



BUSY TIMES AHEAD

By Stefanie Rossel

Stephane Colard (left) and Pierre-Marie Guiton (right)

Coresta's new secretary-general shares his plans for the organization.

At the end of last year, Stephane Colard took over as Coresta's secretary-general. Before joining this "cooperation center for scientific research" in Paris, he worked for Altadis and Imperial Brands where his last position was head of scientific research and harm reduction. Colard has been involved with Coresta since 2000 as a presenter of several papers and as a working group member and coordinator. From 2014 until 2018, he also served on the organization's scientific commission. Colard holds a doctorate in science and last year obtained a Master of Business Administration degree with a specialty in corporate and social responsibility. *Tobacco Reporter* spoke with Colard about his plans for Coresta.

***Tobacco Reporter:* You've been at the helm of Coresta since November 2019. What is your vision for the organization?**

Stephane Colard: The vision of Coresta is "to be recognized by its members and relevant external bodies as an authoritative source of publicly available, credible science and best practices related to tobacco and its derived products." This vision is mine too, and in addition, I have a personal ambition for Coresta: to meet the fast-changing stakeholders' expectations by translating and embedding, with the cooperation of all members, the vision into an extended scientific scope. With "stakeholders," I mean all people or organizations impacted by or impacting the tobacco sector; for example, regulators, NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], suppliers, manufacturers or investors.

I am convinced that the scope of Coresta's activities should not only cover the science of the products but also environmental, social and economic sciences. By considering large and multidisciplinary scientific domains and decreasing the granularity of specific areas of expertise, one can reduce the distance between scientists and stakeholders. This is a pre-requirement for meeting new product, environmental, social and economic expectations; this is my ambition.

The tobacco industry is in a state of transformation. What are the most pressing issues for Coresta?

Organizations are being asked to be more responsible than ever, and this is particularly true for the tobacco sector. Ignoring or underestimating this responsibility would be a trap reinforcing the strategy of "demonization." This sector should therefore behave responsibly today, and because there is no doubt that more changes will occur, it should prepare responsibly for the future to make sure that value is sustainably created and shared. Investments in innovative new technologies and products like heated tobacco or oral nicotine-delivery products are interesting signs of industry transformation and of alternative levers of value creation.

Obviously, it is not the role of Coresta to influence business decisions and strategies. However, I am personally convinced that science can support value creation by developing new consensual tools for measuring the performance and the positive impacts of business adaptations and transformations. So, in my view, the most pressing issues for Coresta are to understand the expectations of stakeholders, to anticipate the needs for new, broad scientific cooperation and tools and to address them consensually and efficiently.

Among the things the tobacco industry will have to deal with are the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations—for instance, of tobacco farmers—must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth while tackling climate change and working to preserve the world's oceans and forests. Developing and developed countries are supposed to work in partnership to turn the 17 goals into a reality. What role can Coresta play in accomplishing the SDGs?

Last year, I completed an MBA specializing in the assessment of the corporate and social responsibility performance of organizations. In that context, I undertook a project to better understand the impact of tobacco and alternative product sectors on the United Nations' SDGs—the full report is available on the Coresta website—and to identify methods for performance assessment and improvement. Even if some specific goals are more impacted than others, this project showed that all goals were interrelated and that synergies and antagonisms should be carefully evaluated before any decisions of action for mitigation are taken. It is then important to take a global and multi-angle approach. Coresta is an international association composed of 160 member organizations spread all around the world and covering a wide range of expertise; this collaborative platform offers great opportunities to create strong and long-term partnerships for addressing issues globally.

During our conferences held last October in Hamburg, Germany, and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, the president of the board of Coresta, Huub Vizee, confirmed that sustainability topics were nowadays one of the strategic priorities for Coresta and that new cooperations should be initiated rapidly. I am currently working hard to make this multidisciplinary cooperation a reality from 2020; everything will then be in place to develop the consensual tools needed for performance and impact assessments.

Electronic nicotine-delivery systems, increasingly used to quit smoking around the world, suffered a severe blow after an outbreak of vaping-related lung injuries in the U.S. Although it turned out that the disease was caused by illicit THC products, consumers of legitimate products have also been scared away. With its science-based approach, can Coresta help restore the products' reputations?

The purpose of Coresta is not to defend the reputation of a certain product category, whatever the product. The purpose of Coresta is to promote cooperation, to do good science and to make it publicly available. Scientists believe that facts are more important than opinions and feelings. I believe that continuing to produce credible science and to educate people will contribute to having an environment where rational facts continue to prevail.

