

NFTO Chamber 2004-2007

Report by Mina Polemi-Todoulou NFTO Board General Secretary

Looking back at our NFTO chamber and board meetings in the past three years we become aware of the wide range of issues that enriched our discussions and of tasks that were accomplished.

NFTO membership: The NFTO chamber under the effective chairmanship of both Kurt Ludewig (2004-2005) and Eric Louis (2005-2007) has been a growing and active organization. It now consists of **28 countries**, having acquired **eight new members** since 2004. The whole EFTA board and the NFTO committee consisting of Annette Kreuz and Mina Todoulou have worked systematically to recruit new memberships and to re-activate those that had lapsed. In July 2005 four countries joined: The Family and Marital Therapy Association of Turkey, established in 1997, consisting of 250 psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, coming from different training schools and backgrounds and following a variety of different approaches; The Macedonian Family Therapy Association, established in 1995, with 20 members at that time, all psychologists and psychiatrists; Serbia and Montenegro, established in 2004, with 40 members, mostly psychologists; Bulgarian society, established in 1998, with 47 members, mostly psychologists; In December 2006 we welcomed the Latvian association, formed in 1996, with 32 members, mostly family therapists active in education, trained by German colleagues, with an academic background in clinical and school psychology, education and theology. During 2007 we welcomed three countries: the Maltese Family Therapy Association and Systemic Practice that was established that year, with 37 members; the Association of Professionals Practicing Family Therapy of Iceland, established in 1992, with 72 members, mostly social workers; and the French Society for Family Therapy, established in 1993, with 420 members, 80% psychologists and psychiatrists, who re-activated their registration with the chamber. There have been contacts to prepare the way for new members: Ukraine, Rumania, Russia, Slovakia and Slovenia; In our Krakow meeting, Slovenian colleagues participated as observers representing their 15 year old association of teachers, social workers, psychologists and medical faculty, with a long tradition in systemic therapy.

It is worth mentioning that during this period four countries have managed to bring separate groups in a closer cooperation, creating **federations**, this way coming in line with the requirement under the EFTA statutes that only one organisation represents the country: Greece created the Hellenic Federation for Systemic and Family Therapy - ETHOS; Germany has achieved a close cooperation between the two systemic societies electing a common representative in the chamber; Switzerland, created "SISTEMICA", combining different language groups; Belgium achieved a close cooperation between the Flemish and the French speaking groups.

NFTO chamber meetings: Our chamber meetings provided the context where we all came to know each other, exchanged important ideas and concerns and shared moments of relaxation in the hosting country. In London, Krakow and Dublin there was a rich participation of about 30 persons in each occasion. In some cases observers from countries that wish to become members have joined the meeting. Encouraging the presence of two persons per country –a procedure that was initiated with the 2004 Athens meeting when Arlene Vetere was the NFTO chair - has proved a good practice, enriching the discussions and creating a relatively steady body of delegates. Continuity is an issue in the chamber, given the fact that National Associations elect their boards and representatives for a specific term (unlike e.g. Training Centers). In the chamber meetings time is devoted for old and new representatives to present themselves and developments in their country.

All meetings have been organized in close collaboration between the NFTO Chair and Secretary and the local NFTO, who in all occasions had the kindness to prepare for all of us the best possible conditions: the best places to hold the meetings, usually their own centers and clinics, the best-practical - and near by hotels, the best restaurants and fun places to visit, socialize and learn about the local culture. Members of the hosting society helped us learn their dances, walked with us around the beautiful parts of the city and in their museums, cared for our family members that sometimes joined us in these trips, helped us get the best of memories from the place. We deeply thank Barbara Warner, Judith Lask of the London team, Barbara Jozefik and Bogdan de Barbaro of

the Polish Society, Trish Murphy, Mary Lalor and Mary Scully in Ireland, their secretaries, colleagues and trainees. At times they organized for us scientific meetings in which colleagues from the local societies shared their work with us. Thanks to all participants who helped keeping minutes.

