

# **The European Shiatsu Federation**

## **The Foundation of a Federation**

By Douglas Gattini

### **Foreword**

The European Shiatsu Federation is one of the most important international organisations representing national associations of Shiatsu practitioners and Shiatsu schools, and thereby representing the associations of professional experts in the art and discipline of Shiatsu. Although they belong to different lineages, they are all connected by the same historical, technical, manual, professional, cultural and moral/ethical principles, and are open to collaboration with all national and international Shiatsu associations.

It is also respectful of all the regulations of the different countries in the social sphere, especially those that refer to people's health in relation to the medical world. Medical regulations are recognised by the ESF as the only competence able to directly influence peoples' health status according to formal medical diagnosis.

Shiatsu, like all independent holistic disciplines, is concerned with people's well-being, thereby making the concept expressed by the World Health Organisation its own:

"A condition of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not exclusively the absence of disease or illness". The Shiatsu approach uses the person's own energetic life forces to improve his or her basic health status - the true manager of the psycho-physical balance that keeps a person alive and healthy.

European Shiatsu practitioners have always claimed an autonomous professional identity. This choice has been crucial in the development of collaborations between recognised ESF practitioners and national healthcare systems, as the competences of the Shiatsu practitioner do not depend on and are not subject to the decisions of other professional competences: those who professionally practice this discipline must have completed a full Shiatsu study curriculum.

The professional profile of Shiatsu practitioners and teachers is therefore autonomous with respect to the competencies of the medical system; Shiatsu practitioners are accountable to their respective associations for their training. Needless to say, they are accountable to the governments and legal systems of their own countries as regards the practitioner-client relationship.

Furthermore, the European Shiatsu Federation recognises the historical Japanese Shiatsu Schools as important references for the Shiatsu profession as practised today. These schools were the ones who originally worked to forge the identity of the discipline, to create a professional method of study and to spread Shiatsu throughout the world.

### **Europe in the 1990s**

Further to this important and unavoidable premise, let us recall that in Europe, already in the 1960's, and especially in the 1970's and early 1980's, Shiatsu had already started to spread on our continent. At that time, practitioners had no professional representation with regard to their national institutions. Moreover, the different styles were at times in dispute with each other, as

there were no formal representative components that could be recognised by all the parties involved.

The first national associations representing our discipline were created in Europe at the end of the 1980's; they committed themselves to finding unitary principles of Shiatsu practice that everyone could identify with, while at the same time respecting the experiences and research carried out by the various groups already in existence.

From this development, the idea gradually emerged to start a European project, even though it seemed like a difficult venture at the time.

The first idea for European Shiatsu unity came from the Italian Shiatsu association, founded in 1990. In 1993, three of its founding members, Fabio Zagato, Gianni Pizzati and Douglas Gattini, proposed to the national associations of Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the UK, a meeting in Kiental, where the various ideas for a European federation came to be outlined for the first time.

### **The European Shiatsu Federation Promotion Group**

This was the name given to the working group created in Kiental. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the Italian Shiatsu association invited colleagues from other federations to its 3rd Annual Convention. The undersigned outlined the pending agenda for the Group's next working meeting:

- 1) General discussion
- 2) Discussion of European statutes
- 3) Forms of International Collaboration
- 4) Participation in the Italian association convention
- 5) Various events arising from participation in the above activities

Fabio Zagato and Gianni Pizzati, Presidents of the Italian association in 1992 and 1993 respectively, ceased direct participation in the foundation of the ESF at this point, due to domestic commitments. The same decision was taken by Gabriella Poli (President 1994), who mandated the undersigned to bring Italian association ideas to the European project.

The next meeting of the ESF Promotion Group, hosted by the UK Shiatsu Society and organised by Nigel Dawes, was held in England between September 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1993.

This was the memo that was sent to the Promoter Group on 12 July, 1993:

*Dear friends,*

*A reminder of the business we will be attending to at the next meeting:*

- 1) Continuation of the analysis of the statutes of the European Shiatsu Federation, as discussed and approved at Monte Livata, Rome*
- 2) Definition of financial aspects and task sharing within the Promotion Group*
- 3) Discussion about European Shiatsu politics and relationships with the European institutions*
- 4) Terms and conditions for the next international phase of Shiatsu practice*
- 5) Other items.*

The representatives of the associations were as follows:

Douglas Gattini (Italy); Îşi Pothig (Germany); Anne Winter (Switzerland); Christian Schnabel (Austria); Bettina Flick (Austria); Nigel Dawes (UK); Nicola Pooley (UK); Karin Melbye (UK).

The following topics were addressed:

1. Articles for Constitution
2. Relationships with non-member countries (Holland, Ireland, Belgium, France, Spain)
3. Finances
4. Updates from member associations (Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, UK)
5. Characteristics and functions of the ESF - statutes, foundation of the Federation, documentation stating different characteristics of each country's association, number of members, examination procedures, curriculum, contact with the government, political situation in the country etc., levels of membership, definition of Shiatsu
6. International Shiatsu Conference - a date was agreed, 3rd-7th August, 1994, and a camping place at Gex, between Annecy and Geneva was proposed
7. Next meeting - 29th-30th November 1993, in Vienna.

Detailed minutes on the various topics that were addressed at the UK meeting are available for inspection.

After Vienna, the Group organized a meeting in Massenheim, Germany, between 27th February and 1st March, 1994. The explicit purpose of this meeting was the foundation of the European Shiatsu Federation.

### **The Formal Founding of the European Shiatsu Federation**

At 9.00 on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994, an appointment was held with the public notary in Hochheim. Seven signatures were required for the foundational minutes, to be signed in the presence of the notary. The signatories were: Douglas Gattini, Bettina Flick, Isi Becker, Esther Maag, Karin Melbye and Otto Melbye. Karin Kalbantner-Wernicke made a separate appointment with the notary to sign the document.

### **EUROPEAN SHIATSU FEDERATION**

#### ***Letter from Douglas Gattini, President of the European Shiatsu Federation (ESF) to non-founder member national associations***

*Dear Shiatsu association,*

*On 1st March 1994, the European Shiatsu Federation was officially founded.*

*It is a group of five national associations: Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland & UK.*

*Each national association represents the various practitioners, schools and styles of Shiatsu in that country. The ESF unifies these national associations on the European level.*

*The European Shiatsu Federation and its national association members are not Shiatsu schools, and neither do they support any particular kind of Shiatsu methodology or the use of it. They do not profess any religious or political ideology but represent a focal point for practitioners and teachers to attain a higher level in their professional practice, and to facilitate a practical validation of these methodologies and their relationship with the social environment.*

*The principal aims of the European Shiatsu Federation are:*

- 1) the study, updating and control of Shiatsu practice from a technical, practical/experiential and professional perspective in the various parts of Europe*
- 2) the correct communication of information towards EU officials and institutions, medical personnel, the press and the general public*
- 3) the development of contacts with national and European government departments for legal definition of the role of professional Shiatsu practitioners in Europe*
- 4) the collection of technical and cultural documentation in the form of information and writings, including a data bank about Shiatsu at the community level.*

*If you are considering establishing a national association in your country and wish to participate in the European Shiatsu Federation, we can advise and support you with further information. Please contact Douglas Gattini at the address below."*

I sincerely thank all those national associations and their members who participated in this significant international birth process.

Douglas Gattini  
ESF President 1993 - 1996  
Milan, 29 November 2023.