

Editorial

Happy birthday: forty years of *FEBS*

Abstract The 2004 Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) Congress in Warsaw marks the 40th Anniversary of FEBS. To celebrate this event, the Executive Committee decided to publish a memoir, which chronicles the foundation of FEBS and its early development as well as presents an overview of FEBS activities and contributions that support the ever growing disciplines of biochemistry, molecular cell biology and molecular biophysics throughout Europe [Forty Years of FEBS Horst Feldmann (Ed.), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 2003, on behalf of FEBS]. This paper summarizes some of the most important aspects of this compilation.

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1. The founding of FEBS and defining its role

Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) came into official being on January 1st, 1964 with 18 adhering societies from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. This founding was preceded by joint meetings as early as 1959 between The Biochemical Society (UK) and several continental biochemical societies. The first meeting of the FEBS Council was held on Sunday, March 22nd, 1964 at the National Liberal Club in London. There the society delegates and officers of FEBS (Fig. 1) signed a copy of the statutes 'of the first hour', which filled only one page (to date the FEBS Statutes occupy some 32 pages). The most important intent is formulated in paragraph 1: "The Federation exists to promote the science of biochemistry, and in particular to encourage closer contacts between European biochemists by arranging meetings, exchanging information, and promoting contacts between the members of the Constituent Societies."

Asking myself why it was the early 1960s that there was a high interest in a closer co-operation between European institutions, I suppose that this was exactly the period after World War II, when young scientists in Europe, many of them having just finished their academic education or having started a research career, sought a forum to establish contacts with their colleagues from other European countries. Thus, it was a far-sighted decision and a rewarding initiative of the founders of FEBS to set up an organization that promotes co-operation among European biochemists. By organizing annual meetings and fostering advanced courses, FEBS not only provided training in new experimental strategies, but also brought together young biochemists from all over Europe. Clearly, this concept was to bear fruit: it provided an excellent opportunity among young researchers to exchange their ideas and views, both in scientific and in political terms. I think that, in this way, scientists have contributed a great deal to overcome national barriers, both in building contacts between people from 'Western' and 'Eastern' countries, and in promoting the idea of a European Union. I even dare say that in this respect scientists were much ahead of

the current political developments. Remember, it was only in 1967 that the former bodies of the EEC (founded in 1957) were unified and the European Union came into existence. However, this union did not include any of the "Eastern countries", and it took until the year 2004 for the EU to execute the step of integrating 10 new Eastern European member states.

Around 1989/1990, the Federation counted 27 member societies. FEBS aimed at intensifying contacts and cooperation throughout all of Europe, and aimed especially to include the Eastern European Societies. After the 'silent' revolution in the Eastern block, FEBS was open to these newly independent countries gaining membership, though sometimes it was not easy for the council to define the boundaries of the 'European area'. Today, with more than 40 000 members distributed among 41 countries, FEBS is one of the largest organizations in the European life sciences. The members (Constituent and Associated Societies) of FEBS, as of 2003, are shown in Fig. 2.

From its beginning, all FEBS activities were supervised by a council, which is composed of one delegate from each constituent society and the members of the Executive Committee (Table 1). The council meets during every full FEBS Meeting and, when necessary, on other occasions. Between meetings of the council, the administration is vested in the Executive Committee, which has overall responsibility and is composed of the Chairman (of Council), Immediate Past Chairman, Secretary General, Treasurer, Chairman of the Publications Committee, Chairman of the Advances Courses Committee, Fellowships Officer, and Meetings Counselor.

2. The years in retrospect

The foundation of FEBS has brought forth a number of fruitful activities and achievements over the years. This underlines the importance and merits of an organization like FEBS in the concert of international efforts "to advance research and education in the science of biochemistry and molecular biology".

