

Report from the EPF President. 2008-2012

After being elected as EPF Vice-President at the Council meeting in February 2005 in Belgrade, I came to realise that the Executive's entire work during Evelyne Séchaud's term of office had been affected by debates about the EPF's so-called Working Parties.

What was all this about? The 'ten-year scientific initiative' established by David Tuckett at the beginning of his term of office and voted by Council was intended to reorganise not only the structure of the Annual Congress but also the understanding of clinical work and its theoretical foundations within the EPF. However this programme was the subject of controversial debate from the outset. No agreement between critics and supporters has yet emerged and the conflict rumbles on to this day, although the Working Parties have also greatly enlivened the conferences.

However, the actual conflict about the Working Parties is not easily revealed. While most of the clinical sub-groups at the Annual Congress were taken up enthusiastically, the influence of the core groups on the entire EPF was critically regarded and the method of the Working Parties instigated by David Tuckett was not only celebrated but also criticised. The criticism was that this kind of formalised method did not correspond to a psychoanalytic process committed to free association, thus to a process-orientated way of generating insights. The controversial question was whether and how far nomothetic methodology is needed to bring psychoanalysis closer to the 'mainstream' of medical, psychological and social-scientific research or whether such an endeavour is superfluous because it cannot do justice to the psychoanalytic method in the stricter sense. It seems to me that this conflict is in no way resolved and will continue to feature in our discussions going forward. Not only is this conflict, as I have explained elsewhere, as old as psychoanalysis itself; it also replicates the critical distance of the French associations from influences from the Anglo-American linguistic region or the IPA, as in earlier periods of the EPF (cf. e.g. Lebovici, 1986: 'Some recollections of the founding of the EPF' in the Bulletin).

The arguments constantly recur in a new guise. My own impression, however, is that this concerns another question that is related to the spirit of our times and a very fundamental problem. Younger generations seem to suffer increasingly from uncertainty. What is a right and what is a wrong interpretation? What kind of communication requires what interventions? What is the right psychoanalytic technique? All the suggestions that seem to provide answers to these questions have a strong currency. It seems to me that the methodology of the Working Parties is connected for many with the hope of finally being able to lay down what is right and what is wrong. The fact that the capacity to tolerate uncertainty lies at the heart of psychoanalytic understanding irritates some people, creates anxiety and is in a certain sense denied.

Evelyne Séchaud's established a further Working Party that sought to address some aspects of the emerging criticism and dissatisfaction. The 'Working Party on the Specificity of Psychoanalysis Today' tried to orientate its methodology firmly by the principle of 'free association'. This is now being led by Erika Kittler from Freiburg.

The main new feature of the Working Parties was that for the first time on a grander scale an EPF

research initiative was being financially supported through the reimbursement of expenses. The EPF has certainly invested funds amounting to circa one million euros in this initiative in the last ten years. In the original planning, however, hardly any care was taken to evaluate the results of the work appropriately and to make its financial support contingent on demonstrable short-term progress. Understandably this led to establishing strong subgroups that worked together well and generally in a friendly way but were in danger of not representing the results of their work transparently enough and above all reaching defined results.

At the beginning of my term of office as EPF President, after being made President Elect on the Council in Spring 2007 in Barcelona, I became aware of this conflict. One objective here was to establish the support and review of target-orientated work in the Working Parties by introducing a regular review procedure conducted by independent assessors and attempting to bring the latent conflicts into more open discussion. While the first of these mostly succeeded with help from Dieter Bürgin (General Editor of the EPF) and the whole Executive, the establishment of a 'Special Panel on Research', which was to constitute a long-term discussion forum, was not crowned with success. The composition of the group simply did not function. In any case all the Working Parties finally presented their results available up till then at a major panel at the Annual Congress in Copenhagen 2011, which were also published in a special issue of the Bulletin in 2011 as an interim report. Anyway all the Working Parties are required in the next two years at the latest finally to submit their results and thus to conclude this ten-year research initiative. With these requirements we have of course not invariably made friends, but we consider them to be indispensable.

We have learnt two different things from these experiences: first the variety of work and therefore the psychoanalytic discussion between European colleagues in clinical subgroups has had extremely positive effects. This is owed to David Tuckett. Second, we now know that the financial support of research endeavours must be structured in a way that is target-orientated, time-limited from the outset and assisted by independent reviewers.

