2013 and featured high profile speakers such as MEP Kartika Tamara Liotard and the President of the Norwegian Bar and Nobel Committee Member Beril Reiss-Andersen. Further to this effort and to bring young lawyers closer to the CCBE, the President of the International Association of Young Lawyers was invited to address us at a Standing Committee Meeting.

During this time the CCBE closely monitored the difficulties faced by lawyers in Turkey. As a consequence of their support for defence lawyers in a controversial conspiracy trial, the President and Council Members of the Istanbul Bar Association faced harassment from both politicians and the judiciary. To show our Turkish colleagues the CCBE’s support, 3rd Vice President Michel Benichou attended the trial as an observer but the trial was promptly postponed! In recognition of their principled stance, the CCBE Human Rights Award for 2013 was awarded to the President and Council Members of the Istanbul Bar.

The Greek Bars were honoured to host the May Plenary in Athens which took place alongside the first Conference on Human Rights, at which the Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights and the President of the Council of State of Greece were the main speakers.

That year, our membership reached 44 Members through the addition of the Croatian Bar as a Full Member and the Andorran Bar and the Federal Chamber of Lawyers of the Russian Federation as Observer Members.

In our 50th Anniversary publication, the 2004 President Hans-Jürgen Hellwig (who served ably and effectively the CCBE) posed a question to pique our interest and to encourage our development: was the CCBE still an eagle with the vision and courage to address the challenges of our time or had it become an ostrich, sticking its head in the sand in order to avoid having to deal with them?

Knowing well my predecessors and successors not to mention the quality and eagerness of the new generation of delegates in our debates (albeit only via video conference now days) I can assure him and everyone that the CCBE, true to its founding principles and aims, still has and will continue to have the vision and courage of an eagle to face and successfully deal with all the challenges as the representative and voice of European lawyers.