2.1. FEBS meetings

Since its foundation, FEBS holds a meeting every year (Fig. 3) in which the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology does not organize a congress. For the years when an IUBMB Congress takes place outside Europe, FEBS organizes a Special Meeting with a restricted program. Normally, no meeting is held when an IUBMB Congress takes place in Europe. The financial arrangements for a FEBS Meeting (since 2004 renamed FEBS Congress) and its organization is the sole responsibility of the host society. This arrangement has proven to be highly desirable, since local conditions vary so much that it is inconceivable for a central organization to do the job, unless the meetings were held in the same one or two places every year. The most stimulating aspect of the present system, however, is the diversity of places where FEBS Meetings have been or will be held and the freshness and enthusiasm with which each one is organized. When one considers the current size of the FEBS Meetings and



Fig. 1. First meeting of FEBS Council at the National Liberal Club in London. From left to right (clockwise around the table): H. Veldstra (NL), S. Bergström (S), F. Lundquist (DK), M. Brenner (CH), W.F.J. Culbertson (Treasurer, The Biochemical Society), A. Sols (E), K. Zakrzewski (PO), W.J. Whelan (Secretary-General, FEBS), F.C. Happold (UK, Chairman, FEBS), S.P. Datta (UK, Treasurer, FEBS), S. Mason (Cook & Son, Ltd.), S. Moore (IUB), J.E. Courtois (F), R.H.S. Thompson (Secretary-General, IUB), H.V.R. Arnstein (Secretary, Biochemical Society), E.H. Fischer (IL), T.K. Nikolov (BU), P.N. Campbell (Secretary, Biochemical Society), V. Nurmikko (FI), S.F. Comes da Costa (PT), O. Hoffmann-Ostenhof (AU), C. Liébecq (BE), E. Auhagen (D), S. Laland (N).

all the problems involved in their organization, it is remarkable how few serious difficulties there have been.

In order to facilitate the organization of the annual meetings and pass on the experience of former organizers, the office of Meetings Counselor was created in 1978. The question as to whether it is sensible to organize such large, broad meetings

has been intensely discussed. But finally, the general agreement was that FEBS Meetings should continue to be held since they were found to be very beneficial, especially for young scientists. FEBS Meetings often provide the only opportunity for young people to present their results to a broad audience of specialists and to meet outstanding scientists.