My actual term of office began with the end of the Vienna Annual Congress in 2008, which I was able to prepare in collaboration with Evelyne Séchaud and the previous Executive, and its theme was 'The Shadow of Heritage'. From Vienna onwards, the entire new Executive was also elected: Ronny Jaffè/Milan (Vice-President), Jonathan Sklar/London (Vice-President), Judith Meszaros/Budapest (General Secretary), Dieter Bürgin/Basel (General Editor) and Anne Rosenberg/Paris (Treasurer). Judith Meszaros had to stand down after a short period in office and Denny Panitz/Athens (General Secretary) was able to take her place. I would like to express my warm thanks to the whole team at this point. We managed to develop an open, trusting and enjoyable collaboration for the entire period of office. To develop a positive working atmosphere quickly with different colleagues from the most varied European societies is truly not easy. I found this an exhilarating experience for which I am very grateful.

From March 2008 to April 2012, the Executive has met sixteen times: In Athens (1x), Basel (2x), Brussels (1x), Copenhagen (2x), London (2x), Madrid (1x), Milan (2x), Paris (2x), Rome (1x), The Hague (1x) and Tübingen (1x).

And in the same period there were nine Council meetings, once respectively in Vienna (2008), Tübingen (2008), Brussels (2009), Rome (2009), London (2010), Madrid (2010), Copenhagen (2011), The Hague (2011) and Paris (2012).

We had to withstand the most acute conflict at the Council meeting in Rome (November 2009) when the session between Council and the European Representatives suddenly wanted to make a decision about the further course of the meeting by a vote from which the Presidency was excluded. This part of the Council meetings was the most conflictual of all during both my own and Evelyne Séchaud's term of office. Here too structural problems and uncertainties are probably the reason. The structure, tasks and goals of the EPF and the IPA are substantially different. When the two meet and ambiguities exist about the significance of

the encounter, conflicts are inevitable given a different set of interests. In the meantime, Council has found a form for this that is now tried and tested. The joint meeting of the European Presidents with the EPF Executive and the European IPA representatives of the IPA Council is part of the Council meeting and is moderated by a President from the European societies. It is a meeting that always takes place at the end of Council in order to discuss common questions and considerations. But it is not part of the Council's business meeting. An unsolved fundamental problem in this context is the fact that the IPA as a component organisation—unlike the EPF as a federation of associations—has no administrative or organisational structures in the regions (Europe, North and South America) apart from subcommittees or, every six years, the International Congress. This leads to a repeatedly expressed wish to combine the two organisations, which is in itself only too understandable but has no structured organisational basis. Moreover, the regional federations have extremely different structures, a different regional importance and different goals, with the EPF having the most developed culture of psychoanalytic debate, especially in matters of clinical practice and training, and adopting a reticent approach towards the IPA's administrative problems.

Continuing Evelyne Séchaud's work, it was a particular objective of my term in office to increase the personal and thematic discussion with the other regions. This has happened until now mainly by attending all the regional congresses and meeting the regional presidents of APSaA/NAPsaC and FEPAL, as well as the IPA's administrative council. For this purpose I went in January for five consecutive years to New York (APSaA conference, 2008-2012), once to Santiago de Chile (FEPAL conference, 2008) and once to Bogotá (FEPAL conference, 2010) and I attended the IPA Congresses in Berlin (2007), Chicago (2009) and Mexico City (2011). The increasing collaboration with the regions also led to both our Annual Congress and our smaller congresses being attended regularly by colleagues from North and South America. FEPAL in particular has a great interest in deepening this collaboration and also making its many kinds of publications more accessible to the other regions by more translations into English. We explicitly support the latter. This collaboration has also led to restructuring the biannual highly traditional EPF/NAPsaC Clinical Conference for training analysts into a TriRegional Clinical Conference for clinically experienced psychoanalysts. Jonathan Sklar played a major role in this initiative.

The collaboration with the IPA began equally successfully under Claudio Eizirik's presidency, but then became more difficult with his successor Charles Hanly. The planned restructurings at Broomhills and conflicts within the IPA imposed a fairly heavy burden on the EPF's work (see the statement by the three regional Presidents in February 2011 by Leopold Nosek M.D. [FEPAL President], Warren Procci M.D. [APSaA President], Robert L. Pyles M.D. [NAPsaC President], Jonathan Sklar M.D. [EPF Vice-President] and Peter Wegner Ph.D. [EPF President] that was submitted to the Council in Copenhagen in January 2011). This is also thought to be because Charles Hanly's objectives and plans were focused to a much lesser degree on the different interests of the regions. We hope that the collaboration with the new IPA President will increase and it will also be possible to understand the structural conflicts better and to address them. But this now falls within my successor Serge Frisch's term of office.

With two exceptions it was possible for me actively to attend all the EPF's so-called small congresses, which could therefore be successfully developed together with Jonathan Sklar

the newly designated annual 'New Member Seminar' (Belgrade/Serbia 2006, Bergen/Holland 2007, Budapest/Hungary 2008, Turin/Italy 2009, Warsaw/Poland 2010, Mainz/Germany 2011), the 'Forum on Education' (Budapest 2006, Belgrade 2007, Zurich 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011) and the newly designated 'TriRegional Clinical Conference' (Tübingen 2004, Vienna 2006, Amsterdam 2008, Cascais/Portugal 2010 and Bordeaux 2012).

