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1. President's Message: The State of the Society

André Nollkaemper

Dear colleagues,

This is the last 'President's Message' that I will write before handing over the presidency at the upcoming ESIL Annual Conference in Naples, and it provides me with a good opportunity to reflect on the state of the Society.

When the Board elected me as president, I set several objectives for moving the Society forward. These objectives were a sustained growth in membership, a better representation of ESIL in the various regions of Europe, a better connection between the academic and professional activities and the members of the Society, and a further professionalization of the Society and its secretariat.

The last point is perhaps the most important. All the other ambitions of the Society will come to naught if not supported by a professional secretariat with sufficient capacity. Here, we could not have done better. The ESIL secretariat, based at the European University Institute's Academy of European Law, has been in the excellent hands of Joyce Davies and Valentina Spiga, now joined by Héléne Debuire Franchini. Whereas the optimal size of the secretariat needed to match the scope of the Society's activities will need to be under continuous scrutiny, it is important to note that the increase in membership has led to a sufficient increase in funds that will enable the Society to secure that match.

The Society has done well in reaching the aim of a sustained growth in membership: the total number of members has been slowly but steadily increasing each year. The Board has discussed ways to further increase membership in lower-income countries and a proposal for reducing membership fees for members from

those countries who are unable to pay the full fee will be presented at the General Assembly in Naples.

We have also done well in terms of spreading the Society across Europe. While the Society has sometimes been seen as predominantly North-Western European, this is no longer an accurate reflection of the actual activities of the Society – indeed, in the last few years the Society has become more truly European than ever. In the last year alone, ESIL events have taken place in Istanbul, Prague, Granada, and Kyiv, allowing the Society to engage with new groups of international lawyers. There is certainly more to be done, but we are on the right track. The Naples conference, for which the available 500 places are quickly being filled, will be the next event on the agenda, and a range of activities in many different parts of Europe are in preparation for the years ahead.

In terms of bridging the connections between academia and practice, more work needs to be done, in particular by involving private practitioners more in the work of the Society. Perhaps the Society is too often (rightly or wrongly) seen as more interested in doctrinal and theoretical questions, not offering enough for those (potential) members who seek concrete leads on particular legal questions. At the same time, the ongoing cooperation with international courts (both the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice) has now provided a firm basis on which the Society can build – to the mutual benefit of the courts and the members of the Society.

On each of the above points, the Society has made good progress. Of course, more can be done but if there is one lesson I have learned during my term as president, it is that the speed of progress in a society like ESIL depends most of all on the ability of its members to find time for ESIL activities alongside all their other professional commitments. From this perspective, it is remarkable that, thanks to continued input from so many of you – in particular, Board members, local organisers of ESIL events, and all the committed Interest Group conveners - the Society is where it is now.

I look forward to seeing you in Naples,

André Nollkaemper

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