IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR VICTOR BLATON

By Ana-Maria Simundic, on behalf of the EFLM Executive Board

Vic Blaton is not with us anymore. This sad event is an enormous bereavement for our profession. For sure many of our colleagues throughout Europe, who had the privilege of knowing him, join us in expressing condolences to his family and our friends in the Belgian Society.

Vic was a pioneer of our profession in so many aspects, a wise leader with a vision, a warm and intellectual person, a lovely gentleman, a friend and a person with a big heart. Vic has dedicated his life to the profession. He was a milestone in the development of laboratory medicine in Europe and beyond. One of his biggest achievements was a merger of FESCC and EC4 into EFCC (currently known as EFLM). He was one of the Founders of EFCC and its first President (2008-2007).

He was especially committed to help and support the non-developed and developing countries in Europe to reach professional and educational standards of the Western countries in the European Community at times of big political and economic changes. He was and will remain a true European, a kind of Grandfather figure in our profession.

His wisdom, warm friendship and smile will be sadly missed.

By Michel Langlois, AZ Sint-Jan Brugge-Oostende, Brugge, Belgium

Vic Blaton was born October 7, 1937 in Belgium. He was married to Dina Vandenbroeke and father of five children – Stefan, Sofie, Sylvie, Benedicte, Filip – and 10 grandchildren. He was basically trained in science and biochemistry at the KU-Leuven (Catholic University Leuven). As PhD he was a postdoctoral fellow at the same University. He followed the postgraduate training to become clinical biologist in 1973, recognized for laboratory medicine.

In 1970, he became director of the Simon Stevin Institute for Scientific Research in Bruges, Belgium. He was working on fundamental and clinical research of lipoproteins in atherosclerosis and cardiovascular diseases, especially on the protective role of high density lipoproteins (HDL) in inflammatory processes of atherosclerosis. Lipidology was his passion, and cardiac prevention became his mission. His main interest was the comparative study of biochemistry in non-human species (primates) in order to find models for studying atherosclerosis development in humans. In 1977 he was installed as staff member – clinical biologist – in the department of Clinical Chemistry at the AZ St.-Jan Hospital in Bruges and became director of the same laboratory in 1997. His activities resulted in many publications in top scientific journals and in PhD theses of his co-workers. He was founder and President (1996-2000) of the Belgian Lipid Club, a prestigious club of scientists aiming to promote recommendations and treatments for the prevention of cardiovascular diseases.

He became Professor in Medical Biochemistry at the University of Leuven in 1982, and he was nominated as Lecturer and Visiting Professor at the North-Western University Medical School in Chicago, Illinois (1989). He presented and organised many courses and International meetings, such as the European Atherosclerosis Society (EAS) Congress in Bruges in 1998. He was nominated in 1982 as NATO expert – scientific adviser for the prevention of myocardial infarctions in soldiers and in 1992 he obtained the NATO-Award for Sciences. He obtained many other prestigious awards, most recently the EFLM-Rocque Award in 2013.

Vic was a leader with a vision and strong pro-European mission. When he was President of the Belgian Society of Clinical Chemistry in 1988-1993, he initiated and participated in the creation of FESCC and EC4. He believed that the creation of a true operational structure is essential for the European harmonization in education and training of the professionals and the laboratory practice guidelines. He became president of FESCC(Forum European Societies in Clin Chem) in 2000 for a first term and in 2003 for a second term. He was able to merge together the two organisations FESCC and EC4 in one new European branch of IFCC, named EFCC – the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine – in 2007. As first President of EFCC (EFLM) in 2007-2009 and also thereafter, he stimulated the professional integration of countries of the Balkan region in Europe.
Vic was a figurehead, a kind of father figure in times of major political and economic changes in Europe, and not only for our profession. In his career he took part in different activities and founded projects to support the developing countries in Africa and South-America. This illustrates his good heart and engagement for healthcare and socio-economic welfare, more than laboratory medicine.

Vic will be remembered as a smiling man who always wanted the best for everyone. We will miss his friendship, his advice, his stimulating force, his enthusiasm. We keep the many beautiful moments with Vic alive and in our memory.

By Gerard Sanders and Rob Jansen, former EC4 Presidents

With the death of Vic Blaton on February 16th at the age of 79 years, clinical chemistry in Europe lost a good friend and colleague who helped to give our profession its current shape.

With the start of the European Union in the 50s of the last century and its gradual extension in the years to follow, it became clear that harmonization of our profession would be an important issue. Many discussions followed and in the late 80s Vic became the Belgian representative in these consultations. In these deliberations that, inter alia, took place in The Hague, Echternach, Pont-a-Mousson and Paris, the contribution of Vic was greatly appreciated.

From that starting point, it became clear that there should be a European association for clinical chemistry to cover all facets of the field. First, EC4 found its place in the EU and FESCC was created for Europe as a whole.

In EC4 Vic was in 1989, 1990 and 1991 one of the initiators of the so-called European Syllabus to describe the contents of our profession as a prelude to a European directive for our professional domain. In the late 90’s he contributed to the publication of the ‘essential criteria for quality systems in medical laboratories’ which became the first version of ISO 15189, nowadays the worldwide standard for quality of medical laboratories.

