

The FIDE 2012 Congress took place in Tallinn, Estonia, a city which, like the country of which it is the capital, is a small and beautiful conflagration of history and culture. Estonia joined FIDE as recently as 2004 but has clearly embraced membership wholeheartedly, much as its beautiful city embraced the 2012 FIDE Congress.

The Congress began with a tour of Tallinn, providing a tantalising first glimpse of its historic city walls and towers. This was followed by a reception at city's Kuumu Art Museum and an introduction to Estonia's cultural life. Being entertained in such style, and in such stunning settings, proved in fact to be something the Congress delegates quickly had to become accustomed to: a subsequent reception was hosted at Tallinn's Concert Hall, complete with Estonian music, while a gala dinner at the unique Seaplane Harbour museum somehow effortlessly set a sumptuous meal against the backdrop of Estonia's naval history. It was a spectacular setting and very memorable evening.

The Congress did, of course, have far more to offer than mere entertainment, however delightful. The attendance of judges, advocates general and officials from the Luxembourg and Strasbourg courts, from those working in national governments, in legal practice and in academia ensured a wide range of perspectives were represented, and all the sessions I attended were full of lively, open debate in which these perspectives were brought to bear. For a pupil from the UK the range of different approaches to the Congress's topics was almost as informative, in and of itself, as the substantive debates to which they were applied.

The three topics reported and debated at the 2012 Congress were the protection of fundamental rights post-Lisbon, focusing on the interaction between the Charter and the ECHR and national constitutions; the interface between EU Energy, Environmental and Competition Law, and issues surrounding the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, and Information Society issues. Perhaps the sole draw-back of the Congress was that the structure prevented delegates from attending all sessions on all topics; as a result this delegate's view is somewhat skewed to the debate on topic one. Notwithstanding the formal structure there were, however, plentiful opportunities for informal discussion, and informative wrap-up speeches from the rapporteurs for each topic ensured delegates did not leave with too blinkered a focus.

In topic one, a recurring debate was the need for accession of the EU to the ECHR. The interaction of the Union, the Convention and national constitutions in the field of fundamental human rights protection was variously described as a system with 'three-strands' and 'twin peaks', albeit with arguably unifying fundamental principles. The need for accession to reconcile these strands was particularly identified by Judge Tulkens, Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights, in his keynote speech, and reassurance was subsequently provided from the Congress's rapporteur from the EU Institutions, Clemens Ladenburger, that negotiations in this regard are back on track, and can be hoped to be completed soon.

The challenges posed by increased integration and expansion, both of member states and of competences, were another recurring theme, and one which underpinned much of the debate.

Opening the Congress, the President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves highlighted the difficulty of reconciling integration with 19th century ideas of sovereignty, which may continue to live on in the sub-conscious of member states and their citizens. In somewhat similar vein, Vice-President of the European Commission Viviane Reding spoke of the need for the EU to become a *political* union, while Professor Skouris, President of the CJEU, highlighted some of the challenges arising as the Union's competencies extends. In an address which seemed to speak to many of the delegates in this regard, Professor Weiler of NYU Law School set out 'legitimacy factors' for a union such as the EU, perhaps unsurprisingly, if somewhat depressingly, concluding that in the EU they are all, currently, at a low level.

As debate ensued on topic one further, and perhaps more specific, questions began to emerge as recurring concerns. The Charter's scope was a live subject, focusing in particular on whether there is a difference between its scope and that of EU law. Another provocative issue was whether there is a difference between the status of the 'rights' and 'principles' contained in the Charter, and further whether either or both of these species can have horizontal direct effect. Tensions between effectiveness and legal certainty were oft-felt in these sessions.

FIDE 2012 concluded in part with an overview of the Congress's progress, and in part by looking to the future, with the announcements of the topics for FIDE 2014. Issues on the economic and monetary union, citizenship, and public procurement law are surely topics which will, like this year's Congress, garner considerable interest and engender substantial debate. Perhaps in prelude, the speech of Professor Tridimas (University of London) on the last morning in Tallinn addressed the current challenges and opportunities for the EU, focusing on the financial crisis and the three elements of sovereign insolvency, sovereign liquidity and the banking system. In so doing, Professor Tridimas' speech was timely, but also provided a nod to the future; specifically, FIDE's. Given the unparalleled experience FIDE 2012 encompassed, my only hope is that I may also, at some point in the future, enjoy another FIDE Congress.