

“NEW ALGORITHMS FOR HEALTH CARE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM”

*This is the title of the 71st FEMTEC Congress which closed yesterday in Batumi (Georgia) where, facing an ailing Europe, **Ukraine, Russia, and China** stood out for the revival of their thermal centres. **Vietnam and Australia** join the Federation for the first time. **Umberto Solimene** was unanimously confirmed as President for the 2019-2022 term.*

Milan, November 5, 2018 – In the era of the digital revolution, **challenges for the revival of the image and contents of world** – and European – **hydrotherapy** begin in **Batumi, Georgia**, the “Dubai on the Black Sea.” Care and treatment protocols, based on scientific data and safety; use of advanced digital diagnostic and rehabilitation techniques; identification of new (public/private) management formats for thermal facilities; inclusion of hydrotherapy in national health schemes; refurbishment of facilities and staff training in the light of the new needs and socioeconomic changes under way across the world: these are some of the main issues that more than two-hundred experts from 23 Countries discussed and agreed during the **71st Congress of FEMTEC, the World Federation of Hydrotherapy**, engaged in official relations with the World Health Organization.

During the Congress, the **1st International E-Learning Course “An Introduction to Thermal Medicine”** was launched in multiple languages (Italian, English, Russian, Chinese), and the Federation’s hymn **FEMTEC Suite, Ubithermaeibisalus**, with lyrics including words of Latin poets (Cicero, Pliny the Elder, and Martial) on the thermae, and music – for piano and soprano – composed by Maestro **Livio Bressan**, a musician and neurologist, was played for the very first time at the Batumi Opera Theatre.

World Hydrotherapy. Current Challenges

In a globalized thermal world, **development** is under way in **three regions: Europe**, where the use of mineral waters is codified and acknowledged, at varying levels of importance, by national health systems; **extra-European Countries**, where “hybrid” facilities (partly medical and partly dedicated to general wellbeing) are in place; and the **Asia-Pacific Region**, mostly dedicated to aquatics and recreational activities.

“One of the main challenges is to reconcile hyper-technology with customized care and treatment,” said **Umberto Solimene, President of FEMTEC**, in his introductory remarks. *“Drawing from luxury brands, including in the automotive sector, I believe that only through a profitable sharing of ideas and material projects at international level, integrated in the respective entrepreneurial cultures, can hydrotherapy play an advanced role in meeting the health requirements of modern society. More specifically, the digital era can promote an increase of employment in the thermal sector, unlike in others.”*

The Sector’s Development in the Individual Countries

According to **Adair Turner, President of the Institute for New Economic Thinking** [1], by 2024 there will be 450 thousand jobs more in the US in the “personal care” sector. The individual delegations of the world thermal centres confirmed such development, which is expected in the near future. In fact, **Florana Menendez**, Vice President of FEMTEC, introduced, on behalf of the Cuban delegation, the review **Wellnessdestiny** (www.wellnessdestiny.eu), in Spanish and English, dedicated to the promotion of the thermal and wellbeing culture. **Ledesma Rosa**, a paediatrician and president of the **Cuban Society of Medical Hydrology**, announced the creation of a **Chair of Health Tourism** by the Cuban Ministry of Health, in co-operation with the Habana University and FEMTEC.

Natalia Starzeva, Director of the National Centre for Research on Thermal Medicine and Rehabilitation in Moscow (Russia), described the co-ordination and reorganization of the institutions that manage over 1,500 Centres in the Russian Federation in view of optimizing care and organizational services, including at social level. Outstanding experts from the Russian Centre (**G. Barashkov** and **G. Giginishvili**) described recent updates and new technologies, some of which are already in use in major worldwide centres. Mr. Giginishvili, a physician and painter, delivered a much appreciated lecture on the **International Centre of Art Therapy in Moscow**, which he manages. The Centre’s activity is aimed at pursuing the psychological recovery of patients following mastectomy and cancer surgery. The important Russian thermal clusters in the St. Petersburg and Anapa (Black Sea) Region were represented by **A. Menschov** and **S. Sebrukova**. **V. Reps** focused on the development of the historical thermal centres in the Caucasian region of Stavropol, with special reference to the integrated thermal health facility management courses promoted by

the **International Research Institute of Piatigorsk**, in co-operation with FEMTEC. Italian organizations are very active in this region, with specialized initiatives including, among others, the recent event *Italy meets Caucasus*, involving high-profile diplomatic speakers.

After being away for some time from FEMTEC, the **Ukrainian** thermae were represented by a large and highly-qualified delegation headed by **S. Buchinsky**, Vice President of the National Physiatrists' Association. The lecture of **O. Gozhenko** on the efficient organization of thermal clusters in Ukraine – a true “renaissance” – was highly appreciated.

The development of thermal and hydroclimatic facilities in **Kazakhstan**, represented by a delegation headed by **S. Bulekbaeva**, head of one of the world's main youth rehabilitation centres in Astana, provides a significant input to child rehabilitation from severe diseases.

Following a period of serious trouble due to the Country's political and economic situation, **Georgia** is now regaining its traditional leadership in hydrotherapy with great efficiency. Private investment initiatives promote the revival of many centres, including Borjomi, Zhalktubo, Kobuleti, or Tbilisi, thus creating the assumptions for local development and for the integration of thermal and tourist-cultural options. Significant and interesting research is under way on the quality of waters and muds at the **Tbilisi University**, through the research team of **A. Bakuridze**. Thermal activity in **Belarus** was broadly documented and described by **I. Paluyanava**, from the National Thermal Coordination Centre, with data on the strictly medical focus of hydrotherapy in her Country, aimed at treating the cardiometabolic syndrome and, in the field of rehabilitation, respiratory disorders.

