Dear colleagues and friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the European Congress of Radiology, ECR 2020: the 32nd annual meeting of the European Society of Radiology, and the 26th to take place in Vienna.

As the ESR has grown into a global society, the European Congress of Radiology has also grown to become a global congress, with attendees from more than 130 countries. It has also relatively recently become the annual meeting of the European Federation of Radiographer Societies and the European Society for Hybrid, Molecular and Translational Imaging, making it Europe’s largest multi-professional radiological meeting. I am delighted that we are now able to attract such a diverse audience from all around the world, and that we are able to offer such a varied and comprehensive programme, not only for radiologists, but also for medical physicists and radiographers. Experts from all of these fields, not only from Europe, but from around the globe, will meet here this week and pass on their knowledge to radiology residents, young and older radiologists, physicists, radiographers and students. It is a benefit for all of us that the ECR has become the true congress of all professionals working in the area of radiology and medical imaging.

I would like to extend a special welcome to the thousands of industry representatives joining us at the ECR. Once again, more than 300 companies have joined us here in Vienna, setting out their stands across 26,000m² of exhibition space, providing us with an excellent opportunity to learn about the latest trends and innovations, and of course exchange perspectives with our industry colleagues. This year, we have allocated 1,500m² of our exhibition space to innovators at the forefront of artificial intelligence, as well as our own AIX Theatre, which will host various industry pitches, keynotes and panel discussions in this fascinating field. I am looking forward to seeing how this expanding sector changes the face of the ECR’s exhibition, this year and at future congresses.

The programme for this congress is the result of a great deal of hard work by the excellent group of experts who comprise my programme planning committee – to whom I am profoundly grateful – as well as the invaluable efforts of the ECR Scientific Programme Department. More than nine thousand abstracts were submitted for ECR 2020 (up 3.4% from ECR 2019, setting a new ECR record) and the very best have been selected for presentation in numerous ways, including My Thesis in 3 Minutes, Clinical Trials in Radiology and Voice of EPOS sessions, as well as many Research Presentation sessions (formerly known as Scientific Sessions). The programme also offers superb educational sessions in all fields of radiology, suitable for beginners and very advanced professionals, from sessions that will update and refresh your basic knowledge to the cutting-edge content of our New Horizons Sessions. This year, thanks to a reformed scheduling system, participants will be able to attend more educational sessions than at previous congresses, meaning attendees primarily interested in education will be able to benefit much more.

Let me summarise a few of the highlights that await you.

The ECR 2020 Grand Opening, which takes place on Wednesday at 17:45 in the Forum (Room A), will this year bear the motto ‘Adagio’. This term, which refers to a slow tempo and graceful movements, is borrowed from the world of music, and it encapsulates our guiding philosophy for what will be a beautiful and memorable occasion. A dark-hued setting and a monochrome stage will provide a very special ambience, and we will draw the focus toward what lies at the heart of our annual meeting – the innovative, creative and inspirational people who make up the radiological community. ESR Honorary Membership and Gold Medals will be awarded, and, in good ECR tradition, music will play a major part, with a performance from popular Croatian pianist and singer-songwriter Lana Janjanin, who will be supported by a big band orchestra that is sure to brighten everybody’s mood with their
rhythm and swing. ECR 2020’s second underlying motto, ‘Be a tree’, will also play a central role, with the Forum transforming into a virtual, futuristic fantasy landscape.

Following the success of ECR 2019’s ‘Women in Focus’ programme, we immediately decided ECR 2020 would have its own exclusive ‘in Focus’ feature. This year’s programme, titled ‘Children in Focus’, is dedicated to the late Helen Carty, ECR 2004 Congress President and a pioneer in paediatric imaging, and has been organised by Dr. Lil-Sofie Ording Müller from Oslo and Dr. Catherine Owens from London, supported by the European Society of Paediatric Radiology (ESPR). The programme will explore a range of healthcare and social issues affecting children and young people, with the aim of stimulating discussion on many aspects of childhood and medicine. I encourage you all to attend these lectures taking place on Thursday and Friday in Room O.

