

**European Spas Association (ESPA)**

**Europäischer Heilbäderverband (EHV)**

**Association Européenne du Thermalisme et du Climatisme (AETC)**



Report by Dr Janka Zálešáková, ESPA President,  
for the period from 20 May 2004 until 7 May 2008

III term of office

## General projects



- **ESPA seal of approval  
EUROPESPA med**

The 'EUROPESPA med' seal of approval developed on behalf of ESPA in 2005 and 2006 by Storch Water Consulting is ESPA's biggest project so far. A uniform seal of quality is now available for spas and health facilities throughout Europe for the first time. After the development of the EUROPESPA med and EUROPESPA wellbeing seals of quality had been adopted in principle unanimously by the ESPA board at its meeting on 3 December 2004 in Cologne, the project was confirmed by a large majority at the ESPA general meeting held on 12 May 2007 in Pärnu (Estonia). The holistic seal of quality examines more than 400 criteria related to safety, hygiene and treatment infrastructure. Following a test phase from February to October 2006, 30 centres in 10 European countries have now been examined over the past 18 months, 23 of which have been awarded the EUROPESPA med seal of quality (in some cases at the second attempt). In December 2007, work began to establish an advisory board of experts to continuously develop the criteria used for EUROPESPA med. This advisory board will include ESPA specialists. The certified facilities are being integrated into ESPA's web portal, which is currently being redesigned. The firm WMP from Prague (Czech Republic) appointed by ESPA is now working together with a new partner, the Swiss company Com4, which has experience of international health tourism. The involvement of Com4 will enable new customers to be found in Western Europe in particular and ensure the intensified advertising of the web portal.

- **ISO Working Group 'spa services'**

On the suggestion of the Spanish association, the quality criteria unanimously adopted at the general meeting in 2006 in São Pedro (Portugal) were included in the work of ISO Working Group WG2 'spa services'. This working group was set up by ISO Tourism Working Group TG 228 with ESPA acting in a liaising role, i.e. ESPA is officially involved in this work as a consultant. Meetings were held in Madrid, Rome and Lisbon, which were attended on behalf of ESPA by the President and/or project officer Reinhard Petry in order to represent ESPA's position.

- **ESPA credo**

By the beginning of the President's four-year term of office, work on ESPA's 'credo' was nearly complete. Setting out the philosophy of ESPA had been commenced by the previous president, Nicasio Perez Menzel, and was concluded by late May 2004. The preliminary work had been largely carried out by the DHV German Spas Association under the overall guidance of its President, Prof Manfred Steinbach, who is also the 1st Vice President of ESPA.

## Marketing measures



- **ESPA web portal**  
**Visit European Spas**

The web portal 'Visit European Spas' was unanimously adopted as an ESPA project at the general meeting in Pärnu. The only Europe-wide portal in its field, its aim is to extensively present European spas and their services on the internet. The presentations can currently be read in English and German, and Spanish and Russian versions are being prepared. The portal lists 838 spas and health resorts in 25 European countries; it also features 1,235 photographs and 8 visual tours. In addition, the portal currently contains 86 individual presentations of spas and health resorts, including 23 in the Czech Republic, 10 in Estonia, 8 in Slovakia, 8 in Hungary, 8 in Germany and 6 in Turkey. One reason why the ESPA web portal is so attractive is because the search function enables users to enter not just destinations but also medical indications. In spring 2008, the Prague-based company WMP, which had been appointed by ESPA to maintain the internet portal, signed a cooperation deal with the Swiss firm com4 in order to exploit synergy effects in customer care and advertising for the internet portal.

- **Exhibitions (especially the Spas and Wellness Travel Show)**

In 2004 and 2005, the third and fourth Spas and Wellness Travel Shows were held during the Cologne travel fair Reisemarkt Köln International. Being the biggest exhibition devoted to health tourism, it was an important marketing platform for ESPA and many of its members in particular. Following a survey conducted among exhibitors during the 2005 show, it was decided to switch the exhibition's location to Munich Airport. Accordingly, the Spas and Wellness Travel Health Festival was held outdoors between Terminals 1 and 2 at the airport from 8–10 September 2006. Once again there were about 70 exhibitors and co-exhibitors from 12 European countries. Despite the attractive accompanying programme including live music, draws and cooperation with a regional radio station, most exhibitors were dissatisfied with the numbers of visitors. The presentation of European spas and health resorts in 2009 will be conducted in a different manner and aimed at different markets.