Spain was represented by **Francisco Maraver**, Director of the **Medical Hydrology School** at the Medicine Department of the Universidad Complutense in **Madrid**, who described academic research in the thermal sector. **Portugal**, with **M. Boaron** from Euroteam, and Head of the IT Commission of FEMTEC, provided a broad overview of the possible applications of IT and digital technology in the thermal sector, primarily focused on possible interactions with the queries of thermal patients. In his opening remarks **Thierry Dubois**, President of the French Thermal Association, from **France**, described the programmes designed for certain sample thermal regions (clusters) in his Country. Lastly, **Stefano Masiero**, from the **Padua University, Italy**, provided an overview of the trends and potentials of Italian hydrotherapy for rehabilitation; the **GB Hotels Thermal Group**, with a lecture by **F. Fornasini**, introduced interesting nutritional approaches integrated with thermal treatments. An original and modern approach to the creation of physiotherapy centres was provided by **A. Kassis** from the **Fisiokinè Group**. The **Swiss Thermal Group** of **Leukerbad**, coordinated by physiatrist **G. D'Alessandro**, introduced interesting studies on the relations and possible interactions between mountain climate, thermae, and the treatment of obesity. Medical, as well as hydro-sanitary and environmental technologies, were the object of a broad lecture by **G. Gurnari (San Marino)**, President of the Technical Commission of FEMTEC, who described recent inputs to the sector. **Rzig Oueslati**, head of the Thermal Department of the Ministry of Health in **Tunisia**, highlighted the Country's commitment towards a safe and effective implementation of thalassotherapy; **A. Belaitar**, from the thermal Center of Guelma (**Algeria**) presented the general strategy of the project supported by the Government and named “**Algerie Thermale**” as driver of the way of health medica tourism ; from the Thermal Centre of Techirghiol in **Romania**, **Olga Surdu**, first Vice President of FEMTEC and professor at the Konstanz University, went through the cost-benefit ratio of thermal care. Beneficial effects of hydrotherapy that may have interesting social impacts were broadly documented by **Soares Natalia**, from the Santa Catalina University in **Brazil**.

Investments for over US\$ 20 billion are provided for in China, as mentioned by **Zhang Yue, Secretary General of the Chinese Thermal Federation**, to include Hot Springs in the national Chinese programme for disease prevention (*Healthy China*), of which FEMTEC is an active partner. The operational hub of a sample thermal cluster – bringing together science, economy, tourism, and local development – was recently created in Chong Qing, one of the four main development districts in China, in co-operation with FEMTEC. **Vietnam**, represented by a delegation from the **Saigon BinhChau Corporation** (www.saigonbinhchau.com) headed by **Linh Vu and Tuan Tran**, introduced the Country's broad and modern investment schemes for the thermal and wellbeing sector. Recent research in **Japan**, where thousands of small thermal centres exist, and certain physiological adjustment mechanisms connected with the use of thermal treatments, were described by **S. Inokuma** through instrumental clinical assessments. Lastly, **Australia**, with the **Peninsula Hot Springs** group (www.peninsulahotsprings.com) from **Victoria** and its president **Charles Davidson**, described the huge potentials of hydrotherapy in the New Continent, the achievements made, and the possible co-operation in the sector between FEMTEC and the **Medical School of the Melbourne University**. True thermal cities were built, and others are planned, in **Australia** and **New Zealand**, which demand the advice and operational experience of Europe, including from the medical viewpoint.

The “World Thermae Day”

Within the framework of such international development, the “**WORLD THERMAE DAY**” was launched in conclusion of the 71st FEMTEC Congress. It will be celebrated in the 28 member Countries of FEMTEC on **April 21, 2019**, the date of the foundation of Rome, the mother of all the thermae, and will join and integrate – for specific water-health relations –the celebrations of the *World Water Day* (March 21). On occasion of the *World Thermae Day*, FEMTEC will launch the **International E-Learning Course “An Introduction to Thermal Medicine”** and a multi-language exhibition dedicated to the role of hydrotherapy in the history of civilizations.

Following the President’s report on the activities and his reading of well-wishing messages from **I. Fluck (Hungary)**, Honorary President of FEMTEC, **P. Cantista**, President of ISMH, **I. Ponitowska** and **J. Choinowsky (Poland)**, President of the Society of Balneology, and **T. Dubois (France)**, President of CNETH, the General Meeting of FEMTEC **unanimously confirmed the outgoing Managing Board and Prof. Umberto Solimene as President**, and thanked them for their efforts, summarized and updated at www.femteconline.org. Special appreciation was given to **Natalia Chauskaya** and **Simona Busato**, from the External Relations Department of FEMTEC, for their great co-ordination effort. The membership applications of **Vietnam** and **Australia** were welcomed wholeheartedly. Special thanks were given by all the participants to the Organizing Committee of the Congress, headed by Prof. **R. Surmanidze** alongside Prof. **G. Gigineishvili** and Prof. **T. Zoidze**, for the excellent organization, support, co-operation, and the interesting cultural/professional agenda integrating the Congress, which conveyed an excellent memory and impression of Georgia and Adjara to all. **The agenda for the next few years provides for Congresses in Greece, Belgium, China, Vietnam, and Australia.**

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[1] A. Turner, *Capitalism in the Age of Robots*, Institute for New Economic Thinking, New York City, USA, 2018

FEMTEC World Federation of Hydrotherapy and Climatotherapy

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FEMTEC is the most representative association of Spa and health organizations in the world, under the aegis of the World Health Organization. It is composed of national Spa and health resort associations and federations and central state organizations dealing with Spa problems from many countries and continents.
