Dear colleagues and friends,

Over the last decade ESSKA has tripled its membership and matched this with a daring expansion of education and publishing. We can now be proud of a world-class orthopaedic journal; a fellowship programme that brings us international renown; an ambitious publishing arm; and a confident use of the latest technology, witness our Academy and online journal JEO. In this relentless quest to raise standards, we have developed a network of teaching centres, created alliances with 34 national societies across Europe, and many international partner societies beyond Europe. And beneath all this, steadily but inexorably, we have improved surgical expertise, by concentrating on specific pathologies and specific joints of the body. ESSKA has become much more than we hoped. It has become “the stuff of our dreams”.

But how was all this possible? The short answer is that ESSKA had a dream, and then worked extremely hard to realise it. Beyond this, however, there’s *je ne sais quoi* about ESSKA. Let me call it ESSKA’s dynamism. I felt this palpably at our 4th Strategic and Leadership meeting, held in Megève, France.

Despite their demanding schedules, a group of 19 ESSKA leaders was able to gather for this two-day event. They included the full Board, the Section leaders, the Committee chairmen, the Journal editors, the Glasgow Congress chairman, and three representatives of ESSKA’s staff. Together we pondered our society’s past, debated the present, and tried to shape our future. And the atmosphere was indeed dynamic.

Given our recent progress it’s become clear that such an exercise has become necessary, on a regular basis, to keep all parties apprised, and keep them aligned to a shared strategy. Having attended the first three Strategic meetings what struck me, forcefully, was how very different this one felt. During previous meetings the talk had mostly been about ESSKA’s structure, and how we could adapt it to pressing problems. This time we were more relaxed, and able to range wider afield. And this reflects the society’s good administrative health, under the leadership of our Executive Director, Mrs. Zhanna Kovalchuk.

ESSKA provides its members with access to a community of peers, which stretches across Europe, and beyond. If they are young, they can learn from their seniors and get opportunities for academic advancement. If they are established luminaries, they can disseminate their experience. Ultimately, this is ESSKA’s role. We create a forum for the free and unfettered exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas.

In all this, ESSKA has now set the standards, and maintaining them will be challenging. We shall, I am sure, face them with professionalism.

But it is important to remember that we remain a volunteer organisation, which relies on individual volunteers. In my presidential address at Barcelona, and my recent KSSTA editorial (*The Making of ESSKA: from an organisation to an institution* [1]), I emphasised the importance of our volunteers. Over 200 of our members, from Europe and beyond, give up their time to serve on ESSKA’s Board and Sections and Committees, not to mention our ad-hoc working groups and editorial boards. Without their commitment, ESSKA could never have become what it is.

Also, we are a surgical scientific society — we have a scalpel on our logo, remember — and that sets us apart from other medical societies, where technical skill is not an issue. As the poet Ted Hughes said: “Ours is an argument of bone, and tendon”. We work at a practical level. So we need to improve our operating procedures, by developing consensus guidelines for indications and for therapeutic principles. That means co-operating with the fields of prevention and rehabilitation. We also need new surgical products and instruments, to make our surgery safer and less invasive. And that requires a carefully independent and blameless co-operation with the medical industry. And all this, when regulatory bodies are always changing the rules. Combining these tasks is not easy, with a diverse continent such as Europe, where medical-culture and health-care systems vary from country to country.

Orthopaedic surgery is always evolving. To keep ahead, ESSKA needs many things. We need clear-sighted and dedicated leadership, professionalism, and quality staff, to ensure that we’re sustainable in the long-run. Above all else, we need our volunteers, who are dedicated, straightforward, respectful and trusting. Having chaired this year’s Strategy and Leadership meeting, I can assure you that they have these qualities in plenty. And they have dynamism. ESSKA will keep on running!

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Romain Seil
ESSKA President