Furthermore, we have incorporated an additional conference on training from the Working Party on Education into the Forum on Education. By now there are so many conferences across Europe that it is necessary to pool our forces and develop what we are offering in a user-friendly way for members. All small congresses are a forum for clinical discussion in Europe and we hope that they will continue to function as well going forward as in the past. An important precondition for this generally is the local

organisers without whom even the small congresses cannot really succeed. We are therefore grateful to the colleagues and associations concerned for their support.

Perhaps I should also mention that with my term of office a further key change has occurred. In David Tuckett's term of office the EPF had employed his secretary at the University, Nancy Poller, part-time, to provide the conference organisation. Nancy then fell ill during Evelyne Séchaud's term of office and suddenly we were completely without help. We managed to obtain the conference organisers Geber&Reusch, which has now worked for the EPF since the annual congress in Athens. We are extraordinarily grateful to Brigitte Reusch and Birgitta Geber for their highly qualified work. Not only did this solution give us considerable financial advantages but also the service was considerably improved for members. With the increase in societies and members, the Executive's work is no longer conceivable without professional support.

The many different activities of the Psychoanalytic Institute for Eastern Europe (PIEE) will only be mentioned here. The Council has been regularly informed about the work by its director Paolo Fonda. The PIEE has worked autonomously, independently and highly successfully. Wherever possible, we have gladly supported its work.

The Executive has set new standards in the planning and execution of the Annual Congress and has emphasized a thematic focus that was felt to be committed to maintaining psychoanalysis in the stricter sense. Above all I would like in this respect to emphasize the close collaboration with Ronny Jaffè. The biggest change in this context was bringing forward with considerable effort the entire programme planning for the Annual Congress by around six to nine months. This meant that the leaflet sent out in autumn of the previous year already contained almost the complete final programme. One effect of this measure was that the quality of the presentations greatly increased because the presenters could prepare in good time. Furthermore the tight timescales for the translation work could be much better observed, which of course also contributed to an improvement in the quality of the texts. Please be in no doubt as to what an extraordinary fact it is that our scientific debate is fostered by three complete versions of the Bulletin in German, English and French and the simultaneous translations during the Annual Congress.

We were also keen to relate a large number of Congress events strictly to the main theme, which we increasingly achieved. The wide range of issues concerning the theme of the first interview at the Paris Congress is impressive. The next Bulletin will represent in three languages almost the complete current state of knowledge on the subject of the first interview.

The themes of the Annual Congress have not arisen merely accidentally and through local conditions. We were keen to combine some of the current key questions in psychoanalysis and provide a balance between theory and clinical practice. The themes were:

21st 2008 in Vienna: The Shadow of Heritage.

22nd 2009 in Brussels: Using different forms of unconscious communication.

23rd 2010 in London: Passion, Love and Sexuality in Psychoanalysis.

24th 2011 in Copenhagen: Anxiety and Method in Psychoanalysis.

25th 2012 in Paris: The Initial Psychoanalytic Interview and the Treatment Process.

The above-mentioned debates on particular subjects at the Annual Congress have also been described. On

the one hand, there is the adherence to the high-frequency treatment method; on the other hand, there are various justified demands for innovations and making empirical methods a subject of discussion. The greatest current problem also going forward will consist in whether and to what extent our members also actually can and want to conduct psychoanalyses in future. It has been our conviction to support the members in this respect and to encourage the necessary discourse. We are convinced that there will also be in future no better treatment method than psychoanalysis in the stricter sense for many patients but we will constantly have to confirm and attest its power of conviction in new ways.

It should be noted in passing that although in this term of office the Annual Congress was mostly held in particularly expensive European capital cities, we not only managed to maintain the annual cycle but also to operate without financial losses. The numbers of participants amounted each time to around 700 and we were able to keep the attendance costs stable in my period of office. This is also due to the sound and skilful competence of Geber&Reusch and the flawless collaboration with our Treasurer Anne Rosenberg.

All the congresses are excellently portrayed in our Bulletin, which has reached an increasingly high standard under the Editor, Dieter Bürgin. Dieter Bürgin has quietly worked in a constant and highly successful way on the selection of papers and the quality of each of the three languages. Coordinating the translators is a highly complex activity. We always take available translated texts for granted but anyone with some experience in this matter will know how difficult translating psychoanalytic texts can be. On Dieter Bürgin's initiative we have therefore invited all the translators of our Bulletin for this year to Paris in order to stimulate a discussion of the problems, to express our thanks and to ease the future editor Ursula Burkert's contact with them. We owe Dieter Bürgin an extraordinary debt of thanks.

