Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

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Why a European society for veterinary virology?

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Incidentally, this first Congress of the Society happens to be 50 years after my first employment as a bachelor at a Veterinary Institute for Diagnosis of Infectious Diseases and Vaccine Production. It was Monday 9 January 1939 when I started, and the first virus I met that very day was the rabies virus in the brain of a wolf, not in Sweden, but in my native country, Yugoslavia. Retrospectively, I see that early encounter as a good omen because I continued in the field of virology and never did regret my devotion, the excellent scientific programme of this Congress being a confirmation.

There are colleagues, veterinary virologists, who were against the creation of a Society for Veterinary Virology arguing that there exist societies of medical virologists that we veterinary virologists may join. And doubtless, there are fields where we did and do meet, namely those of comparative virology. To give an example, I will quote Luc Montagnier, the discoverer of the AIDS virus: "The initial concept that AIDS may be caused by a retrovirus came from the knowledge that some leukemogenic retroviruses, such as feline leukemia virus, can also cause immune depression. Later on, when HIV (LAV) was isolated from pre-AIDS and AIDS patients, its similarities with some lentiviruses such as equine infectious anaemia and visna viruses helped in a prompt discrimination from the HTLV group of viruses and an understanding of its pathogenic effects in vitro and in vivo ..." (Montagnier, 1989). And how would one understand the aetiology and pathogenesis of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease without the long-term studies performed on scrapie of sheep, this to mention another example.

No doubt, we should be interested in the discussions of medical virologists about the hepatitis B virus because Pekin ducks, woodchucks and two squirrel species may carry closely related viruses. However, would the medical virologists join our meetings when we are discussing, say, the mysterious pathogenesis of mucosal disease for which I could not find a parallel in medical virology (even if one sequel of fetal BVDV infection might be like the rubella syndrome)? We have also to join medical virologists in the field of animal virus classification to which we veterinary virologists did, and do, contribute with "new" viruses – with the first rotavirus and coronavirus in the past and,

quite recently, with the toroviruses. However, our ways diverge in the fields of diagnostic virology and control of viral diseases.

Whereas the medical virologists have to deal with viruses of a single animal species, the human being, and only occasionally also with those of some other primates, we veterinary virologists have to deal with a rather limitless number of viruses even if we consider only those of domestic animals. We do, of course, apply, for diagnostic purposes, in principle the same ELISAs, immunoblottings or DNA hybridizations as the medical virologists do, but we have to put the results, particularly those of screening, into the concept of plans for eradication, as for infectious bovine rhinotracheitis, bovine leukosis, hog cholera, African swine fever, rabies, and pseudorabies. In this connection, the exchange of experience, antisera, monoclonals etc. between experts and institutes of various European countries has proved invaluable. We have also still to combat foot-and-mouth disease which does reappear from time to time in some European countries.

Whereas many politicians have a "dream" of a United Europe (UE), we European veterinary virologists practised a "UE" very early, i.e., soon after World War II when discussing the control of foot-and-mouth disease, first in Copenhagen and then, yearly, in Paris, or when we regularly met in different European cities to discuss the diagnosis and control of bovine leukosis or visnamaedi. To us, the UE was not a "dream" but reality. This first Congress, being a veritable "siège de Liège", will confirm the necessity of the European Society for Veterinary Virology. Moreover, the recent collaborative studies by the Soviet and Western European virologists on the epizootiological link between the outbreaks of a distemper-like disease in Western European and Lake Baikal harbour seals (Grachev et al., 1989; Osterhaus et al., 1989), point out the need for a "stronger link" between East and West that should be realized within the framework of the Society.

Well, in order to come to an end of my speech, I remember a meeting in the early 60s at Lyon, the city of hospitality (I mean by the Institut Merieux) when a professor from Alfort (I have forgotten his name) gave an introductory speech in French. He said that his speech would take five minutes only. He started, and we listened. Five, ten, 15 and 20 minutes had gone, but he was still speaking. Then he suddenly stopped and said: "Excusez moi, mesdames et messieurs, mais la langue française est tellement belle que, avec ma meilleure volonté, je n'ai pas pu cesser mon discours après cinq minutes comme je l'avais promis". Thus, ladies and gentlemen, you might feel lucky that my speech was not in French. My best wishes go to the success of this first Congress and to the progress of the Society, a progress, which will much depend upon us, the European veterinary virologists.

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