

# Why EuroPython 2015 was not in Berlin - as originally planned

To The CoC Committee of The EuroPython Society

Jason C. McDonald resigned from the Board of Directors of the EuroPython Society (EPS). As the main reason he described multiple issues with Marc-André Lemburg not acting in the best interest of the Python community and personally attacking Jason for making suggestions about some topics with which Marc-André Lemburg did not agree.

## **Abstract**

**There were considerable disagreements between the EPS and the local organizers of EuroPython 2014 on important points. Despite great effort, we couldn't find solutions that both parties could agree on. In our opinion, this was mainly due to Marc-André Lemburg insisting on his point of view, ignoring any arguments and new facts brought forward by us. He was not open to any compromise to find a workable solution. We found that Marc-André Lemburg made the life of the local conference organizers more difficult. It felt more like a fight than a collaboration. This was a very different experience from all other conference organizations we did before and after.**

We would like to describe some aspect of the organisation of EuroPython 2014 and why EuroPython 2015 did not take place in Berlin as originally planned and confirmed by the EPS.

The EuroPython 2014 conference was a big success. We had more than 1,200 participants and a long waiting list because the venue was sold out. The feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive. Surprisingly for most people, EuroPython 2015 did not take place in Berlin even though both EuroPython 2014 and 2015 were originally given to the Berlin team. Why did this happen?

We, the local organizers, had experience in organizing multiple Python conferences before. This was always a lot of work but the organizing teams were always very motivated and goal-oriented, which often requires to be rather pragmatic to get things done and make the conference happen. We were very surprised that the organization of EuroPython 2014 felt very different. We thought that may be partially due to the organization being split between the EPS and the local team. But there were numerous internal problems that we had to solve. Most of them were between the local team and the EPS. More precisely between the local team and Marc-André Lemburg. Our impression was that Marc-André was the EPS and the others of the board appeared to act only in the background, essentially voting yes to Marc-André suggestions.

We had multiple issues that we talked, or should we say argued, about in many online meetings. We would like to focus on one issue, the conference software. We had a strong local team including two very proficient software developers with profound Django knowledge who volunteered to work literally hundreds of hours for free on the conference software. The EPS had a software that was used for previous EuroPython conferences. We originally planned to use the EPS software. Therefore, our software developer team looked at the source code and evaluated it extensively. As it turned out, the software was de facto not usable. There were multiple severe technical problems. For example all documentation as well as class and variable names were in Italian.

The solution suggested by the EPS, i.e. Marc-André Lemburg, was to pay the original developers to work on the software. We, the local organizers, made a different proposal. We had a software with similar functionality but better code quality. Our team worked on this software for other conferences and offered to work for free on it to get it ready for the conference. This is actually what we did. The software worked fine and the conference was a big success. But the EPS did not like it. No matter what arguments and technical problems we presented, Marc-André Lemburg didn't change his opinion at all. It felt like "talking to a wall" as we would say in German. It did not feel like a discussion that was open to find the best solution for a problem and get the conference going. Marc-André Lemburg didn't change his position a millimeter, no matter what arguments and facts we presented. He insisted on spending community money for something we would get for free from our local team. Of course, the software we suggested and finally used for the conference is fully open source.

After many back-and-forth discussions, we just could not find a solution that was acceptable to both sides. This is strange, as we spent a lot of effort on mitigating the situation and to find a workable compromise. But to find a compromise you may need to change your perspective and adapt to new facts. This is something Marc-André Lemburg seemed to be totally unable to do. In the end we use the, in our opinion as local team, best technical and community-friendly solution as conference software. As a consequence the EPS withdrew the already assigned EuroPython 2015 conference from Berlin. This was certainly not a decision in favor of the Python community. We had a working, highly motivated team that organized the largest EuroPython conference to date. The second edition of a conference is usually easier. You can heavily draw on your prior experiences.

In our opinion, Marc-André Lemburg, certainly did damage to the Python community. It always felt like fighting when we communicated with the EPS. A lot of community energy was burned for these internal issues instead of being used for organizing a good conference. We have organized many more conferences since 2014. All of us concluded not to do this with Marc-André Lemburg again as he would be more a hindrance than a facilitator of any organization. Other conferences we organized later, without Marc-André Lemburg, felt much more relaxed in terms of internal atmosphere and goal-oriented collaboration instead of pushing one position no matter if it is best for the community. The how matters. Community is not about power but about consensual solutions of common problems.



Mike Müller



Daniel Szoska



Reimar Bauer

At the time of these events members of the board of the Python Software Verband e.V. and part of the local organizing team of EuroPython 2014.

2020-12-18