

*Editorial***BANTAO Association - from Foundation to Present and Future Perspectives**

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The idea to establish Balkan Society of Nephrology was born in Skopje, in May 1991, on the eve of the Balkan wars, when the nephrologists from Macedonia (M. Polenakovic), Bulgaria (D. Nenov), Serbia (A. Radmilovic) and Turkey (K. Onen) signed a memorandum in which this idea was articulated. Two years later, on 9 October 1993, at the first Congress of the Macedonian Society of Nephrology, Balkan Cities Association of Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation and Artificial Organs (BANTAO) was established. Scientific and technical cooperation in the fields of nephrology and artificial organs between the regions on the Balkan Peninsula and the world was highlighted as the main goal of BANTAO. Despite the turbulent times in Balkan Peninsula the I BANTAO Congress was held in Varna from September 22 to 24th, 1995 (President - D. Nenov, Varna), that was an impressive event. Fernando Valderribano, Chairman of the EDTA-ERA Registry, reported on that event with a lot of sympathy in the paper entitled "Nephrologists of the Balkan countries meet across political frontiers and war fronts - an example to politicians!" [2].

BANTAO continues to live and to grow: the II Congress of BANTAO was held in September 1997 in Struga, (President - M. Polenakovic, Skopje), the III BANTAO Congress in September 1998 in Belgrade (President - Lj. Djukanovic, Belgrade), the IV Congress of BANTAO in Izmir in November 1999 (President - A. Akcicek, Izmir) and the V Congress of BANTAO in Thessaloniki in September 2001 (President - P. Stathakis, Athens) [3]. The number of participants, presented papers and lectures from distinguished guests increased from congress to congress, although the Association did not even have its own statute, nor membership fee. BANTAO has lived and has thrived thanks to the friendship, respect and appreciation among leading nephrologists from BANTAO region, transferred to all other participants.

Ch. Stathakis called the links that connect us "spirit of BANTAO" and presented it in the logo of the 5th Congress that became the logo of BANTAO [4]. The next cycle of congresses were held in the same countries as the first five: the VI Congress in Varna (2003; President - D. Nenov), the VII in Ohrid, (2005; President - M. Polenakovic), the VIII in Belgrade (2007; President - V. Nestic), the IX in Antalya (2009; President - A. Basci) and the X BANTAO in Chalkidiki (2011; President - D. Tsakiris) [5]. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of BANTAO idea birth M. Polenakovic wrote: "The BANTAO Congress has been established as the major scientific and institutional forum for Balkan nephrologists, with its own journal, indicating our will to communicate, to collaborate, to get to know each other, and to share our difficulties and our successes". [6]. BANTAO journal is an official publication and constitutes the main connection between or a glue sticking together all members of the BANTAO Association. At present, it is published biannually, is incorporated into the public and internet-available databases of DOAJ, SCIMAGO, EBSCO, Google Scholar, De Gruyter Open and we currently consider application into the Medline (Pub Med) database [7].

However, it seems that the history has not been favoring the BANTAO association. After a decade of severe political crisis in 1990s, we are now faced with severe economic crisis. It is clear that the organization of congresses and maintaining positive spirit has been a challenge all previous years. Nevertheless, the BANTAO spirit has surprised even its most persistent and supportive advocates. After circling the Congress between the founding countries, from 2013 the Association was enriched by an initiative of the Romanian nephrologists, which resulted in the organization of a very successful Congress in Timisoara. The next Congress was also moved from the founding countries and was

successfully held in 2015 in Opatia, Croatia. With a special excitement we do expect the Congress in 2017 when another Balkan country - Bosnia and Herzegovina will join the congress organizers. In this regard, a question that still needs an answer would be how we can explain this positive trend and a large number of visitors at the Congresses during the present economic constraints? Do the centuries-old ties between the Balkan countries still live? Can the hunger for scientific affirmation be met here? Is the Balkans a polygon for training of promising young nephrologists who have difficulties in finding their place at major European and international conferences? Finally, whether the reason might be that people in the Balkans better socialize, laugh, eat, play and sing during the congress social events? Most probably, all together.

So, the question remains - can we do better than this? Our responsibility is not to betray the expectations of the young generation of nephrologists and to persist in goals that have been set in the previous years. Is it a success to keep the tradition despite the years of crisis or we must seek for innovative initiatives within the BANTAO Association? We believe that multicenter studies across the region should be favored since we share the similar medical problems and these studies are a good starting point for obtaining grants. Thus, if we used to have joint CME meetings between the regions, it's reasonable that pharmaceutical companies may support such initiatives in different fields of nephrology.

Many case reports remain forgotten in our institutions but the BANTAO Journal is open to accept them to be published along with the other original scientific contributions and that is certainly an accomplishment of the great spirit of BANTAO. However, we should also try to stick as close as possible to the adopted constitution and validate ourselves as members of the Association, with membership card and growing infrastructure in the years to come. In conclusion, BANTAO has

proved to be a new European Medical Association that overcomes political obstacles and boundaries. Neither devastating wars, nor economic crises could have switched off the BANTAO initiative established as a major scientific and institutional forum for Balkan nephrologists communicating and collaborating between each other respecting distinctions but also sharing regional difficulties.

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