

EDITORIAL

Urgent Plea for an Immediate Stop to the Russian Invasion of the Ukraine and Respect for the Legacy of Professor Nikolai L. Volodos

We write this text on February 28, four days after the unprovoked and illegal Russian invasion of the Ukraine. This part of Europe, now affected by an unthinkable humanitarian catastrophe that must be stopped immediately, is a haven of modern vascular surgery.

In September 2015, at the Annual Meeting of the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS) in Porto, the greatest highlight was to listen to Professor Nikolai L. Volodos. He gave an outstanding lecture to commemorate the 30th anniversary of his great innovation; stent grafting of the aorta and iliac arteries.¹ It was truly a magical moment, in an overcrowded auditorium, with people standing along the walls. Everyone was so focused on listening to his words, that one had to breathe carefully so as not to disturb. For his extraordinary contribution he was later awarded honorary lifetime Fellowship of the ESVS.

Many borders changed in 20th century Europe because of wars and turmoil, and as a result, many countries can consider Professor Volodos a son of their nation. The family lived in the village of Kokoshicy in the Slonimskiy region. This region is now the western part of Belarus, but in 1934 (when he was born) it was part of Poland. He studied medicine in the Ukrainian city of Odessa and was trained and performed his breakthrough innovation in Kharkiv, Ukraine, at the time a part of the Soviet Union.

At this very moment, professor Volodos' home city of Kharkiv is being attacked by the might of the Russian invaders. The very city where the first endovascular stent grafts were inserted²⁻⁵ is now being shelled by Russian artillery. His grave is jeopardised, and even worse, his friends' and former patients' lives are at risk. Even soldiers from his beloved native country of Belarus are participants in this criminal war.

Kharkiv is the second largest city of the Ukraine, famous for its high technology. This was the background to professor Volodos' great success. He had the support of 20 engineers specialised in metallurgy, textile technology, and mechanical engineering to develop stent grafts and construct the delivery device. Although the city was actually famous for its weapons and space industry, its technical competences proved decisive for one of the 20th century's major lifesaving innovations in medicine. Unfortunately, professor Volodos died in 2016⁶, which made it impossible

for him to be awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine, which we think he deserved.

How is it possible that 76 years after the end of World War II, one European nation invades its neighbour in a large scale war, putting everything we hold so dear at risk? Hundreds of civilian casualties, among them many children, have already been counted after only four days of war. We as vascular surgeons, so well trained to perform life and limb saving procedures for degenerative diseases, cannot begin to imagine how appalling it must be for our fellow colleagues to suddenly be working day and night while desperately trying to save the lives of young men, women and children who led normal lives until just a few days ago. We as a vascular community must stand together firmly in our commitment to humanity, peace and rightfulness.

We condemn this unilateral attack and militant invasion, and protest together with thousands of brave Russian doctors against the war, and against their regime that is behind it. We applaud their civilised acts of bravery, as only



Professor Nikolai Leontyevich Volodos, May 15, 1934 - April 3, 2016. The photo is from 2014.

recognition can mobilise the public to put an end to this insanity and to preserve their own legacy.

Our thoughts are with all the suffering Ukrainian people. The ESVS will do everything in its power to support our Ukrainian colleagues in this dark hour and is committed to help rebuilding vascular surgery after the invaders have returned to their countries of origin. We who have met Professor Volodos are certain that he would have been devastated by this war between his own brother nations. We write this text to remind everyone to honour his legacy in these difficult times.⁶

We originally attempted to invite the ESVS councillors from the Ukraine and Russia to co-sign this editorial. It was not possible, however, to get in contact with the Ukrainian councillor, because of the war. We were informed that Russian colleagues who sign international “letters” risk dismissal and up to 15 years of imprisonment. Thus, we decided not to invite them to sign this editorial, considering their safety.

We demand an immediate stop to the war imposed by Russia and Belarus!

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Martin Björck*

Senior Editor of the European Journal of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery,
Sweden

 @mabjo425

Maarit Venermo

Secretary General of the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS),
Finland

Florian Dick

Editor-in-Chief of the European Journal of Vascular and Endovascular
Surgery, Switzerland

Mauro Gargiulo

President of the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS), Italy

*Corresponding author. Martin Björck, Professor of Vascular Surgery,
Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

E-mail address: martin.bjorck@surgsci.uu.se (Martin Björck)