NFTO elections: During this period we had elections in between annual meetings, due to the stepping down from office of Kurt Ludewig and Janna Graff early in the term and Arlene Vetere's election to the position of EFTA chair in 2004. Eric Louis and Mina Todoulou developed a procedure for holding elections through mail. The procedure was used successfully both in the occasion of the interim elections as well as for members who could not attend elections in Glasgow. The elections of 2005 enriched our board with three new members Corina Ahlers, Eija Liisa Rautainen and Julia Hardy. Our new board, constituted after October 2007, misses Annette Kreuz and Corina Ahlers who did not run for a new term, yet serves both continuity – with Eric Louis, David Skorunka, Mina Todoulou, Eija Liisa Rautainen and Julia Hardy - and renewal with Maria Borcsa and Javier Bou.

NFTO directory: It has been decided to have the directory of members including basic information for contacting the association will be available posted on the web to all visitors. For the directory to be operative, it is important for members to keep the NFTO secretary up to date with information and new developments in their association (such as changes in the board, the size of the organization, new emails and addresses, etc).

NFTO profile: All representatives have responded to our call for the creation of the “NFTO profile document” initiated in 2005 by M. Todoulou and Kurt Ludewig. We deeply thank them for their collaboration. The document brings together information on the family therapy scene and the development and status of psychotherapy and systemic practice in the member countries along with the identity and the development of each National Family Therapy Association. It is based on representatives' answers to the “NFTO profile guiding questions” which address key issues of family therapy developments in the country, with respect to: criteria for therapists and for membership in the association; the extent of training and academic background of members; their personal psychotherapeutic experience and whether this is required for membership; the prevailing approaches; the target populations in their everyday practice; the most frequently used mode of therapy; the public recognition as well as the legal status of therapy and of systemic and family therapy in particular; and the main concerns of the association. The presentation in the form of tables and graphs gives a picture of the wider European Systemic Therapy community, pointing out trends, similarities and differences. This is a “live document”, requiring constant updating with new information on developments in each country and association. The document was distributed to all members as a hard copy in Krakow, as well as electronically. It is a chamber decision to update the profile and to enrich it with further items, such as: what is the position of family therapy in the National Health Organizations of the country and with respect to social insurance paying for the costs; what specific laws exist that regulate therapy and specifically family therapy; do these regulations relate to each profession separately, i.e. different for psychology, psychiatry and social work; what academic disciplines provide an acceptable background for entering training in systemic therapy; how many of the NFTO members have obtained the ECP certificate and how the association approaches their collaboration with the EAP.

NFTO sponsorship fund: The fund, an initiative of Kurt Ludewig was created in 2007 with a donation from the German Systemic Associations that had organized the Berlin EFTA Conference in 2007. The fund is available for supporting the participation in the chamber meetings of NFTO delegates whose associations cannot afford it. Our members may apply to our Treasurer Eric Louis.

NFTO working Groups: During all chamber meetings these last years, participants met in plenary sessions as well as in “Working Groups” (WG). This practice started earlier than 2005 and in the London meeting it took a more stable form in terms of specific issues and procedure. So far the groups the WG were: “raising the profile of systemic therapy” “research”, “website”, “ethics”, “membership and training standards”, “fund raising”, “newsletter and journal”, “current issues”. Some of these groups met only once, some carried their work in all three chamber meetings. In the

recent chamber meetings participants expressed the need for more specific delineation of the role and scope of each WG, for more group time - feeling that a valuable networking process is encouraged- and for members to keep on the work of the groups in between meetings, so as to facilitate the completion of the projects they undertake and avoid the frustration of staying only with sharing ideas. Detailed information on the status and progress of these groups will be posted by each convener on behalf of the board. In summary, the concerns of some of the groups as they have been reported in chamber meetings so far are:

Training: understanding the training standards required for membership in each NFTO, and how these relate with legal regulations and the wider therapy practice in the country as well as with EFTA and EAP criteria. It has been pointed out that some countries regulate the training standards through a law of psychotherapy while others regulate through the Federation of therapy. Since the psychotherapy scene is constantly changing, the criteria have changed, creating a mosaic of different standards for different generations of members. One goal of the group is to work out a plan for helping countries with lower criteria than EFTA to raise their standards, and also reduce differences in the approach regarding the training standards among the three EFTA Chambers. The group discussed similarities and differences of training standards among NFTOs and suggested that this information be posted on the web, so that each NFTO may compare their own to those of others. They suggested appointing a contact person in EFTA, available to answer questions on this matter.