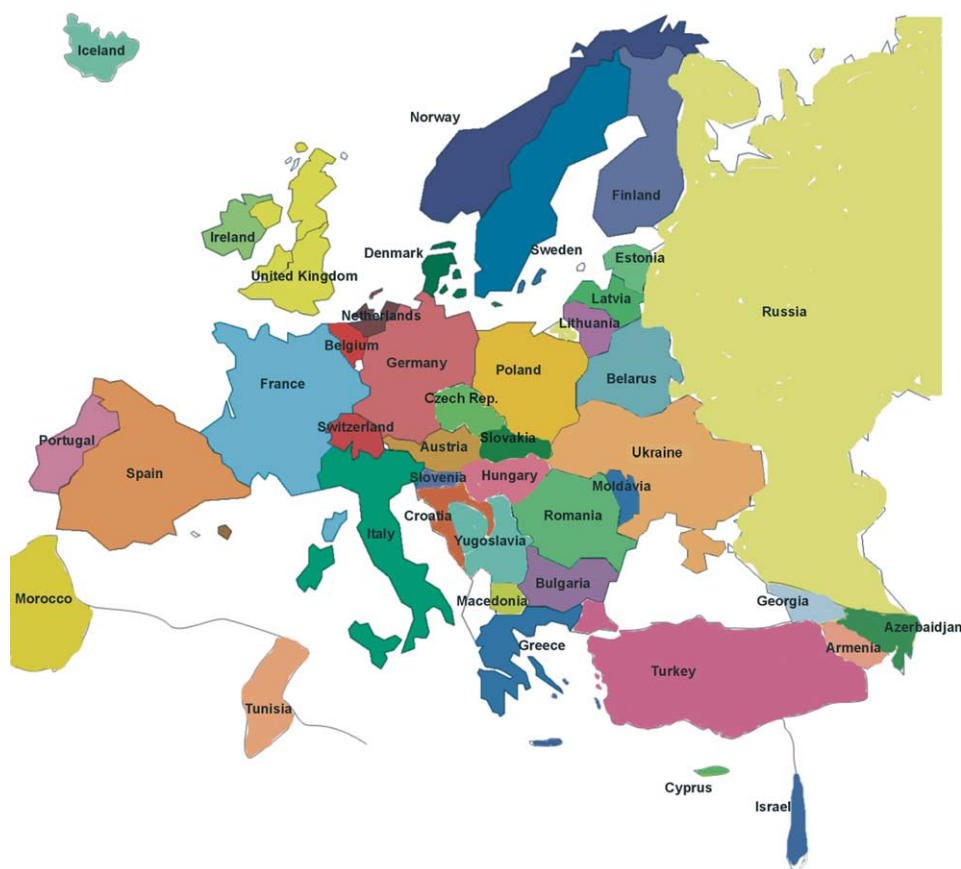


Fig. 2. Member Societies of FEBS in 2003.

Table 1
Composition of the FEBS Executive Committee

<i>FEBS Chairmen</i>		
1964–1965	Frank Happold	United Kingdom
1965–1966	Otto Hoffmann-Ostenhof	Austria
1966–1967	K. Zakrzewski	Poland
1967–1968	Alexander Pihl	Norway
1967–1969	Frantisek Sorm	Czechoslovakia
1969–1971	J.R. Villanueva	Spain
1971–1972	Todor Nikolov	Roumania
1972–1974	Laurens L.M. van Deenen	The Netherlands
1974–1975	Ferenc Guba	Hungary
1975–1976	Jean-Pierre Ebel	France
1977–1978	Frank Lundquist	Denmark
1978–1979	Samuel Rapoport	Germany (DDR)
1980–1981	Nathan Sharon	Israel
1981–1983	Hamish Keir	United Kingdom
1983–1984	Claude Liébecq	Belgium
1984–1986	Yuri Ovchinnikov	Russia
1986–1987	Karl Decker	Germany
1987–1989	Vito Turk	Slovenia
1989–1990	Doriano Cavallini	Italy
1990–1992	Peter Friedrich	Hungary
1992–1993	Norma Ryan	Ireland
1993–1995	Lars Thelander	Sweden
1995–1996	Joachim Seelig	Switzerland
1996–1998	Carlos Gancedo	Spain
1998–1999	Brian Clark	Denmark
1999–2002	Guy Dirheimer	France
2003	Claudina Rodrigues-Pousada	Portugal

Secretary Generals

1965–1967	William J. Whelan	United Kingdom
1968–1974	Henry R.V. Arnstein	United Kingdom
1975–1977	Laurens L.M. van Deenen	The Netherlands
1978–1983	Moritz Yomtov	Bulgaria
1984–1989	Guy Dirheimer	France
1990–1998	Vito Turk	Slovenia
1999	Julio Celis	Denmark

Treasurers

1964–1990	Prakash S. Datta	United Kingdom
1991	John Mowbray	United Kingdom

Meetings Counselors

1978–1987	Simon G. van den Bergh	The Netherlands
1988–1996	Horst Kleinkauf	Germany
1997	Joan Guinovart	Spain

Chairmen Fellowships Committee

1979–1983	Guy Dirheimer	France
1984–1992	Carlos Gancedo	Spain
1993–2001	Israel Pecht	Israel
2002	Maciej Nalecz	Poland

Chairmen Publications Committee

1966–1972	Claude Liébecq	Belgium
1972–1974	Bo G. Malmström	Sweden
1975–1977	Samuel Rapoport	Germany
1978–1983	Trever W. Goodwin	United Kingdom
1984–1989	Uriel Z. Littauer	Israel
1990 (Interim)	Vito Turk	Slovenia
1990–1996	Karl Decker	Germany
1997	Willy Stalmans	Belgium

Chairmen Advanced Courses Committee

1965–1967	Henry R.V. Arnstein	United Kingdom
1967–1970	Peter N. Campbell	United Kingdom
1970–1977	Max Gruber	The Netherlands
1978–1986	Giorgio Bernardi	France
1987–1995	Horst Feldmann	Germany
1996–2004	Karel Wirtz	The Netherlands

