2017 will be a year of anniversaries. It is 35 years since ESSKA was founded in 1982, and 25 years since ESSKA became ESKA in 1992, not to mention the 25th anniversary of KSSTA.

In all this we celebrate the ideas and vision of our founding fathers, when they created our society and our clinical science journal back in 1982 and 1992 (see separate article by Matteo Denti in this issue).

From the beginning, our credo was ESSKA’s first choice is excellence. This has been documented through a study we did in cooperation with Dr Olufemi Ayeni from McMaster University, Canada. Dr Ayeni and his team looked at the quality of abstracts of the ESSKA congresses over the last decade. They showed an increasing scientific quality, and this confirms the efforts of our congress and leadership to get better at every meeting. It shows that ESSKA is on the right track!

But in another study (as yet unpublished, but covering the five years after the 2008 and 2010 congresses) they demonstrate a publication rate of less than 50% of presented free papers. This is similar to comparable congresses, but suggests that we need to stimulate more effort of our congress and leadership to get better at every meeting. It shows that ESSKA is on the right track!

A recent survey (conducted by our basic science committee, and covering all ESSKA members) can be understood in this sense. It tried to identify our members’ needs in terms of scientific education and publishing, so as to create a larger evidence-base for our profession. You will be given the answers of the survey in the coming months.

ESSKA’s main message is surgery. It is therefore a great pleasure to see the positive evolution of our surgical skills courses programme. Under the academic leadership of our 1st Vice-President David Dejour and his task force composed of Profs. Michael Hortis, Mustafa Karahan, and Martin Lind, we succeeded dramatically, and increased the number of high-end surgical skills courses (organised by ESSKA, in collaboration with several of our industry partners, and in many European countries).

Our activities are also increasingly busy. They have many activities and, thanks to the support from our staff, their work is increasingly structured which is essential for long-term success. The autumn of 2017 promises to be busy, with many open-meetings in various venues: AFAS in Bordeaux (21-22 Sep); ESA in Krakow (5-7 Sep); EKA in Berlin (13-14 Oct) and ESSKA in Munich (5-6 Oct). We shall supply the details, so please mark your calendars.

We officially launched preparations for the Glasgow 2018 meeting in August last year. Our staff convened in Scotland, together with the scientific chairmen Profs. Gino Korohtivi, Michael Hirschmann and Fares Haddad, our local partners and Intercongress. I can promise Glasgow 2018 will be a fantastic Congress and that it will exceed expectations. Scotland is a wonderful country and Glasgow is a city which has a rich and dramatic past, an industrial heritage, but is now creating a post-industrial and knowledge-based economy.

For the first time in ESSKA’s history, we decided to choose a charity partner for our congress. We formed an agreement with Handicap International, a non-profit association born in 1982 after the Cambodian Red Khmer killings.

Handicap International work alongside people with disabilities and vulnerable populations, bearing witness to their essential needs, their dignity and fundamental rights, and acting to improve their living conditions (www.handicap-international.org).

One of their original goals was to restore people’s mobility. As such, this organisation is similar to ours, with the difference that we operate at the two extremities of a similar spectrum. We will work to ensure that Handicap International gains visibility amongst our peers, and hopefully generate some funds for their humanitarian programmes.

In terms of publications, lots of improvements will be expected in our book publishing programme. With 12 books published over the last six years, this has evolved substantially and will continue (several books are in production for Glasgow). You have certainly noticed the intense and ever-increasing activity of the ESSKA Academy with high-quality work under the scientific leadership of Mustafa Karahan and Sebastian Kopf. This year, we will also start the first series of ESSKA Webinars to reach out to our many international members. More information on this subject will follow soon.

This brings us to our ‘new baby’, the JEO, which starts to be recognised in the scientific world. I would like to thank Prof. Henning Madry and his editorial team to get this up and running. Without the support of so many ESSKA members and the backbone of our strong society, this would not have been possible.

I am also very happy and proud to see the positive evolution of our flagship journal KSSTA under the leadership of Prof. Jon Karlsson. Early in 2017 we published the ‘Surgical Management of Degenerative Meniscus Lesions: the 2016 ESSKA Meniscus Consensus’. This was the result of a three-year collaborative effort which cost ESSKA significant personal and financial resource. I hope that similar initiatives will follow under the umbrella of ESSKA, and using a similar methodology. This would harmonise our clinical work in Europe, using evidence-based practice-criteria.

The initiative showed how difficult it is to reach a European consensus, but that the team managed to do so, was a tribute to the leadership of Prof. Philippe Brumelé and Roland Becker. They taught us that nothing is impossible. ESSKA should be proud of this achievement.

In November last year, our staff launched ESSKA’s new website, as well as ‘YOUR MEMBERSHIP’, our new membership management system. This is much more than a simple homepage: many possibilities are linked to it, like membership payments, members’ database handling facilities, fellowship application tools and much more. A special credit should be given to our staff for the great job they did over the last months. Their dedication and increasing specialisation has brought ESSKA to a higher level.

On a more personal note, I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate this first year of my presidency. I’ve had so many nice encounters across our fantastic continent, where I was able to represent ESSKA. It is a pleasure to see that ESSKA gets such recognition, and at so many meetings of our affiliated societies. The impact our society has all over Europe is incredible, and the feedback we get is extremely positive. This is something we must be constantly aware of and cherish like a treasure over the coming years.

In this sense, we do have a role as European ambassadors. I realised this at two of my invitations of 2016. One was Romania, where we were shown how politics can negatively affect medicine, and what our colleagues did to overcome the shadows of the past. I would invite you to read the KSSTA article by Prof. Ioan Cristian Stoica. In my second meeting, the presence of the ESSKA president was taken as an important political message, in support of colleagues who share our common values of democracy and humanism. This was a country where you could speak freely in the recent past. This was a real step back in comparison to what I saw in Romania some months before. These two examples show us how fast things can change, and that we need constantly to fight for our values.

Once again, let me thank you all for your work for the society, and your commitment to keep ESSKA’s flame burning – for another 35 years!