In 2005 it became clear that the two organizations should merge and Vic as President of FESCC at that time contributed to the steps necessary for the merge to the new organization and thus became one of the founding fathers of EFLM.

By Nada Majkic-Singh, Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia

Upon learning the sad news of the passing of professor Victor Blaton, the Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia feels obliged to remember our many years of scientific and expert collaboration and personal friendship with him. Professor Victor Blaton first came to Belgrade as the president of FESCC in June 2005, to join the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia and Montenegro. On this occasion, the First Symposium for Balkan Region was held, entitled “Education, Management and Standards in Laboratory Medicine”, which, as the president of the FESCC, professor Blaton wholeheartedly supported and even asked for such symposia to be regularly organized. The tradition of holding this Symposium has lasted to this
day. Professor Blaton was a coordinator, teacher and participant of practically every Symposium held. As the President of FESCC, he promoted the importance and goals of this European organization, bringing it closer to our medical biochemists. Professor Blaton was also a welcome guest and teacher at our national congresses, as well as the Congresses of the Balkan Federation, of which four were organized in Serbia with great success. For his contribution to the promotion of clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine in our country, the Balkan region and globally, the Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia presented professor Blaton with the highest reward of the Society, our Honorary Diploma.

Professor Blaton last stayed in Belgrade in May 2015, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia and the 12th EFLM Symposium for Balkan region. Professor Blaton truly wanted to get to know the way of life, the customs and the people of Serbia and the Balkan, and I will never forget his desire to learn about the wines that can be found in Serbia. I knew he was a wine connoisseur, but once he confused me with a question: how to obtain the wine called “Probus” from Fruska Gora? I had never heard about this brand of wine, however, upon my request, some colleagues soon brought two bottles of this rare wine that he took to Belgium. They are probably still in his collection. The last time we met was in October of last year in Tirana, at the Congress of the Balkan Federation of Laboratory Medicine. We were all very happy to see each other again and evoke memories of previous meetings and events.

All of us who loved and valued him had a hard time hearing about his sudden death, so in this way we would also like to pay our respect and express our condolences to his great family.
By Elizabeta Topic, former Chair of the EFLM Education and Training Committee

I first met Professor Blaton late eighties, at the Conference on Lipid and Atherosclerosis in Bruges then in 1993 at the 10th European Congress of Clinical Chemists in Nice, where FESCC was formed. I worked with him in FESCC, EFCC and EFLM in the Committee of Education and Training (C-ET). Prof. Blaton was a leader with a vision and supported any activities contributing to the profession in the European Society and he was a person with whom it was very easy to find a common ground and collaborate in pleasant atmosphere.

In 2000, Prof. Blaton and I started to settle a project with basic plan for continuing professional education in clinical chemistry. This project was launched in 2001 in cooperation with the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CSMBLM) and Slovenian Association of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (SACCLM). Over these more than 15 years, the C-ET has provided attractive continuous education and training programs that were heterogeneous and diverse enough to meet the individual educational needs in the course of continuing professional development. The common title of EFLM, former FESCC, courses was New Classification, Diagnosis and Treatment, each of them dedicated to a particular medical discipline.

These Courses known as Dubrovnik Courses were affiliated with the programs of the Interuniversity Centre Dubrovnik. Professor Blaton always managed to allocate some of his precious time to take part in each of the Courses, and as a wise European leader he gave an opportunity to about 1000 participants attending these Courses and listening to some 100 invited speakers from all over Europe to have friendly discussions with him. In this way he learned about the situation or the possible problems in the profession in particular countries. It was an opportunity for him to meet professionals and get informal information from almost all European countries. He was always ready to listen and always ready to help.

Prof. Blaton was my very good friend and true friend of the Croatian Society and of all European Societies alike. He was a nice gentleman and a person with great heart. All of us having a privilege to know him and work with him will miss his wisdom, smile and kind-heartedness.

By Evgenija Homšak, President of the Slovenian Association for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine

In the name of Slovenian Association for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (SZKKLM) I would like to express our deep sympathy and sadness at lost of our good friend and honored member of SZKKLM.

During his fruitful professional life, especially under his FESCC presidency, together with his motivation and positive attitude, SZKKLM has started and worked on several important FESCC projects and established EFLM conferences like Alpe-Adria, EFLM postgraduate Courses, that were held for several years in Dubrovnik, conferences on quality and accreditation in clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine.

We were always happy and honoured to host him at our several national congresses and professional meetings. His presence as the professional and great warm person was always precious, that gave to our meetings a great added value.

We would also like to express our sincere condolences to his close friends and family.

Prof. Victor Blaton will stay in our deep precious memories.

By Claudia Pronk-Admiraal, President of the Netherlands Society for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine on behalf of the Dutch Clinical Chemistry community

We are so sorry to hear the news that Vic Blaton has left us forever.

What a remarkable man he was, patiently piecing the European Clinical Chemistry community together in what finally EFLM is nowadays. It was a privilege to have worked with him and to have known him.

We wish you all the courage to continue in his footsteps.