Chairman of the Science and Society Committee

2002	Federico Mayor	Spain
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Table 1 (continued)

<i>Chairman of the Working Group to Explore Ways of Improving Assistance to Central and Eastern European Countries (WOGA)</i>		
1999	Guy Dirheimer	France
<i>Working Group on Education in Biochemistry</i>		
1999	J. Wallach	France
<i>Member of the Executive Committee for a one time 3 year appointment: Working Group on the Career of Young Scientists</i>		
2002	Marja Makarow	Finland
<i>Working Group on Women in Science</i>		
2003	Sissel Rogne	Norway

When FEBS was first established, each host society was free to make its own arrangements regarding publishing the FEBS Symposia. Although the possibility of FEBS setting up its own publishing house has been discussed, there seems to be little advantage in pursuing this idea, particularly in view of the difficulties experienced by many scientific periodicals in maintaining their circulation. Since 1989, when the publication of the proceedings ceased, *FEBS Letters* publishes a special issue for each FEBS Meeting with short reviews from the invited lecturers, including the *Datta Lecture*. Similarly, the *European Journal of Biochemistry* publishes the abstracts of the meeting and the *Sir Hans Krebs Lecture*.

2.2. FEBS advanced courses

Early in the history of FEBS, at the second Council Meeting in Vienna in 1965, the idea was put forward that FEBS should organize special courses. Henry Arnstein proposed sponsoring summer schools and a committee was formed under his chairmanship to recruit potential organizers. Christian de Duve organized the first such school in Louvain, Belgium. Gradually, the committee broadened its activities and began sponsoring symposia, workshops, round-table discussions, etc., and the summer schools were renamed “advanced courses” (since some of them had been held in winter!). Arnstein chaired the committee for the period 1965–1967, followed by Peter Campbell (1967–1970) and Max Gruber (1970–1977). In 1971, the Youth Travel Fund, which allows young scientists to attend the advanced courses, was initiated. After 1977, under the chairmanship of Giorgio Bernardi, the Advanced Courses Committee increased its activities and adopted a new policy, namely to sponsor events of educational value to younger scientists and to refuse funding symposia and other types of meetings beneficial mainly to well-established scientists. The new policy underlined the concern FEBS felt for young biochemists, who are entitled to receive grants from the FEBS Youth Travel Fund to attend FEBS Advanced Courses.

During the period 1973–1995, the Advanced Courses Committee was also responsible for selecting and sponsoring lecture tours by prominent scientists, both from within and outside Europe, who visited different ‘FEBS’ countries. Besides giving lectures, they held discussions and consultations with several laboratories. These lectures were financed by the publishers of Springer-Verlag and were therefore termed “FEBS Ferdinand Springer Tours”.

2.3. FEBS publications

Another early suggestion was that FEBS should venture into scientific publishing. In 1966, Theodor Bücher, who was appointed chairman of a sub-committee, proposed that instead of FEBS starting a new journal, he would try to convince the



Fig. 3. The 28 FEBS Meetings and 7 Special Meetings held since 1964.

German society to persuade Springer-Verlag to convert the *Biochemische Zeitschrift* into the FEBS journal. His suggestion was adopted and the FEBS officers were empowered to negotiate with Springer-Verlag to form what is now known as the *European Journal of Biochemistry*. Claude Liébecq was already appointed as Editor-in-Chief and Sir Hans Krebs became Honorary Chairman of the Editorial Board.

In 1967, the idea of a new journal was raised again and presented to the FEBS Council. After many discussions, Bücher took the initiative of asking prominent European biochemists at the Oslo meeting, if they would join the editorial board of the new journal. As a result of these discussions, the first editorial board of *FEBS Letters* came into being. It was also agreed that *FEBS Letters* would have a policy of rapidly publishing short communications, but that these publications were to be in a final form, i.e., not to be republished elsewhere. After contacting several potential publishers, the sub-committee chose North-Holland Publishers as they had expertly developed the photo-offset process, which was ideal for the rapid publication envisaged for *FEBS Letters*. Prakash Datta, who had thrown all his weight behind the proposal, became the Managing Editor, and the first issue of *FEBS Letters* appeared in July 1968.