In 2005–07, ESPA participated in the Termatalia exhibition in Ourense (Spain) with speakers in the trade programme and for the second time its own stand. In 2007, seven European countries showcased their services at ESPA's stand. In 2008, ESPA presented its project 'europespa med' as a co-exhibitor of the company medikur at ITB Berlin.

## Lobbying

- **Cross-border healthcare services in the EU**

The EU launched its process of consultation in late September 2006 by submitting its list of questions regarding healthcare services. By 31 January 2007, responses had been received from not just 25 governments of EU member states but also more than 260 European institutions.

ESPA noted in its statement dated 31 January 2007 that European spas and health resorts had not been mentioned in the draft services guidelines and called for cross-border services in the medical rehabilitation and prevention sector to be included. Unfortunately, only the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber submitted a statement containing a similar view.

- **ESPA conference at the European Parliament  
'Spas in Europe – health and wellness for women'**

On 1 April 2008, Slovak MEP Anna Zaborska, who is also chair of the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, and ESPA President Dr Janka Zálešáková hosted an ESPA conference at the European Parliament entitled 'Spas in Europe – health and wellness for women'. Following the President's keynote speech, eight speakers reported on various aspects of the competencies of spas for women. They included Prof Karagülle from Istanbul (Turkey), who spoke about the effectiveness of thermal therapies for women, and Prof Steinbach on medical rehabilitation and women. The previous evening, ESPA and the Slovak region of Nitra hosted a reception at the mission of the Free State of Bavaria at the EU, where ESPA project officer Reinhard Petry spoke to about 100 participants about the economic muscle of European spas using the example of Bavaria.

### **ESPA: internal affairs**

- **ESPA mourns its honorary president**

ESPA is in mourning for Prof Christoph Kirschner, its founding and honorary president, who died unexpectedly on 15 November 2007 at the age of 81. Until his death he worked tirelessly for the interests of European spas and health resorts, never shying away from conflict regarding ESPA's stance or correct development. He was an internationally acclaimed expert in the spa sector and was popular for his charming, obliging manner. When he was already Honorary President, he attended all the annual congresses and numerous meetings of the board. Prof Kirschner left a lasting work by completing the glossary, the first and only reference book on spas to contain the authorised definition of more than 1,000 terms in German and English.

To mark his 80th birthday, at a ceremonial dinner held at the Hotel Imperial in Karlovy Vary, Prof Kirschner was awarded the Order of Merit of the District of Western Bohemia by the region's deputy governor. Shortly before his death, he travelled to Bulgaria with ESPA Secretary General Joachim Lieber, where he visited 11 spa centres in four days, learned about the situation there, and met colleagues from various professions in the spa sector as well as the Bulgarian Minister of Health. At the closing event held in the Bulgarian spa of Hisarya (the former Roman town of Diocletianopolis), he tackled medical aspects of spas.

- **ESPA secures .eu domains**

During the second phase of the award of .eu web domain names in early April 2006, ESPA (being a European association) managed to secure the following for its exclusive use:

**espa-ehv.eu**

**europeanspas.eu**

**europeanspa.eu**

**europespas.eu**

**europespa.eu**

This step protected the most common spa terms, enabling everyone to find their way quickly and easily to European spas and their facilities on the internet.

- **Development of membership**

At the beginning of the term of office starting in 2004, ESPA had 24 members from 21 European countries. The spa associations and facilities from Finland and the Netherlands resigned from ESPA with effect from 1 January 2005, while those from Slovenia and the United Kingdom left as of 1 January 2007. At the same time, the Spas Association from Poland was expelled for failing to meet its subscription obligations. Finally, according to the Austrian Spas and Health Resort Association, it was forced by financial reasons to temporarily resign from ESPA as of 1 January 2008.

