



PARTNERSHIP BUILDING IN EUROPE

The European model of consensus-building is unique and represents a ground-breaking approach to conflict prevention. We now take an EU of 27 nations for granted, but how daring and visionary it was for Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet to propose that France and Germany should put coal and steel - the raw materials of war - under common management. Finding harmony while at the same time respecting diversity has been a challenge ever since the European Coal and Steel Community (the forerunner of the European Union) was created. But Europe has stood the test of time, and we have developed a range of proven techniques for building relationships that we can promote and share.

Now, with the expanding demands of the 'new Europe', our skills in partnership building will be more in demand than ever before. These skills will be tested as well - as additional countries join the European Union, and young associations there seek to grow and develop. We've already seen growing numbers of associations emerging and seeking guidance from other, well established professional groups. As European associations, and particularly as members of ESAE, our expertise - as umbrella groups, national chapters and individual associations - is something we can build on in terms of establishing best practice in our profession.

Just as the European political institutions emerged from a technocratic process rather than a grassroots or democratic mandate, many professional associations on this continent have also been established in the shadow of the state. Numerous churches, universities and even a few states on this continent date back for a millennium. In this context, trade associations were often established as advisors and assistants to official powers, such as state and church. In France, for example, many sector associations are responsible for standardization or labour conventions in their field. In recent decades, these technically oriented associations have had to learn a new way of operating in response to the rise of non-governmental organizations and the impacts of the Internet. Many professional societies still maintain a model based on a strong and well-resourced secretariat with minimal volunteer involvement.

In the United States, associations have a very different origin, and their culture is fundamentally different as a result. The wealth of American associations sprang from two sources. The first was the desire by those fleeing state religions and oppressive autocratic European states to create an open marketplace of beliefs and ideas. Already in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville marvelled at the propensity of Americans to create associations

of all types based on common interests and creeds. This tendency was reinforced by the pioneer era of the country's development when small groups had to band together in the wilderness to ensure their mutual survival, with no formal institutions to help. This history was clearly reflected by John Graham, CEO of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), in his recent ESAE masterclass, *Adapting to the New Leadership Imperative*, when he stated that association leaders need to be 'brokers of ideas' - taking a personal stake in sharing information, while at the same time using all available technologies to spread the word. Yet given the diversity of today's Europe and the ease with which a multiplying number of voices can be heard through the Internet, this is something that ESAE should build upon in developing new networking opportunities across Europe. Our partnership with ASAE can provide useful perspectives and materials, but we also need to integrate our own unique history.

We'll be looking at the challenges and outcomes of European networking and partnerships at the ESAE Annual Congress, Exhibition and Dinner in Brussels on 16-17 January, 2008. I hope you'll mark the date in your diary; for more information, please visit the ESAE website:

www.esae.org