Raising the Profile of Family Therapy: what is the status and public recognition of family therapy; how is it portrayed in the media; what role it plays in crisis situations; sharing ways, experimented with in different countries and contexts, for creating a better image of family therapy and of connecting it to main developments in the field and in the society. Participants in the meetings proposed a number of interesting ideas such as: declaring a family therapist of the year as an incentive for members to participate, appointing a press officer to create links to media and relevant people, sharing simple definitions of what family therapy is.

Ethics: it was a unanimous chamber decision to study comparatively the ethical codes of different NFTOs and that of EAP or other relevant organizations in order to create a more specific set of articles in the code of ethics of EFTA.

Research: The group has worked closely with the committee of EFTA, on a three-fold interest: a) to explore the everyday practice of family therapists in Europe, in terms of what therapists actually do (who they address their services to, how frequently they see families, do they work with individual members of the family, how many sessions they have per week, in what contexts they work, how are they paid and how much, how easily families and health organisations accept to have family sessions, how they and the others in the work environment think of what they are doing); b) to explore, register and create a data base in a usable form, of all existing and ongoing family therapy related research done in Europe and in each member country, that could be made available to the EFTA members - and to use the newsletter for presenting the latest research news; and c) to proceed with research on the effectiveness of family therapy – a much needed and promised project – that would involve as many NFTO member countries as possible using the same tool for comparative purposes. This threefold project to proceed requires that each NFTO nominates 2-3 contact persons in their association that will serve as link between EFTA-NFTO research team and the key persons or agencies in the country that will contribute towards these goals.

NFTO Core documents in Support for Family Therapy: In the chamber meeting in Dublin on Sunday morning participants agreed on the proposal to create two “core documents” that will serve as tools in the hands of the NFTOs in their efforts to promote and gain acceptance for family therapy in their country:

- a) The one text will pull together evidence from research that supports family therapy as an acceptable therapeutic approach the effectiveness of which is based on evidence.
- b) The second will support the argument that family therapy training cannot be offered by universities only, since universities usually emphasize the academic aspect. What the training institutes offer is absolutely necessary since they practice therapy.

In the creation of these documents chamber members suggested using: the report of the U.K. National Institute of Excellence; The résumé of a German report from a book published in German about the evidence based family therapy; the book by Alan Carr; Mony Elkaim’s recent book; Peter

Stratton's paper published in the AFT -U.K. web. It was suggested to create a bibliography of family therapy and its evidence based practice using all above mentioned sources.

NFTO website: A section for NFTO chamber was created in the wider EFTA website and is being cared for by David Skorunka with the technical assistance of Martin Rehourka. It has been agreed in the general board that each chamber decides autonomously about information posted in their own section, and about ways of presenting, layout, choice of colors etc. The website so far presents NFTO basic goals and identity, the board, the list of its members with basic contact information (Directory) and the membership criteria and application procedure. The distinction between what information should be open to the public and what only to EFTA members has been a subject of discussion in the EFTA general board and in the chamber. The criteria for this distinction relate to providing to our members services that are not available to non-members. It has been decided that any NFTO member may be linked to the chamber website. Participants in the chamber have expressed the wish that, at this stage of EFTA-NFTO development, the website should be facing outwards. NFTOs agreed to help each other create short presentations of what is family therapy, how can one become a family therapist, how to join the association, how to choose family therapy as a modality. They decided to study the websites of different countries and get ideas about the EFTA-NFTO site.

