

History of the Europa Forum

The idea was first voiced in 1952 during a meeting between French and Italian Lions, attended, among others, by PIP Friedrichs, PID Pinetti (Bergamo) and Bologna's PID Gardini. From 1953, with the sole exception of 1957, an annual meeting has been held in various locations around Europe. In 1998, the Forum went for the first time to an Eastern European country - Budapest to mark ten years of Lionism in Hungary. The Italian Multiple District has hosted the Forum in Venice in 1958 and 1983, in Florence (1964 and 2000), Taormina (1972), Genoa (1992), Rome (2004) and Bologna 2010, as well as the German multi-region in Wiesbaden (1959), Berlin (1973 and 1994), Munich (1984), Stuttgart (2005) and now Augsburg (2015).

A Forum was the place in the Ancient Roman world where people met to exchange experiences and compare new ideas. While offering the same opportunity, the Lions Forum has changed and kept abreast of the times.

The last twenty years have been marked by sea changes in the old continent, with the irreversible construction of the European Union and the growth of the Council of Europe to include some 47 countries stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals.

European Lions have taken these changes on board, updating and fine-tuning the framework within which we operate and the tools with which we can best deliver service to the community. The changing scenario has been met by the ability of Lionism in the various European countries to evolve. Sometimes the new needs were first flagged up in certain Multiple Districts before becoming a common feature throughout Europe.

The overall framework and aims of the Forum have, however, remained essentially the same.

They are to:

- Promote mutual understanding and friendship among Lions Club members in Europe;
- Establish a forum for free exchange and discussion;
- Promote the aims of Lionism;
- Promote the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF);
- Promote and implement the service aims as indicated by our International President.

Apart from the introduction of a general theme or motto for each year's Forum, our meetings over last 25 years have been marked by five watershed years: 1978, 1983, 1994, 2001 and 2010.

In 1978 in Torremolinos, the European Council, the Forum's governing body, decided to apply to the Council of Europe for membership as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) in the light of the public service provided by European Lions and hence its special contribution to fundamental human rights. It was further decided in Torremolinos that the European Lions' representative in Strasbourg would be the incumbent Forum President.

The Torremolinos decision and the accompanying commitment along with the continued work of our representatives in Strasbourg prompted the Lions Association to apply for NGO-status membership of the Council of Europe in 1992.

In 1983 at the Venice Forum, a further update of our legal framework was approved. This marked the conclusion of action outlined in Turku in 1980 and followed up by the so-called EFEC, the explorative committee of the Europa Forum. Venice 1983 also saw the birth of a Europa Forum coordination office, the EFADACO, with a mandate to work to prevent drug abuse. This new body was formed in the wake of the 1982 declaration of European Lions at the Lugano Forum.

The 1990 Limassol Forum paved the way for the Forum to become a point of convergence for common service action by European Lions to meet common European needs. This was also the Forum that introduced a general annual theme or motto to be the cornerstone of European Lions' action in topical areas.

In Istanbul in 1991 the need was voiced to further fine-tune our operational tools to make our annual Forum more effective.

In Berlin in 1994, the structural changes indicated by studies conducted from 1991 were introduced. A more widespread awareness of our continental responsibility allowed the unanimous adoption at the Berlin Forum of a declaration that would be the basis for the first European service action plan: the rebuilding of five Bosnian schools backed by resources of some € 650,000.

In 1998 in Budapest the need was expressed to further refine the organization of the Forum to improve the quality of the experiences exchanged and enable greater flexibility to allow any European Lion to make his/her contribution.

The careful analysis carried out over three years by the special working group charged with this task led to the adoption of the Forum's altered structure at the Porto meeting in 2001. The traditional PECs (Permanent European Commissions) were disbanded in favour of a series of interactive seminars on issues that may be proposed by member countries but which must be allied to the Forum's general topic and key focus of activity.

European Lions are now being asked to help examine the results and spin-off from the new objectives the Forum has set itself:

- Providing new inputs and ideas on club and district administration and Lions activities in Europe's multicultural society;
- Examining and discussing the reports of the Association's representatives at international organizations headquartered in Europe: the Council of Europe, WHO, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the offices of the United Nations in Geneva and Vienna;
- Offering the possibility of discussing and analyzing the needs of European society and how to develop common service activities for the good of all members of Europe's multicultural society.

To reinforce the fact that these developments are nonetheless part of a continuum, the new norms allow the Program Committee to include on the agenda at the start of a Forum highly topical issues of major interest.

