

Preface

It is very hard for me to write this preface at a time when Europe is descending into an armed conflict many of us, including myself, would not have considered possible just a month ago. First Corona, and now the invasion of Ukraine, have also shaken the foundations of science and scientists around the globe.

In the years of the pandemic, many of us have been confronted by claims that science is simply relative, unreliable, opinionated and, at worst, corrupted by the pharmaceutical industry. I have myself spent hours in public debate trying to explain that mRNA cannot change the human genome, often to no avail as the internet is full of foggy studies ready to be tabled if and when convenient to support the most bizarre theories [1, 2]. And today, many scientists are being pushed into politics or facing embargos depending on which country they belong to.

The situation is dire. Science is a global human endeavor for the betterment of humankind and life. No decent scientist can possibly be interested in fake news, conspiracy, war and destruction. It is therefore truly tragic that the science of today is being confronted with such medieval attacks. In the context of Corona and vaccination, popular opinion in many Western countries suggests that science must be democratic and provide alternative opinions and options, just like in politics. Only last night, I was asked again, how do you define the state-of-the-art in viral research without being judgmental? Is this really so? Can we choose freely between a set of data advocating vaccination and a set of data advising against it? Or do we as scientists have to balance the evidence and derive at a qualified and justifiable conclusion based on evidence rather than on a heated debate?

And what happens if science becomes a matter of nations and political alliances? Anyone recalling the journal *Biochemistry (Moscow)*? I do as I spent a few hours in 1992 in a dark basement at the Radcliffe Library in Oxford trying in vain to find a protocol in this journal, not realizing that I am stuck in the aisle next to *Biochemistry (Washington)* and thence barking up the wrong tree [3].

Thirty years on, and after globalization and digitalization, we should have long left that stuffy basement at Oxford and overcome these divisions. We should cherish a respected, unified and peace-loving science, of course, with heated debates on the newest theories, stunning experiments to prove or refute equally stunning hypotheses, and public outreach to the wider community second to none.

So let us take this challenge to improve our communication with the wider population, not as populists, rather as popular scientists able to explain complicated matters in a simple and even so in a correct manner. And let us assume that the overwhelming majority of scientists cares about our planet and thrives for the betterment of mankind and not for war and destruction and should therefore not be driven into separation. Neither an alternative science full of pessimistic half-truths nor a separatist science is of any benefit. Science is open for challenges and new discoveries, and it is open for anyone decent to join in.

Our first issue of Volume 3 is proof of this. It contains excellent contributions from Asia and Europe on topics relevant to human health [4]. In the first article, Saleem and his colleagues describe the synthesis and antimitotic activities of podophyllo-toxin and some of its derivatives [5]. This article is followed by the contribution of Caroline Gaucher and her colleagues in France and Germany, discussing recent developments in the trace element analysis of selenium in biological samples [6]. After synthesis and analysis, we can read about the benefits and risks of taking green tea catechins in a comprehensive review authored by Erik Hefti and his colleagues [7]. Moving on from tea to the cumin *Nigella sativa*, Naina Mohamed and Pakkiri Maideen review the possible benefits of this popular spice in the context of plasma lipids [8]. Staying with culinary herbs, the fifth article authored by Naira Sahakyan and her colleagues from Armenia and France looks at the essential oils of basil cultivars and how they impact antioxidant enzymes in murine glial cells [9]. Our issue is completed by a contribution from Ritesh Tiwari, Lalit Singh and Vaibhav Rastogi on the properties of fluid-dried gums produced from Okra or Gombo (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) and the tree *Anogeissus Latifolia* and their possible applications as food additives or for drug delivery [10].

If this has whetted your appetite for more science, then why not go for a popular Southern Gumbo with spicy Tofu? As I said at the beginning, good science, just as good cuisine, is international and open to everyone and offers so much good to cater for everyone's taste.

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