These publication initiatives were extremely beneficial to FEBS: the income from the two journals funds a large portion of the organization's activities. FEBS had practically no monetary resources when it was first founded. In fact, its assets in 1967, which came from very modest member fees, did not exceed 1000 British pounds. This situation changed thanks to the income of the two journals and the rigor and know-how of

the two successive treasurers of FEBS, Prakash Datta and John Mowbray. This income even permitted FEBS to develop new initiatives, particularly those in favor of young scientists, who remain one of 'FEBS' major concerns.

I should also mention the FEBS Bulletin produced twice yearly between 1965 and 2001, first by Prakash Datta, and from 1984 onward by Jan Skoda. The names of the colleagues involved in managing the publications and other activities are listed in Table 2.

2.4. FEBS fellowships

The FEBS Fellowships program started in 1979 and with Guy Dirheimer as the first Fellowships Officer (1979–1983), the program got off to a good start and became very successful. The fellowships were initially established to support short-term visits (up to three months) by members of any FEBS Constituent Society to laboratories in another 'FEBS' country. These visits enabled researchers to carry out experiments that required special techniques, or conduct other forms of scientific collaboration and advanced training. In the course of the first five years, 200 fellowships were granted out of 298 requests.

In 1983, the council decided that fellowships should not be awarded to undergraduate students or those just beginning their research careers (a Ph.D. degree or a publication in a major journal is a prerequisite), nor are senior scientists eligible. That same year, Summer Fellowships and Long Term Fellowships were established by FEBS. The latter was a very ambitious, but absolutely necessary activity. Due to administrative constraints, it is still not possible in many European

Table 2
Other appointments

<i>Chairmen of the Editorial Board of the European Journal of Biochemistry</i>		
1967–1988	Claude Liébecq	Belgium
1989–1998	Philipp Christen	Switzerland
1999	Richard Perham	United Kingdom
<i>Managing Editors of FEBS Letters</i>		
1964–1985	Prakash Datta	United Kingdom
1986–2000	Giorgio Semenza	Switzerland
2000–2001	Matti Saraste	Germany
2001	Felix Wieland	Germany
<i>Editors of FEBS Bulletin</i>		
1965–1983	Prakash Datta	United Kingdom
1984–2001	Jan Skoda	Czech Republic
<i>Counselor of SARS</i>		
1990	Peter Campbell	United Kingdom

countries (unlike in the USA) to include salaries in grants or convert bench and equipment funds to post-doctoral fellowships. This activity turned out to be rather expensive, and as FEBS never has been supported by public (government) funds, the money had to be found from its own resources.

Bursaries permitting young scientists to attend the FEBS Meetings were created in 1990. To aid young biochemists and molecular biologists in some Central and Eastern European countries, “Collaborative Experimental Scholarships” were established. Additionally, “Follow-up Research Grants” were created to support the installation of long term fellows in their country of origin and to help offset the brain drain, which other fellowships might promote. These grants should be supplemented by paying decent salaries to young researchers in their home institutions.

2.5. FEBS awards

In 1968, the Sir Hans Krebs Lecture and Medal was endowed by a generous capital gift from the Lord Rank Centre for Research and, since 1973, is awarded annually to an active European researcher for outstanding achievements in biochemistry and molecular biology or a related field. Each year, the Organizing Committee chooses a recipient who delivers a plenary lecture and is presented with a silver medal at the FEBS Meeting. The first recipient of this award was Max Perutz, whose lecture was entitled ‘X-Ray Analysis, Structure and Function of Enzymes’.

