Medical Informatics History.
A View from Socio-Political Context in European Countries

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Abstract This workshop intends to trace the development of Medical Informatics in European countries within the context of socio-political frame. The presentations and discussions will cover three distinct epochs: the East-West scientific contacts before the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern block, the collaborative relations during the pre-adherence to EU of most Eastern countries, and the present state – facts and trends.

Keywords. Medical Informatics history, East-West collaboration, trends in Medical Informatics

Introduction of the topic

This Workshop aims to continue the series of events dedicated to the History of Medical informatics organized in connection to the 40th anniversary of both EFMI and IMIA. The previous action organized under the EFMI umbrella was the successful Panel on Medical Informatics History in Europe at STC2013 in Prague [1], resulting in the publication of an entire issue of Acta Informatica Medica, with both presentations from the Panel and invited papers [1-4]. It is obvious that such a generous topic could not cover all aspects, events or stories and there were proposals to develop the series of events by selecting major features and viewpoints to be detailed separately.

Aim of the discussion

During the last four decades, representing approximately the official existence of EFMI, Europe faced a tumultuous stage namely: the foundation of European Union, the
switch from cold war to collaboration, the break down of the Iron Curtain and Communism in Eastern Europe, the war in Jugoslavia, the enlargement of the European Union, the economic crisis etc. All these events put their imprint in the development of all areas, including our beloved domain – Medical Informatics. We know that the involvement of political factors do strongly influence the degree of success of implementation of various actions, including ITC in healthcare. Thus, the proposed viewpoint of this Workshop will be an analysis of the development [5] of Medical Informatics, including facts, events, ideas [6], and actions seen within a "socio-political perspective". Three major epochs can be defined from a socio-political viewpoint: the East-West scientific relations before the collapse of communist regimes in the Eastern Block, the collaborative relations during the period of pre-adherence to EU of Eastern countries, and the last decade, marked by economic crisis. The narratives of speakers will comprise not only facts, but also try to highlight the specific traits of each period.

**Contribution from each speaker**

All speakers have been active in various actions in different periods under discussion.

Jan H van Bemmel will describe the efforts during the eighties to encourage East-West scientific relations. Several meetings were organized together with Jana Zvarova in Prague, a place accessible also from Eastern Block [7]. He also provided valuable support for developing Medical Informatics Education in some Eastern countries [8].

Bernard Richards, during his presidency of Health Computing Group of the British Computer Society was able to support financially large groups of participants from Eastern countries at the Healthcare Computing Conferences in Harrogate in the period 1994-1998 and provided educational materials to several people [9].

Rolf Engelbrecht was always successfully trying to bring people together in a national and European scale, having high positions in various societies: SSHC (International Society for Systems Science in Health Care), AIM [10] (Advanced Informatics in Medicine), AIME (Artificial Intelligence in Medicine Europe), KMF (Koch Metschnikow Forum), initiator of conference series: Telemed, ICITHC (International conference on information technology in health care, Samos), annual EFMI Special Topic Conferences STC which started in Bucharest in 2001, etc. He always was strongly supportive of bursaries awarded to participants in EFMI events and he himself helped the attendance of large groups from CEE countries in MIEs [11].

Izet Masic will relate the difficulties in the Balkan region, which experienced war times. His experience covers both medical informatics and public health. He has also collected numerous materials on the history of Medical Informatics in Europe [3].

Reinhold Haux, as IMIA president, was the initiator of the foundation of IMIA Task Force on History, and he is a mindful observer of trends and evolution of ideas and concepts in Medical Informatics [5], involved in several collaborative activities.

Casimir Kulikowski is the chair of the IMIA Task force for History and is engaged in setting up the best documented web pages on Medical Informatics History [4,12]. He will talk about integration of all features into a user-friendly interface of the web page.

The Workshop Chair, George Mihalas, was the chair of the EFMI Working Group on “Medical Informatics in Countries in Transition”, then president of EFMI, with an experience as the CEO of the Romanian Center for Health Statistics and Informatics of the Ministry of Health. He will also present the initiatives to develop inter-regional cooperation EFMI-AMIA-APAMI [13] and the potential to extend these Projects.
Expected results

This Workshop represents one of the several actions organized in this period (2013-2016), linked to the celebration of forty years since foundation of EFMI and IMIA and 50 years of organized activities in the domain of Medical Informatics, which started under the umbrella of IFIP.

Similarly with the Panel organized in 2013 (at STC in Prague), all presented and invited contributions will be collected and published as an issue in one of the journals of Medical Informatics. It will also bring new items to be posted on the internet [10]. These exploitation modalities will comprise not only the contributions of the speakers, but also from the active participants at discussion during the Workshop and invited Papers.

A section dedicated to history of European Medical Informatics is also proposed for the EFMI portal, with subsections for all countries and all working groups.

References