

Motivation Letter – Béla Merkely

Building Bridges Between Western and Eastern Europe



First of all, I would like to tell how much honoured I feel to have been nominated to the position of Treasurer of the European Heart Rhythm Association. It is the first time that someone from my country is nominated to a position at EHRA. In case of my election, I would commit everything to deserve this trust.

I have been participating in the work of the European Society of Cardiology and its associations for more than 16 years. From 1996 to 2004 I served as the National Delegate of the Working Group on Cardiac Pacing of ESC. In 2004 I became a Member of the National Societies Board of EHRA and I have been in this board for more than 8 years. From 2009 to 2011 I was Co-chairman of the National Societies Committee of EHRA and in 2010 I was the Organiser of an EHRA Summit in Budapest which attracted 200 registered participants from 31 countries. I have also been contributing to the work of the Credentials Committee of ESC and the EuroPCR Relations Committee at EAPCI. I have been the Eastern Initiative Coordinator at the National Societies Board of EHRA since 2011.

At the Hungarian Society of Cardiology I have also been holding offices for 18 years. I have been Secretary, Vice-President and President of the Hungarian Heart Rhythm Association, Member of the Scientific Board and President of the Working Group of Interventional Cardiology. From May 2010 to May 2013 I was President of the Hungarian Society of Cardiology and presently I am Past-President of the Society.

This experience gave me the opportunity to understand the structure and the operation of both the National Societies and the European Society of Cardiology and its associations as well, such as the European Heart Rhythm Association.

Over the last decade, EHRA has become the indisputable leader of the profession of electrophysiology, arrhythmias and pacing in Europe. For now it hosts already 53 Member countries and therefore an opportunity presents itself for us to collaborate and fight together against the impact of arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death.

A primordial issue is that there are still large inequalities in the acces to certain device therapies in Europe. I am convinced that this can be improved by the raising of awareness, the harmonisation of education and accreditation and by procuring greater political and economic care and support for the primary and secondary prevention of sudden cardiac death, heart failure, and arrhythmias.

This was also the focus of the EHRA Summit of 2010 that the Hungarian Society of Cardiology and the European Heart Rhythm Association jointly organized. The Summit was the third leg of the Eastern Initiative which already had had two meetings: in Visegrád, Hungary in 2009 and in Pilsen, Czech Republic in 2010.

The Summit of Budapest was subtitled “ICD for Life Initiative – Fighting against Sudden Cardiac Death in Emerging Economies” as the aim of the summit was to demonstrate the benefit and efficacy of the prevention of sudden cardiac death. Many arrhythmias could be treated by means of device therapy and this would also reduce death rates. Nevertheless, many patients with high risk of SCD still do not undergo ICD implantation. The reason is partly economic, partly due to the lack of public awareness and the lack of qualified specialists.

The main message of EHRA Summit was that the professional collaboration does not suffice to remain within the country borders for the prevention of SCD. The collaboration has to cross borders to develop unified international professional, health economical, and health political strategy. And this is one of the reasons why I am convinced that EHRA can play an important role in helping for the countries in need. I consider the “ICD for Life Initiative” an issue of utmost importance and therefore, in September 2011 when the Hungarian Society of Cardiology organized the Alpe Adria Cardiology Meeting in Budapest, there I also devoted a session to the initiative. We invited lecturers from 18 countries, especially from Central-Eastern Europe. Then in March 2012 we also organized an ICD for Life Meeting with Prof. Ali Oto at their congress in Antalya. Besides, I helped in the organization of the “ICD for Life Summit” in Belgrade in October 2012 and also co-wrote a chapter in the new EHRA White Book.

I think that Hungary has done an exemplary work in the respect of acceptance of device therapies. The Hungarian Society of Cardiology has been working for more than a decade so that today Hungary could belong to the “green region” of Central-Eastern Europe which means that the number of implanted cardiac rhythm management devices approaches the healthcare demands.

At the beginning of the 90'ies at Semmelweis University we managed to launch an arrhythmological profile that had not been existed practically and we elevated it to a European level. In the same time arrhythmology had become a leading topic of cardiology in Hungary.

Semmelweis University Heart and Vascular Center has several scientific cooperation projects with a wide range of Western and Central European Heart Centers such as that of England, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Russia. I would like to strengthen and widen these relations and use them in order to build bridges between Western and Eastern Europe.

I would like to use my experience and the possibilities given by Board membership to have this cardiological subspecialty which shows an extreme development grabbed these opportunities in Europe. My EHRA activity has always been inspired by EHRA's positive strategy to look ahead and treat the consequences of the financial crisis proactively. Besides, the earlier elected Board Members and the President-Elect also inspire me for work.

I reckon that I also have the necessary managerial experiences for a Treasurer position. I have been Director and Chairman of Semmelweis University Heart Center, later Semmelweis University Heart and Vascular Center for six years, have directed the Hungarian Society of Cardiology as a President for three years and have also been the President of the Cardiology Council of Professional College in Hungary. I also obtained an MA Degree as Manager in Health Economics at Semmelweis University, Budapest.

In case of my election, I will do my best to help the work of the European Heart Rhythm Association.

Prof. Dr. Béla Merkely
Past-President of the Hungarian Society of Cardiology
Past-President of the Hungarian Heart Rhythm Association