At the 2006 Europe Forum in Bournemouth, the European Council passed a resolution at the request of MD 105 to set up a working group with 6 members to revise the Standing Orders. Members of the group included one representative of each of the five language groups in the Forum (English, French, German, Italian, a Scandinavian language) and a representative of from the Eastern European states. The adviser and archivist also attended the meetings.

The working group chaired by PID Phil Nathan completely revised the Standing Orders at two meetings in February and April 2007 in Frankfurt. The working group cut the Standing Orders down to the essential points as the old version, which had previously remained unchanged since 1987, was too too detailed, cumbersome and even contradictory in parts. The new Standing Orders mainly regulate the rights and obligations of the President of the European Council, the chairpersons of all of the other events, and procedure at corresponding meetings. The European Council adopted these new Standing Orders at the 2007 Europa Forum in Bucharest, and annexed them to the Rules of Procedure to emphasise the close relationship between these two sets of regulations.

While revising the Standing Orders, it became clear that the Rules of Procedure in the Europa Forum were in need of reform. The Bucharest Forum passed a resolution to have the same working group that already drew up the new Standing Orders revise the Rules of Procedure. The new Rules of Procedure for content and organisation of Europa Forums were elaborated at four extensive meetings in Frankfurt (6/7 May 2008), Budapest (10/11 July 2008), Rome (9/10 December 2008) and Paris (2/3 May 2009). After presentation at the 2009 Europa Forum in Tampere, the 2010 Europa Forum in Bologna passed a resolution to adopt the new Rules of Procedure, which were first applied at the 2011 Europa Forum in Maastricht.

The previous Program Committee was abolished and a Supervisory Committee introduced, albeit but with a different set of responsibilities. The Organizing Committee is now exclusively tasked with setting the program as it had previously effectively done so up to that time. The Supervisory Committee is mainly responsible for supervising logistics, management, finances and subject matter covered in the Forum. An Advisory Committee was also newly established in order to ensure quality, continuity and experience beyond individual forums.

MD 111 lodged a request for the establishment of a Steering Committee to replace the "Gentlemen's Agreement" in setting out the order of what was now six International Directors from Europe for the first time at the Bucharest Forum in 2007; the Steering Committee would not be directly annexed to the Europa Forum. After several changes and in-depth consultation with the above working group, this highly controversial Committee was finally adopted in March 2010 in Birmingham and at a final meeting in May 2010 in Stuttgart, and finally by the European Council at the Bologna Forum in 2010, and taken up as Annex I to the Rules of Procedure. The Committee's President is the last International President from Europe, its members are the three International Directors in the second year as well as the three immediate past International Directors from Europe, whereby a total of eight European regions are to be represented. This Committee was renamed as the Long-term Planning Committee at the 2014 Europa Forum in Birmingham; alongside the International Directors' rotation regulation, the Committee's responsibilities also include ensuring the exchange of information between the LCI Board and the Area Europa as well as full European diversity in the operations of the Board of Directors with the aim of enriching the activities of LCI.

After this overview of the aims of the Forum and the opportunities it provides, let us look at some of the most significant Forum events.

