

**Boško Barac:**

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Helmut Lechner**

**Secretary General INPC 1985 - 2005**

**Honorary President of the INPC Kuratorium 2005 - 2006**

On March 27, 2006, after the brave and arduous battle with relentless disease, died the long years' Austrian Secretary General of the International Neuropsychiatric Pula Congresses. In the last months, during his severe illness, he was elected the Honorary President of the Kuratorium.

Professor Dr Dr med h c Helmut Lechner, a distinguished scientist and humanist, world-wide renowned Austrian neurologist, was born in 1927. He graduated medicine at Karl Franzens Medical Faculty in Graz (Austria), where he specialized neuropsychiatry; he received further studies at neurological institutions in Marseilles, National Hospital for Nervous Diseases Queens Square, London, as well as in the leading neurological institutions in the USA. In 1959 he habilitated neuropsychiatry in Graz, in 1972 became full professor and in the same year he was elected Head of Neuropsychiatric, later Neurology Department at the University Hospital in Graz, which he successfully ran until 1995. He was Dean and vice-Dean of the Karl Franzens Medical Faculty in Graz.

Professor Lechner belonged to the leading neurologists of his time. He dealt with clinical neurophysiology, the epilepsies, wake-sleep disorders, and especially with the most serious problem in neurology of the past century: cerebrovascular diseases. In this field he gained world acknowledgements and reputation, belonging to pioneers in new investigations which have brought to modern views that cerebrovascular diseases are not one's fate: stroke occurs abruptly, but it develops slowly and progresses with the now well-known risk factors; they are preventable, and if diagnosed early, can be successfully treated. In 1961 he founded the Research Group for Cerebrovascular Diseases of the World Federation of Neurology (WFN) together with the pioneers in these investigations: John St Meyer, John Marshall, Carlo Loeb and others. He was also a founder and the many years' leader of the Salzburg Conferences on Cerebrovascular Diseases, which during two decades were one of the most important places of interdisciplinary exchange of scientific and clinical experiences in the field. 1998-2005 he was a Secretary Treasurer of the WFN Research Group for Organization and Delivery of Neurological Services.

He was honorary member of many respectable national and international scientific societies, visiting professor of many universities, highly acknowledged in the world, well known and respected among specialists and experts from the USA and Mexico to India,

China and Japan, from Scandinavia to Argentina, Greece, Israel and Arabic countries. He loved and appreciated the most noble in every man, not making differences among people of various races, religions and nationalities, what he brought in the best possible way into our region. Because of various kinds of cooperation with the scientists from the former Yugoslavia he gained long before the wars in the region the status of the honorary member of the Associations of Neurologists and of Clinical Neurophysiologists of Yugoslavia.

In 1985, together with me, then the Head of Neurology Department Rebro in Zagreb, and with all the Kuratorium, as Austrian Secretary General he started innovating the International Neuropsychiatric Pula Symposia (now Congresses), the oldest scientific medical meeting in Europe. Founded in 1961 as a result of traditional cooperation between Graz and Zagreb, the Pula meetings have become a meeting assuring continuous links of neurologists and psychiatrists of the region with the best representatives of the European and international science, fostering international cooperation and exchange. Helmut Lechner included in the cooperation the South East European Society for Neurology and Psychiatry (Thessaloniki), which he founded in 1973 with John Logothetis, and with the Venetian Symposia, founded in 1965 by Diego Fontanari, Johann Kugler and H Lechner.

The main ideas of the "Pula School" coming from its founders: Lopašić, Bertha and Grinscgl, were continued with numerous innovations: postgraduate courses, satellite symposia and workshops. The common language, English, enormously simplified mutual understanding and the problems of organization. The scientific program was enlarged, high international standards achieved and the Symposia were extended to five days. The active participants and the eminent speakers were coming from Central Europe, from Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Czech and Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Croatia, as well as from many distant countries: USA, UK, Israel, Arab and other countries.

During the war in Croatia and later on in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, he wanted to make sure that these meetings would not disappear in the war storms: later he significantly contributed to their continuation, supported by his friends in Austria and encouraged by all INPC Kuratorium members. Taking now place for the fifth decade, the Pula meetings, former Symposia - now Congresses, during the twenty years of leadership of Lechner and his collaborators in the Kuratorium, got the unique profile in the European space, dealing with the borderline areas of neurology, psychiatry and neurosurgery. So they gained the special significance for the countries in the South East Europe, now especially important, when they are approaching the European Union.

He was awarded by many honorary positions and titles: Honorary President of the Austrian Society for Clinical Neurophysiology, of the League against Epilepsy, Doctor honoris

causa at the Aristoteles University of Thessaloniki, Honorary Fellow of the Stroke Council of the American Heart Association, of the World Psychiatric Association, of Yugoslav Society for Clinical Neurophysiology, of the Peruvian Society for Clinical Neurophysiology, Ehrenmitglied der Gesellschaft Deutscher Nervenärzte und Psychiater, Hungarian Stroke Council, Honorary Corresponding Member of the Indian Academy of Neurology, among many others, visiting Professor at the Belgrade University Medical school, etc, with many other high acknowledgements.

Back in 1978 he was elected honorary member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Croatia for his cooperation with Croatian neurologists and psychiatrists; he also gained high Croatian tributes: honorary citizen of Pula (1995), Diploma of Croatian Medical Association for fostering Croatian medicine (2000), the Order of Croatian Morning Star (Danica) with the image of Katarina Zrinska (2005) from the President of the Republic of Croatia, an expression of appreciation and gratitude of the host country for all he had done with Pula Congresses for the promotion of national and international science.

During our common intensive work in the preparation of the Pula meetings we were both of us specially careful to help younger ambitious colleagues to prepare their abstracts for publication in the best possible way, according to the international criteria, trying not to eliminate their contributions, if the formal improvement was possible. He was also proud on eminent speakers taking part in our yearly programs, aware of their altruistic efforts to prepare their summaries and lectures.

No one could have believed that only 8 months after his last academic lecture in Pula: in June 2005: "Bridges between neurology and psychiatry: Example of dementia and stroke", and after his optimistic speech at the final ceremony of the Congress, a sad news would come that he had to leave us.

His funeral took place on April 1 2006 in Straß (Styria), attended by many friends, colleagues and distinguished personalities and the Federal Minister of Health of the Republic of Austria. After solemn funeral mass, a commemoration was held in church. Among the speakers, who said their farewell, was the Rector of the Graz Medical University and representatives of scientific, social and political Austrian public life. I myself had a painful duty to thank him for his achievements on behalf of his collaborators and participants of the INPC, also on behalf of the World Federation of Neurology.

I am convinced that the participants of the Pula Congresses will remember him for a long time, as always an upright and proud, at the same time a warm man and a good friend.