The specific results of the work done by Working Parties have been reported elsewhere. I would like here only to mention two further clinical offerings that have also proved highly popular at our Annual Congress. First, the 'Forum for clinical issues' (Listening to listening), run for over ten years by Haydée Faimberg and also the new 'Free Clinical Groups' run by Denny Panitz and Peter Wegner, held since 2010 in London. Neither clinical forum receives any financial support from the EPF, but they enable an intensive and productive clinical discussion at our Annual Congress that has regularly been taken up by participants in good numbers. Thanks are also due of course to the colleagues who over the years have run and fostered the forum for child analysis and the forum for adolescent psychoanalysis, as well as the various ad hoc groups that have provided events in some cases for many years.

Finally I would like to remind you that during the expiring term of office the Executive has begun the so-called 'Eastern European Initiative'. This was intended to take account of the fact that many new societies have emerged in Eastern Europe that have not yet made a strong connection with the EPF. In 2009 and 2010 members of the Executive (in particular Jonathan Sklar and Ronny Jaffè) visited almost all the Eastern European societies for a weekend, gave presentations, ran clinical seminars and reported on the EPF's activities. I myself had been visiting Budapest and Zagreb. It is difficult to say how successful this endeavour has been but in Copenhagen and Paris we have been able to register far more participants from these societies at our Congress. We would be glad if this positive development continues.

A further initiative was the founding of a first EPF Archives Committee, which began its work in 2009. This neglected area concerning the EPF's history has not been easy to implement and has not yet gone beyond an initial agreement. As a second step, we have commissioned a professional archivist (Michael Steck/Lausanne) to view and capture digitally the available materials from the past, which are in fact very incomplete. As well as all the minutes of the Executive and Council meetings of my term of office, which had already been made accessible by Denny Panitz on our website for Council and Executive, we will also soon have available the corresponding minutes from 2000 to the end of 2007 for the current Council and Executive. That is a start. We hope to be able to locate further materials from surviving Executive members from earlier terms of office and would be glad of all your assistance. To continue this work, Serge Frisch will set up a new Archive Committee, and it will then be possible to define their tasks

considerably better. To commemorate the EPF's half-century, a publication 'Zur Geschichte der Psychoanalyse in Europa/On the history of psychoanalysis in Europe' is under way, which Dieter Bürgin and Peter Wegner have been asked to plan by Serge Frisch. Among other things, witnesses who are still alive (e.g. former EPF presidents) will be interviewed in person.

As you can see, the EPF's financial situation has been extremely stable over the years. The EPF has provided a great many offerings in return for the contributions made by its members. I have never known a treasurer who could manage the finances so inconspicuously as well as with such good will and efficiency. For this we are extraordinarily grateful to Anne Rosenberg.

I would like to conclude by saying that the work in the EPF has given me great happiness and represented an exciting additional experience of my professional life as a psychoanalyst. But I would also not wish to conceal the fact that the constant burden on time and through work was substantial and I have some doubts as to whether as requirements increase this activity this will continue to be feasible in future as an honorary office if it is simultaneously necessary to earn a living from psychoanalytic practice. All this has only been possible for me because the team in which I could work cooperated so naturally and all the members of the Executive proved throughout the whole period to be so responsible and committed. I would also like to thank Evelyne Séchaud, my predecessor, and all the EPF Council presidents who have supported and motivated me over the years. It has been a pleasure to advance our shared goals. To those who have found me hard to tolerate, I wish more luck with my successor. In Serge Frisch you have chosen a President whom I trust to do many things better and I hope you will also support him in his work to the best of your abilities.

My special thanks go to Denny Panitz, with whom I experienced a wonderful collaboration. Anyone who has ever found himself in the situation of having to agree and decide highly complicated connections by phone or email at short notice will understand what I am talking about.

I would like to end by thanking two friends who not only encouraged me to aspire to this office but were also always ready to listen to me in critical situations and constantly helped me to keep an overview. I would like to give my warm thanks to Ekkehard Gattig/Bremen and Joachim F. Danckwardt/Tübingen. Unfortunately Ekkehard died, most prematurely, in December 2009, which is a great loss for the DPV and for me personally. I had the privilege and the pleasure of knowing Joachim Danckwardt and Ekkehard Gattig over a long period in their role as presidents of the German Psychoanalytical Association, in their publications, seminars and in many personal discussions, and I was able to learn from both what it means to strive lifelong to further the understanding of psychoanalytic processes. Both were my immediate port of call when I felt at a loss or I had not yet managed to find the solution to a problem.

Finally I would like to thank my wife, the psychoanalyst Christine Wegner, for her unstinting and intelligent support. Without her good will and her critical distance, I would probably hardly have been able to manage my tasks adequately.

Presented at the Council meeting 2012-01, March 28th, in Paris.