On the 10th Anniversary of FEBS, the *Gesellschaft für Biologische Chemie* (now *Gesellschaft für Biochemie und Molekularbiologie, GBM*) offered two prizes to be awarded at each FEBS Meeting for outstanding achievements in the fields of biochemistry and molecular biology. These are provided from the interest on a generous capital donation from *Boehringer Mannheim GmbH* and *Eppendorf Gerätebau Netheler und Hinz GmbH*. The prize is awarded to a person under the age of 40, who is selected from among the FEBS Meeting invited lecturers.

Also inaugurated as part of the 10th Anniversary celebrations, a *Diplôme d'Honneur* is awarded to individuals judged by the Executive Committee as having made an exceptional contribution to FEBS activities. Nominations are solicited from the constituent societies and the Executive Committee selects the recipients of the Diplôme. Diplômes are then presented at the annual FEBS Meetings.

The *Datta Lectureship Award* is funded by generous capital gifts from *Elsevier Science Publishers* and is awarded for outstanding achievement in the field of biochemistry and molecular biology or a related area. The award was set up in 1986 and is presented at each FEBS Meeting to a plenary lecturer from one of the ‘FEBS’ countries.

The *Theodor Bücher Lecture and Medal* was endowed by a generous capital gift from Frau Ingrid Bücher and, since 1999, has been awarded for outstanding achievements in biochemistry and molecular biology or a related science.

2.6. FEBS interactions

FEBS became the model for sister organizations; PAABS, in the Americas, and FAOB in Asia and Oceania. These three organizations now work closely with the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and greatly assist the IUBMB, since the Union's contacts with individual biochemists are only possible via the societies. The regional organizations link IUBMB with the societies. Also, FEBS is represented on the board of the European Cell Biology Organization. There is no doubt that effective collaboration between the various international organizations interested in biochemistry and allied fields is highly desirable. An important step in this direction was to establish closer co-operation with the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO), with which in the early years there had only been sporadic contact.

3. New FEBS activities since 1999 and FEBS prospects

In 1999, it became evident that new activities should be developed by FEBS. The first idea, proposed by Julio Celis, was to set up a *Science and Society Committee*, with the goal to bridge the gap between scientists and the general population. This way, FEBS could better identify issues of public concern, which result from research developments. Federico Mayor, former Director General of UNESCO, was appointed chairman of this committee. The 41st FEBS Council in Lisbon (2001) adopted the terms of reference for the committee, which are: 1. To discuss and advise the Executive Committee on problems arising or foreseen from advancements in science. 2. To participate in public debates and make recommendations on behalf of FEBS. 3. To interact with other organizations engaged in similar activities. 4. To organize a symposium or colloquium at the annual FEBS Meetings.

On the occasion of the 26th FEBS Meeting in Nice, an organized workshop called “Teaching Biochemistry in Europe” was very well attended. As a consequence, Guy Dirheimer proposed the establishment of an *Education in Biochemistry* working group to the Executive Committee in 2000. Education is clearly mentioned at the beginning of the ‘FEBS’ statutes as one of its principle objectives.

At the council meeting in Birmingham in 2000, it was also decided to increase the Executive Committee by two members. Starting in 2002, these new members would serve one three-year term and act not only as a liaison between Council, the Constituent Societies and the Executive Committee, but would also be responsible for specific tasks. Marja Makarow and Sissel Rogne were nominated, and later approved at the Council Meeting in Lisbon, to oversee the *Careers of Young Scientists* and the *Role of Women in Science*, respectively. One of the rewarding initiatives of Marja Makarow was to establish

a *FEBS Forum for Young Scientists*, which proceeds the annual FEBS Meetings. The first of these forums was organized in connection with the Lisbon meeting, followed by similar events in Istanbul and Brussels.

Another recent initiative of FEBS was to establish a *Working Group to explore ways to improve assistance to Biochemists of Central and Eastern European Countries* in 2000. This group has already traveled to Rumania and Ukraine, where it defined the level of supplementary assistance to be added to the “Scientific Apparatus Recycling Scheme (SARS)”; a program which was created in 1990, and to this day is brilliantly managed by Peter Campbell.