The U.S. also made headlines when the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced plans to reduce nicotine in cigarettes to “minimally addictive” levels. What impact have these plans had on the work of your organization?

Challenging regulatory perspectives automatically trigger new scientific work. Several initiatives [were] launched by Coresta when the FDA announced its intention to regulate nicotine levels in tobacco leaves.

In 2017, two task forces were created to investigate the biosynthesis of nicotine and new biotechnologies. The objectives of the first task force are to understand the genetics that control alkaloid formation in tobacco plants; to understand the feasibility of conventional and nonconventional breeding techniques to modify alkaloid formation; and to understand the impact of tobacco alkaloid levels on leaf production and quality. The second task force's objectives are to describe and summarize publicly available literature on biotechnology and omics techniques and to prepare clear and concise definitions of nomenclature and techniques.

In addition, a new task force, the Collaborative Study of Low Nicotine Tobacco Agronomic Production Practices, was created in 2019 to determine the impact variety selection has upon nicotine levels and to determine the impact of modified cultural practices on nicotine levels. ►

Reflecting on an exciting time

Pierre-Marie Guiton, who led Coresta as secretary-general from January 2010 to late 2019, takes stock of his decade with the association.

Tobacco Reporter: How do you look back on your time with Coresta?

Pierre-Marie Guiton: It was an exciting time. Coresta has this extraordinary purpose and capacity of making an array of tremendously smart and committed people cooperatively work on issues raised by the rapidly evolving tobacco-related world for the benefit of science on a noncompetitive basis. Moreover, I have been impressed with the international and friendly spirit of Coresta.

What do you consider the greatest accomplishments of your tenure?

I am not sure about “great accomplishments,” but I am glad I brought the vape world into Coresta—or the other way around—in 2012 with a working group launched [in] early

2013. I contributed, as a speaker [at] many events, in demonstrating to more and more stakeholders that Coresta is a unique platform to develop solid analytical methods that can become international standards.

In the 2019 membership, there are now almost as many independent labs and consultants as there are tobacco and vape producers; the ratio was 50 percent in 2010. Lastly, and although not a personal accomplishment, I am also proud that Coresta was granted the Most outstanding service to the industry Golden Leaf Award in 2018.

What will be the greatest challenges for the organization in the near future?

After the vape disruption, heated products and low-nicotine tobacco will surely keep scientists very busy. Widening the scope of Coresta is also a challenge, and the growing interest worldwide in sustainability will need support from an experienced organization such as Coresta. And I know my successor is the man to handle that task. —S.R.

So, yes, Coresta monitors the changing environment [and] priorities and revises rapidly its scientific program accordingly.

Heated-tobacco products are another growing category. What are Coresta's current and future tasks in this field?

Last year, nearly 50 international scientists participated in an open forum organized by Coresta with the aim to identify scientific needs and priorities for this new product category. They came to the conclusion that a working group should be created with the objective to establish standardized terminology and definitions that encompass all categories of heated-tobacco products, to define one or more specific approaches and regimes for the generation and collection of emissions, to define and agree on priority compounds to be analyzed, and to revise or develop recommended methods. Three months after the open forum, this new working group was created and held its first meeting. Work is progressing fast now.

Coresta will hold its annual congress in Vienna from Oct. 11–15. Which topics can we expect?

The theme of the 2020 congress is “Integrated Science: Opportunities and Challenges.” Science should not be seen as a set of different domains of expertise ignoring each

other. Like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, areas of expertise are interrelated. Agronomists, geneticists, physicists, chemists, toxicologists, behaviorists, clinicians ... all scientists should meet and work together to develop product, social, environmental and economic science. It is a bit early to provide the details of the scientific program as it is based on the abstracts that will be submitted for oral or poster presentations. However, considering the congress theme, we can expect a rich and “integrated” scientific program demonstrating that a unified [scientific] approach is the best way to meet expectations.

Where can stakeholders access information on Coresta's current projects?

Information on Coresta activities are published on our website, www.coresta.org. This is the first source of publicly available information as it gives access to thousands of documents. Our annual congress also offers the opportunity to network with our members, to interact with experts, to exchange more detailed information, to participate in workshops, to listen to the latest reports of the working groups and to hear a whole range of high-level scientific presentations. The congress will be held Oct. 11–15 in Vienna, Austria—make a note in your diaries and register as soon as possible!

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