Taking the place of the former Honorary Lectures, ECR 2020 will feature three Plenary Lectures, in which esteemed speakers will present topics of relevance to the large audience in the Forum. All of these sessions have been specially scheduled to avoid overlap with any other congress activity, so I very much look forward to seeing many of you there for each of them. Ralph Weissleder, German-born professor at Harvard University and a famous researcher in molecular imaging, will give the first of these lectures, entitled ‘Imaging at a different scale: the wild lives of our cells’ on Thursday at 10:30; Bernd Montag, CEO of Siemens Healthineers, will present his lecture, entitled ‘Digitalisation: the journey to a more human healthcare’ on Friday at 10:30; and on Saturday at 10:30, Nenad Šestan, executive director of the Yale Genome Editing Center at Yale University will deliver his lecture ‘Building the human brain: molecular logic of neural circuit formation’.

Several highly successful session formats have been introduced in recent years and these will of course be continued, such as ‘Coffee & Talk (open forum)’, a highly interactive session format with a lot of time for discussion in a relaxed atmosphere, and the ‘MyT3’ sessions, in which young colleagues present their theses in just three minutes! The Clinical Trials in Radiology (CTiR) sessions will see researchers presenting scientific evidence for imaging tests that are very likely to have an impact on clinical practice in the future. And the CUBE, our ‘theme park’ for interventional radiology, designed for residents and beginners, is back for a third time, even bigger than before.

Another welcome return will be the excellent workshops on MRI of the prostate, this year with even more slots due to popular demand. We have also introduced new ultrasound workshops combined with lectures, covering the most important areas of ultrasound use in radiology, as well as a brand-new workshop in MRI of the pelvic floor.

Of course, there will also be plenty of classic ECR sessions too. As every year, the ESR will ‘meet’ several countries at ECR 2020. We will have three ‘ESR meets’ sessions – ESR meets Canada, ESR meets Israel, and one combined ‘ESR meets’ session for Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia, all with very attractive programmes. You can also look forward to the return of two of the most popular sessions of any ECR, the Image Interpretation Quiz and the Junior Interpretation Quiz. The IIQ’s theme is ‘Humans vs Machines’, whereas the juniors will compete in a challenge with the intriguing title ‘Heroes assemble: join our ranks’.

As noted earlier, ECR 2020 will also place a strong focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning: in addition to the strong presence in the exhibition, our scientific programme also aims to show all attendees a clear vision of AI in radiology. From informative courses under the heading of European Excellence in Education (E³), to the New Horizons, Coffee & Talk and AIX Theatre sessions, participants can expect a thorough exploration of the foundations of the field as well as fascinating insights into the latest AI discoveries in radiology.

Cooperation and partnership are as important to us as always, and so there will be many opportunities to engage with people not working directly in medical imaging professions. Several
sessions will involve patient representatives as speakers and moderators, which is a result of the continuous good work of the ESR Patient Advisory Group (ESR-PAG). Furthermore, we are extremely pleased that some of our latest collaborations have led to some very interesting sessions being organised, such as with the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFLM), to foster the implementation of integrated diagnostics.

Finally, in addition to the Grand Opening on Wednesday afternoon, ECR 2020 will, for the first time, feature a Grand Finale on Sunday, March 15, 12:30–14:00 in the Forum. Based on the themes of the ‘Children in Focus’ programme, the Grand Finale will include three talks by extraordinary young speakers sharing their thought-provoking personal stories. Do not miss this wonderful conclusion to our congress!

The ESR is working hard on harmonising radiological teaching, practice and research in Europe, and the ECR is more than just a professional meeting. Modern technology can offer us opportunities for online teaching and training of a very high quality. But nothing can replace or surpass human interactions and encounters. The congress venue and the remarkable, beautiful city of Vienna offer our participants so many opportunities to meet, discuss and make friends from different countries. Some of these encounters will grow into real life-long friendships, as I know well from my personal experience. The best way to fight burn-out syndrome, which is so relevant and widespread in modern healthcare – including radiology – is to relax and enjoy yourself in addition to hard work. The ECR is the ideal opportunity for this. So welcome and enjoy!

Boris Brkljačić
ESR President