



2002\_ Alastair Compston  
Bern, Switzerland

### 1. Reasons for joining the ENS

I became aware of the ENS through close professional and personal connections with several of the founding members. I attended the inaugural meeting in Nice, and subsequent congresses, and realised that this was an organisation that served as a conduit for presenting the best clinical science in Europe and in an atmosphere of scientific enquiry rather than political expediency. Although inspired by the American Academy of Neurology, I saw the ENS as closer to the aims and style of the American Neurological Association of which I was then a member.

### 2. On the values and missions of the ENS

I had, from 1989, served as co-chief editor of the Journal of Neurology (initially working with Klaus Poeck); and in discussion with the executive of the ENS and Springer Verlag (Dr. Thomas Thiekötter), negotiated the arrangement whereby that publication became the official journal of the ENS. This was a good arrangement although some work was needed in order to make the relationship mutually beneficial and profitable, in all senses. Through that connection, I joined the Executive Committee in 1996. Apart from the social and gastronomic benefits of visiting Paris each December for those meetings, this provided additional insight into the organisation and workings of the ENS; and it allowed us to shape the scientific meetings so that these remained of high scientific quality and provided advanced teaching for delegates.

It was clear that there were already at that time rumblings about the justification for having two European Societies – one scientific in its origins and aspirations (ENS), and the other political and with membership based on proportional representation from constituent countries (EFNS). There had been discussions between former ENS presidents and senior members of the World Federation of Neurology about the possibility of merger. Indeed to many this seemed both desirable and inevitable. In the event, this union proved difficult. Much time was spent and tensions revealed as conditions were discussed. Eventually, at that time, the negotiations floundered over style, personal attitude and apparent incompatibility of the origins and aims of the ENS and EFNS.

But now a new factor arose that sealed the long-term fate of one organisation or the other. The ENS had enlarged the scope and size of its meetings; and was now dependent on the support of pharmaceutical companies. Here is not the place to tell the story of how drug treatments for multiple sclerosis changed the climate of education and exchange of scientific ideas in neurology for all time. But the appetites of the ENS and EFNS were fed by Big Pharma and they it was who indicated that supporting one European meeting each year was preferable to the arrangements then in place. Whatever may now be said about the reasons for merger, it would be my view that this was the force that eventually brought the ENS and the EFNS together. That a healthier and fully representative organisation has emerged in which the best clinical science in Europe will still be presented, and European neurology speaks with one voice, remain to be seen.

Although, disappointingly, it has proved difficult for me to attend several of the more recent ENS congresses, my time with the Society was stimulating and immensely enjoyable keeping me in touch with the best work in Europe on neurology, meeting young people who will shape the future of the subject, strengthening old friendships and making new ones, and savouring the style and congenial atmosphere fostered by the ENS that makes for a rich and varied professional life.