Under the direction of its dynamic Secretary General, Julio Celis, FEBS has further developed its relationship with the IUBMB. This can be demonstrated not only by the organization of common Congress in 2000, but also through other important initiatives. At the FEBS Council meeting in Istanbul 2002, it was decided to expand the activities of FEBS and establish a Working Group actively engaged in the realization of the European Research Area (ERA) and a European Research Council (ERC). These initiatives aim at fostering the integration and co-ordination of science in Europe. To ensure the participation of the scientific community in the initial stages of the ERC discussions, FEBS, the EMBO, and the European Life Sciences Forum joined their efforts in 2003. There is no doubt that FEBS could play a major role in establishing the ERA, as its members are distributed across many European countries. This will further strengthen FEBS role as one of the leading life science organizations in Europe, thereby benefiting all biochemists and molecular biologists whose role in the achievement of these sciences will continue to grow in the century that has just begun.

4. Reminiscences of the FEBS meeting Warsaw 1966

I myself became aware of FEBS through the early meetings held in Warsaw, Oslo and Prague. They provided excellent opportunities for a ‘beginner’ to follow novel developments in biochemistry and molecular biology and to present his own results in short talks.

The 3rd FEBS Meeting was organized by the Polish Biochemical Society in 1966, and the Palace of Culture and Science in the center of Warsaw was chosen as the convention site (Fig. 4). Sessions were held in the Congress Hall and in smaller lecture halls at the 4th, 6th and 12th floor of the palace, which was built in the confectioner’s style since it was a ‘gift’ from the Soviet Union. Only much later did it become clear to me why the Polish Biochemical Society chose the year 1966 to host a FEBS Meeting: this year marked the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the Polish State by Duke Mieszko, who converted to the Christian faith in 966. His son, Boleslav Chrobry, succeeded enormously in extending the Polish territory.

I vividly remember that the program was scheduled in four (mostly parallel) sections: G – Properties and Function of Genetic Elements (Symposium contributions and communications); P – Biochemistry of Blood Platelets (Colloquium contributions and communications); M – Biochemistry of Mitochondria (Colloquium contributions and communications); and F – Free papers. In the Symposium ‘Genetic Elements’, contributions during the first three days were devoted to timely topics, such as the genetic code, molecular structures of nucleic



Fig. 4. Reminiscences from the 1966 FEBS Meeting in Warsaw.

acids (especially tRNAs), cytoplasmic DNAs, bacterial transformation, and virus replication. Though supplies at that time were short and restoration of the picturesque old town had just been begun, the organizers offered an attractive social program: we could enjoy a great performance of Gounod’s *Faust* at the Warsaw Opera House (Teatr Wielki) and admire the completely renovated Chateau of Wilanów. We also discovered the splendid restaurant ‘Krokodil’ situated at the Old Market Place.

5. Concluding remarks

There is no doubt that over the years FEBS has greatly contributed to the development of biochemistry and molecular biology throughout Europe and the world. There is also no doubt that FEBS, though mature, has preserved its youthful vigor and will continue its beneficial activities in the development of science. It is a pity that in this short article it is impossible to pay tribute to those colleagues involved in the foundation and successful development of FEBS, and to those who have served as FEBS Officers or as members of the various committees with great devotion and enthusiasm (see Tables 1 and 2). I am convinced that some of these reminiscences will be raised again during the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of FEBS at the 2004 FEBS Congress in Warsaw. I wish FEBS a flourishing future and perseverance in its endeavor.

Acknowledgements: Prakash Datta, London, has kindly provided photographs for Fig. 1. A selection of pictures memorizing the history of FEBS has been made available on a WEB page: <http://biochemie.web.med.uni-muenchen.de/FEBS-Warsaw/>.

Reference

- [1] Forty Years of FEBS Horst Feldmann (Ed.), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 2003, on behalf of FEBS.

Horst Feldmann
Adolf-Butenandt-Institut, Molecular Biology
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany
E-mail address: horst.feldmann@bio.med.uni-muenchen.de