

# Future Development of the European Optical Society

Discussion document prepared by Chris Dainty (EOS President Elect)

At the meetings of the Advisory Committee and the EOS Board in Florence this August, I hope we can have fruitful, open discussions on the possible future development of the EOS. The content of this short note indicates some of my own thinking. The EXECOM, who discussed this issue at their June 20th meeting, asked me to prepare this note to help you formulate your own views in advance of the Florence meetings.

1. The past two years have seen the start of the growth of the EOS as a professional society. In a number of areas, particularly the increase in corporate membership and our relations with the European Commission, we have recorded significant successes. We have a working business plan and the Executive Director, Klaus Nowitzki, is to be congratulated for achieving so much in the time available. It is absolutely essential that we "keep our eye on the ball" and stick closely to our business plan. At the same time, I feel that the time is now right to think in more strategic terms about the longer term development of the Society.
2. As a starting point, we have to decide what sort of optical society European scientists, engineers and industry want. I suggest that a good model would be some combination of the best of OSA and SPIE, whose combined membership is about 30,000 individual members (<10% overlap) and a corporate membership of about >500 (more overlap I suspect). The strength of OSA is its diversity from fundamental physics to engineering, and its peer-reviewed publications: SPIE's strength is its strong focus on engineering and industry, and its agility to move into new technical areas quickly.
3. Many people in Europe feel that an aspiration to form a single optical society with (say) >10,000 individual members and hundreds of corporate members, comparable in quality and professionalism to OSA, IEEE/LEOS or SPIE, is simply a dream which we might as well forget about. I would argue that this defeatist, negative approach is one of our major problems in Europe: it is true that, as long as I can remember, parochial (i.e. national) issues and some strong personalities have prevented progress towards this goal but surely we Europeans are not inherently inferior to Americans in our organisational capabilities?
4. One essential ingredient for the long term success of EOS as a professional society is that we should have a large number of individual members (as well as corporate members). Currently we have 679 full members. The combined membership of all the National Optical Societies (NOS) which form EOS is approximately 4100. We should find a way to make these people full members of EOS. "Full members" means at least (i) that they pay a fee (and know they are paying this fee) to be a member, and (ii) they really feel part of EOS, treating it as their "home" society on international matters.
5. I have no fixed prescription for achieving this goal but I think that together with the NOS we should find a way to achieve this. I do not underestimate the difficulty of this task but feel it is of over-riding importance for the EOS and for European Optics. Given that agreement is unlikely to be obtained by all the NOS at once, we might wish to consider a two stage approach to this, in which some National Optical Societies agree to have a closer relationship with EOS, whereas others retain the status quo for the time being.
6. A second issue (possibly a second phase or perhaps concurrently with the inclusion of NOS individual members) is to establish a much closer working relationship with the Quantum Electronics and Optics Division of the European Physics Society (QEOD/EPS). In the long term, I would like to see a merger of EOS and QEOD/EPS but I see many potential barriers and this is a significantly more difficult task than that of increasing our own membership. As we saw with the aborted OSA-SPIE merger, a case badly prepared and presented can reveal deep resentments and hostility.
7. Please think about these two issues before the Florence meetings. I would ask that you come with positive suggestions for possible ways forward, and with an open mind, rather than with a specific, fixed agenda. The goal of our discussions at the Florence meetings is not to reach some final decision on a detailed plan for the future – the issues are far too complicated for that to be a realistic goal. However, I hope we can agree a broad strategy that will lead to significant developments in 2003 and beyond.

Chris Dainty, June 28th 2002