NFTO and EFTA Newsletter: Since 2004, the chamber has posted on the web three newsletters, with the responsibility of the chair, the secretary and David Skorunka. In our meeting in Rome on January 2007, it was decided to incorporate our news in a common wider EFTA newsletter. All members are encouraged to send articles, announcements and news about developments in their country directly to Arlene Vetere and Fabienne Dardenne. There are no copyright restrictions with respect to publication of articles in the newsletter. Own language may be used.

NFTO contribution in the Glasgow Conference: Firstly, almost all NFTOs eagerly publicized the conference to their members and to the wider community of colleagues. Secondly, during the conference the board held a stand and a poster presenting the NFTO chamber. Thirdly, the chamber organized a NFTO **symposium** on "A Systemic view on family and youth related issues as portrayed through headline news". Convener on behalf of the board was Mina Todoulou and the meeting was co-chaired by Corina Ahlers and Roberto Pereira. Each participating country - Austria, Spain, Greece, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Portugal, Italy and Hungary gave a stimulus presentation, in the form of a DVD, slide show or handouts, on breaking news during the past year that concerned the public and that had an important bearing on families and young people. Participants shared their reactions and experience in small groups. The integration of the discussion in the large group at the final session of the symposium pointed out commonalities and differences of issues among the different countries. Common was the issue of violence and cyber-violence among adolescents and between adolescents and their parents or teachers in the school environment. The need for a more careful collaboration of the therapists with the media was identified, speaking out and seizing initiative. Attention was given to the way language is used by journalists encouraging simplistic and one-dimensional understanding of complex phenomena, a tendency that encourages polarization of views, stereotypes and undifferentiated thinking in the public. On the contrary participants wished to see therapists take more authority and treat the media as a tool creating connections between the therapy room and the outside world. A note of interest for all members: in chamber meetings the issue of life long learning of the members has come up, the extent to which this is mentioned in the statutes as a requirement and how 'Education Credits' for Attending the Conference may be obtained. It was stated in Krakow that each country handles the definition of credits for their participating members in their own way. What the EFTA conference does is to issue a Certificate of Attendance that amounts to six hours per day, for three days.

NFTO membership fee: Chamber and board meetings have dealt with this issue repeatedly. At present we have two levels of annual membership fees a) 900 euros and b) 300 euros. This was decided in Krakow after many different views and proposals were heard. In some way it still remains an issue since three eastern countries which could not afford paying the lower rate membership fee did not participate in the recent elections. Decisions regarding the membership fee have often been

related to the average income in the country and to the size of the organization, since some organisations have over 1000 participants and some newer ones or from smaller countries barely reach the size of 20-50.

NFTO Certificate of Membership: It has been created and distributed to members during the meetings. Interested NFTOs may ask for it -it is subject to annual renewal after payment of fees.

NFTO solidarity: the chamber has discussed the need to promote an exchange between NFTOs using each other's experiences in ways to gain acceptance for the approach. Back in 2004 the NFTO chamber mobilized its members to provide support for the German systemic societies that have been in doubt by their colleagues from other modalities. It has also been mentioned in the chamber the need to create procedures for EFTA to respond and be helpful to crises.

NFTO encouragement of individual participation in EFTA: In order to strengthen EFTA as an organisation that strives to promote the status of systemic and family therapy in Europe and negotiates regulations for a number of issues, the NFTOs encourage their individual members to apply for EFTA –CIM membership. To support this, CIM and NFTO have created an “NFTO and CIM Agreement”, by which active members of a NFTO pay only half the fee for CIM membership. Members may ask Jacques Pluymaekers or Malvina Tsounakis for this “Agreement” form. The Hellenic Society for Systemic Therapy, the Belgian Society and the Swiss Sistemica have already signed an agreement. They both have a wide percentage of their members in EFTA-CIM. In the discussions in the chamber it was pointed out that belonging to EFTA as an individual has a value in itself – not only to get services.