- The first example of service activity involving two constituent areas: Europe, and Africa and southwest Asia. The operational tool is the Euro-African Committee set up in Nice in 1975 and which is still thriving today;
- In 1973, thanks to the commitment of the International Directors of the time (Dall, Grimaldi and Van Wingarden), the Board adopted the first set of rules governing the Forum's obligations;
- In 1973 in Stockholm, the decision was taken to appoint an Archivist to keep track of developments in the by-laws, the flow of information and activities. This task was admirably performed by PDG Jim Bolton of MD 105 (British Isles and Ireland) from 1973 to 1997. Starting with the Venice Forum in 1983, the task of the Archivist was combined with those of Advisor. The Europa Forum remains the only one of the 6 Association Forums to have this function, ensuring records are kept for future consultation;
- 1964 saw the first agreement of a system of rotation of European International Directors. The agreement was subsequently integrated in 1971 at the Palma di Majorca Forum, in 1986 at the Aarhus Forum and again at the Rotterdam Forum in 1995. Compliance with the international rule that does not allow the appointment of two Board members from the same Multi-district meant that certain intermediate changes had to be made in the International European Presidencies. These changes were adopted at the Forums of Torremolinos in 1978, Venice in 1983, Genoa in 1992, Deauville in 1996 and Budapest in 1998;
- From 1976 to 1995, the European Forum Bulletin (EFB) was, thanks to the generous and intelligent commitment of the late Carlo Martinenghi, the first and only European Lion publication to give information on the Forum and European-wide service activities. It was thanks to the EFB that the meeting of editors-in-chief of the various THE LION editions became a standing feature of every Forum.
- European contributions during the early 80s in the area of drug abuse prevention paved the way for the adoption of the Declaration of Lugano in 1982. As a result, European Lions set up a permanent secretariat with AIDD in Milan and appointed a European coordinator. The EFDACO (European Forum Drug Abuse Coordination Office) allowed for a Europe-wide monitoring network to be set up and the publishing of six annual reports. In addition every first Saturday in May became a European Lions Day in the fight against drug dependency. All these activities, carried out especially by the AIDD in our Multi-district and by MD 104, Norway and MD 111 Germany, were all important for the development of the Association's first program set out during a Blue Ribbon Committee meeting in February 1983 in Oak Brook. These activities and experience were subsequently to lead to the development of the LIONS-QUEST program in 1983/84;
- From 1976 through to the Paris Forum in 1985, a seminar was dedicated to the question of a united Europe. The approach to the topic has always been in line with our highest ideals, i.e. to enhance the progress of the community, in this case the community of Europe. Of note was the commitment of Italian Lions during the first election by universal suffrage of the European Parliament;
- A constant focus from 1989 onwards has been the dissemination of Lionism in eastern European countries, with seminars and coordinated activities that continue even today. The pediatric facility developed by Italian Lions in Albania is a good example of the sort of work being done.

- From the Genoa Forum in 1992 to the Berlin meeting in 1994, another key topic was the training of Vice District Governors. An ad hoc problem was drawn up; at the 2002 Brussels Forum, Vice District Governors attended a special training course;
- The Istanbul Forum of 1991 saw the formation of the Europa Forum Music Competition subcommittee, giving a further opportunity to young European talents to gain recognition;
- Each Forum became dedicated to a particular theme or motto so that all sector activities - youth, training, international relations or social commitment - would be directed to a common European aim of particular pertinence. For example, the Genoa Forum of 1992 following the fall of the Berlin wall and with the prospect of East European countries returning within the democratic fold, the key theme put the emphasis on individual responsibility: EUROPE OF CITIZENS: EACH RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN CONSCIENCE.

It should not be forgotten that those who initially pressed to institute a Forum did so at a particularly important moment in history. World War II had only recently ended and there was a general awareness of the need to establish positive relations among the peoples of Europe.

The aims of Lionism were fully in line with the need to prompt consideration and appreciation of our common European roots as a means of preventing future conflict among the peoples of Europe. These were the years when the Council of Europe was set up in Strasbourg (1949) with the aim of safeguarding fundamental human rights, and when the European Coal and Steel Community, the ECSC, and EURATOM were formed. Subsequently in 1957, the European Common Market would be established with the signing of the Rome Treaty. This marked the first step towards the European Union, whose membership has gone from 15 to 27 countries.

Forum promoters had the foresight to realize how the principles of Lionism could contribute to establish and maintain peace in Europe as well as help create the baseline conditions for civic progress on the Old Continent.

The Forums expressly aims to "provide an opportunity for open discussion of possibilities and the assessment of European needs for joint service activities in a multicultural society in Europe for the benefit of all people".

Europa Forums have helped spread Lionism in Europe along with a common perception of European issues. It has contributed to disseminating an ability to assess situations from a perspective that goes beyond the boundaries of individual nation states. They have developed a common European understanding and as a result strengthened the ability of Lions to work at international level.

As Europeans, our service activities are conceived and conducted within the overall framework of good citizenship, which underpins the highest ideals of Lionism. The Forum is therefore a vibrant event. It is a dynamic tool for European Lions, enabling them to look with farsightedness to the future.

We should also be aware that the Forum is not the right place to broach the structural issues of the Association. These are questions exclusively for the International Board

and the Convention. The Forum can, however, be the place to collect ideas and proposals for submission to the Board by the European International Directors.

With the Forum's operational methods and structures now more in line with the times, it is to be hoped that participation will be increasingly wide. To this end, the various national editions of THE LION are called upon to disseminate regular information updates.

Information and participation are of strategic importance to make our service activity even more incisive in Europe.

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