On 1 January 2005, Klovtoft Spa Clinic in Denmark and the seaside resort of Palanga in Lithuania both joined ESPA, followed on 1 January 2006 by the Lithuanian spa of Birštonas. As of 1 January 2008, the newly founded Association of Lithuanian Spas and Health Resorts joined ESPA. The Romanian Spas Association (OBTPR) joined ESPA on 1 July 2006; the Bulgarian Union of Balneology and Spa Tourism (BUBSPA) joined on 1 July 2007. The Irish organisation ILAM, which also represents spas and wellness centres, joined ESPA on 1 July 2007.

Other newly founded national member associations from Estonia and Iceland took over the memberships of the previous individual members with effect from 1 January 2008, bringing the development supported by ESPA into a monopoly association at a European level closer. At the general meeting on 7 May 2008, facilities in the Netherlands joined forces to apply for ESPA membership. ESPA Secretary General Joachim Lieber is in contact with the spas associations in Italy and Slovenia regarding rejoining. At the end of the third term of office, 20 associations and facilities from 20 European countries are therefore members of ESPA.

- **ESPA activities in member countries**

The President and the Secretary General of ESPA attended a spas symposium held in Pamukkale, Turkey, from 15–17 March 2007. They gave a talk on ESPA's quality standards and the current situation concerning health tourism in Europe to about 300 participants. The symposium was organised and chaired by the President of TURKSPA (the Turkish Association of Spas, Thalasso and Health Resorts). It garnered plenty of attention in the Turkish media thanks to a visit paid by the country's Minister of Economic Development accompanied by a delegation of government officials, providing plenty of publicity for Turkish spas.

From 23–25 April 2007, the ESPA Secretary General attended the International Spa and Wellness Seminar hosted by the Central European Initiative of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in Sofia, Bulgaria. The positions of ESPA and its activities were presented by the representatives present from Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Serbia and Slovenia, and received broad approval.

At another event held in association with the Central European Initiative of the WTO from 3–5 October 2007 in Sovata, Romania, Secretary General Joachim Lieber reported on the latest developments in European health tourism and the EUROPESPA med seal of approval.

On 17 March 2008, a UNWTO seminar organised in association with the State Tourism Agency of the Russian Federation during a tourism exhibition in Moscow attracted about 150 participants. The World Tourism Organization was represented by its secretary general, Francesco Frangiali. ESPA Secretary General Joachim Lieber, the keynote speaker, reported on the situation in European health tourism. It was agreed that ESPA would provide close assistance to UNWTO in connection with specific topics.

The II International Thalasso Congress was held from 2–5 April 2008 in Heringsdorf on the island of Usedom in Germany. The Congress was organised and conducted by the Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania Spas Association in close conjunction with ESPA. The speakers from eight different countries described the current situation of Thalasso centres from a medical and an economic angle.

- **Congresses, board meetings, work groups**

During the third term, a total of four congresses were held in Reykjavik (Iceland), São Pedro (Portugal), Pärnu (Estonia) and Yverdon-les-Bains (Switzerland).

During the same period, 11 board meetings (including two informal ones) were held in Trenčianske Teplice (Slovakia), Cascais (Portugal), Cologne (Germany), Reykjavik (Iceland), Cologne (Germany), São Pedro do Sul (Portugal), Máriánske Lazné (Czech Republic), Wiesbaden (Germany), Pärnu (Estonia), Băile Felix (Romania) and Yverdon-les-Bains (Switzerland).

During the annual congresses, the Medicine and Local Authorities work groups had the opportunity to discuss current issues. The Marketing work group met on several occasions to develop the 'visiteuropeanspas' internet portal.

Five proposed additions and amendments were received regarding the ESPA quality criteria adopted at its general meeting on 19 May 2006 in São Pedro (Portugal). They were forwarded to the members of Committee 4. Since C4 has not met to discuss this issue since its most recent session in Pärnu (Estonia), these amendments have not been incorporated. This work group also met on the 8 September 2006 in Munich (Germany), 11 May 2007 in Pärnu (Estonia) and 26 March 2008 in Bratislava (Slovakia).

Brussels, 6 May 2008

Signed

Dr Janka Zálešáková  
President

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