

Looking back to the foundation of CEUREG

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1994. The beginning. A historic period. The Central and Eastern European countries were busy searching their places in a Europe after the collapse of the so-called socialist regimes. They were organising and shaping the frames of state administration in the labyrinth of problematic privatisation. In most of these countries this meant the disintegration of the „socialist” large-scale/cooperative farms and the appearance of the new farming holdings. This was a real challenge in itself, but considering our special field, i.e. the pesticide authorisation, we understood that the new system of authorisation had been developed and slowly introduced in Western Europe and in other regions of the more developed world, which took into account the many experiences of the early periods along with the new environmental and health challenges. Due to the short time for this presentation, I can only briefly touch the main issues but nevertheless I hope you see how these things have been related. All these facts gave birth to the idea of organising the exchange of regional experiences and the necessity for co-ordinations in the management of plant protection administration. The initiative came from Zoltán Ocskó who was at that time our colleague responsible for the authorisation of plant protection products in the ministry. Though he is not present now but I think it is important to mention his active participation in launching the CEUREG-philosophy. So in October 1994 Hungary convened the first CEUREG Forum the chronology of which will be described by my friend Josef Svaricek. I am speaking only about the professional background.

Based on the positive experiences and success of the first meeting, the politics, i.e. the agricultural government was ready to support the CEUREG idea. In December of the same year of 1994 the Hungarian minister wrote a letter to his partners in the countries involved and proposed that CEUREG would become a continuous professional forum. Thus Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the “Visegrád countries” immediately joined the initiative. Besides the representatives of the founding countries, you who are now here at this meeting do not necessarily know the past events of the alliance which goes back to the Middle Ages. In 1335 the Hungarian king invited the king of Bohemia and the king of Poland to Visegrád in order to settle their dispute and to make an agreement on economic and commercial co-operation. After the change of the regime the Hungarian prime minister proposed, in 1991, to renew the original alliance. (I apologise for this lesson on history.) Later positive events confirmed how fruitful the mutual co-operation of politics and science can be.

Regular participants of the meetings were the experts of the national competent authorities responsible for plant protection product authorisation and the pesticide manufacturers. Regular or temporary participants were, in addition, the representatives of international organisations (EU, EPPO, FAO, ECPA) who were invited lecturers on certain particular subjects. Other international organisations were also ready to come to the CEUREG workshop, e.g. the Eurasian Economic Commission. They have helped transmit and disseminate the CEUREG information to other parts of the world. The Forum was an attractive meeting because of the most up-dated subjects on the agenda. By now the number of participants has reached over 100. The informal personal information exchanges in the breaks and free-times proved to be as important and useful as the official programs. True friendships, both professional and personal, have been formed. We express our thanks to the lecturers and countries of the 25 years, who made efforts to successfully organise the various events.

CEUREG Forum showed an ideal co-operation in the field of authorisation and made a continuous and living information exchange possible. The close relations have remained even when almost half of the participating countries became members of the European Union. The professional tasks and activities of the new EU member states are governed by internal directives

and ever increasing number of regulations. The scope of action of the national competent authorities has been restricted to some extent, others would say, significantly. Politicians therefore say that, because of this, they have less tasks, nevertheless the new legislation gives the member states more works in this field too. The managers of both the old and new member states have been complaining about the lack of professional staff in the field of pest management. Withdrawal of the active substances, significant restriction of their uses and the high number of gaps to be filled in the application techniques pose difficulties for the member states within the EU. Several countries outside the EU want to become member states therefore they are directly concerned as regards the harmonisation in legislation.

So there is a lot to discuss ahead you. The ever renewing tasks and the arising new problems justify not only the past of the series of organisations but also presume its future. However the past 25 years of history of the CEUREG Forums have not been kept alive by the multitude of tasks but by the participants' dedicated activity and your vocation. We express many thanks to you who are now present at this meeting and to all those, who, during the 25 years have contributed to the successes of the Forum and are not or cannot be with us. Many thanks, once again.