

The 34th EAES International Congress 2026: A Meeting Report from Athens, Greece

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Between 23 and 26 June 2026, the European Association for Endoscopic Surgery (EAES) held its 34th International Congress at the Megaron Athens International Conference Centre, under the theme “From Hippocrates to Modern Surgical Innovation.” The Congress president was Fotis Archontovasilis (Greece), while for the success of this great MIS event the Hellenic Society of Endoscopic Surgery (HAES) was incorporated.

The motto was apt: a programme devoted to artificial intelligence, robotics and image-guided surgery was presented in the country whose Hippocratic tradition first codified the obligations of our profession, and that juxtaposition of inheritance and innovation ran through the entire meeting. Over four days, an international faculty delivered a programme that ranged from pre-conference hands-on courses and technology symposia to free-paper and invited sessions in colorectal, upper gastrointestinal, hepato-pancreato-biliary, bariatric, hernia and endocrine surgery, with parallel tracks on artificial intelligence, robotics and surgical education. Education and mentorship ran through the meeting as a deliberate thread, structured around the EAES Research Talent Academy and the Rising Stars Academy for surgeons at the beginning of their careers.

Beside the scientific program, during the programme, the EAES Honorary Membership and Lifetime Achievement Award session the Association honoured Emmanuel Leandros (Greece), Selman Uranüs (Austria), Minhua Zheng (China) and Jaap Bonjer (The Netherlands).

This report follows the proceedings day by day, with particular attention to the Romanian delegation, most of them members of the Romanian Association for Endoscopic Surgery (RAES), who took part as session chairs, invited speakers, free-paper and poster presenters, and also as award recipients.

The 2026 EAES congress was held under the presidency of Professor Nicole D. Bouvy (The Netherlands), Chair of the Department of Surgery at Leiden University Medical Centre after a long career as Professor of

Innovative Surgical Techniques in Maastricht, who had succeeded Professor George Hanna at the head of the Association the previous year. Long active within EAES, chair of its Programme Committee from 2017 and the first woman to serve on its Executive Board, Prof. Bouvy has built a clinical and research career spanning upper and lower gastrointestinal and bariatric surgery and, increasingly, the environmental sustainability of surgical practice. These preoccupations shaped her Presidential Lecture, “Surgery 2035: Beyond the Scalpel,” which argued for a specialty capable of absorbing innovation and artificial intelligence without losing sight of its responsibility to patients and to the planet – an argument the rest of the programme repeatedly illustrated.

Proceedings opened on Tuesday, 23 June, a pre-conference day given over to examinations, technology symposia and the EAES Academy programmes. The UEMS practical examinations in minimally invasive and robotic-assisted surgery were held that day; among the candidates, Andrei Popa (Romania) passed and obtained UEMS-MIS certification. In parallel, Amazing Technology Symposia took up organ preservation, artificial intelligence and robotics, while four hands-on courses covered flexible endoscopy (HO1), laparoscopic suturing (HO2 and HO3) and laparoscopic bile-duct exploration (HO4). The same day, the EAES Research Talent Academy introduced a new cohort of early-career researchers to the fundamentals of academic work; among the invited faculty, Draga-Maria Mandi (Romania) spoke on the use of social media in disseminating research and building a professional network. Dr Mandi’s presence at the congress extended well beyond this lecture: she co-hosts the “Inside Surgery” podcast and was announced as a new member of the ISG subcommittee of the EAES Technology Committee, the committee chaired by Hans Fuchs (Germany), the subcommittee by Michele Diana (Switzerland), a notable recognition for a Romanian surgeon at an early stage of her career.

Concurrently with the examinations, the Research Sandpit, the Academy’s collaborative-research competition, in which selected participants take a project from idea to pitch over a single afternoon of breakout work, was convened by its course directors, Lisa Massey (UK), Marina Yiasemidou (UK) and Sem Hardon (The Netherlands), with Dr. Mandi among the panellists. Three Romanian surgeons had earned places among the selected participants, and Andrei Chitul – a Romanian surgeon currently serving as senior clinical fellow in colorectal surgery at the Royal London Hospital, longstanding member of RAES and EAES, among the mentors of the programme.

On the same day, in parallel with the aforementioned activities, the Hellenic Association for Endoscopic Surgery (H.A.E.S.) organized its

Masterclass, held at the Amphitheatre of the NIMTS Hospital in Athens. Prof. Dr. Cătălin Copăescu (Romania) was invited to serve as one of the chairs of this important educational event. The program of the first day concluded with the official opening ceremony of the 34th EAES Congress, followed by the welcome reception.

Wednesday, 24 June, opened the main scientific programme: parallel free-paper and invited sessions across every subspecialty, alongside a dedicated technology track. Each clinical stream was introduced by an invited lecture from a partner society – among them ESCP, EHS, IFSO-EC, ESDE, ISDE, ESES, IAES and E-AHPBA – a format that anchored the free papers which followed in the current guidance of each field.

In the metabolic track, the session “Evolving strategies in metabolic surgery: from technique to long-term outcomes” was co-chaired by Vasile Bințișan (Romania) who is also a member of the Education Committee of EAES, and Nicola Di Lorenzo (Italy). Within the education-and-training programme, Radu Turliuanu (Romania) presented “Minimally Invasive Decompression of Pelvic Nerve Entrapments: A Three-Year Neuropelveology Experience from a High-Volume Centre”. Toward the close of the day, the EAES Poster Award session, one of the meeting’s principal competitive sessions, drawing the highest-scoring posters across all specialties – was chaired by Cătălin Copăescu (Romania) with Rosa Jiménez-Rodríguez (Spain).

The Jacques Périssat Lecture, “Surgery in a Different Light,” was delivered by Alexander Vahrmeijer (The Netherlands), introduced by Michele Diana (Switzerland).

Wednesday also brought the “Meet the Expert” luncheon, a mentorship format limiting each of seven specialty tables to ten registered participants: upper gastrointestinal surgery with Lorenzo Ferri (Canada); hernia surgery with Victor Radu (Romania); benign colorectal disease with Willem Bemelman (The Netherlands); malignant colorectal disease with Antonino Spinelli (Italy); liver surgery with Go Wakabayashi (Japan); surgical technologies with Marlies Schijven (The Netherlands); and surgical research with Barbara Seeliger (France). The day ended with the Honorary Membership and Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony and the EAES General Assembly.

Thursday, 25 June, carried the densest programme of the congress: parallel sessions on minimally invasive surgery, emergency and acute-care surgery, solid-organ and endocrine disease, and crisis management, with the Rising Stars Academy session in the afternoon. “Pushing the limits of minimally invasive surgery” was chaired by Clarisa Birlog (Romania) with

Willem Bemelman (The Netherlands); in the same session, Victor Tomulescu (Romania) gave an invited lecture on the minimally invasive management of post-operative complications. In the emergency-surgery stream, Călin Popa (Romania) addressed the indications for, and treatment of, acute diaphragmatic hernia repair. In the solid-organ and endocrine free-paper session, Andrei Cristian Cioacă presented “Robotic Resection of a Splenic Cystic Tumour: Partial Splenectomy under ICG Guidance,” with Cătălin Copăescu and L. Bărbulescu (Ponderas Academic Hospital, Bucharest) as co-authors, a demonstration of fluorescence-guided, parenchyma-sparing surgery.

In the afternoon, Cătălin Copăescu took part in “Crisis management in unexpected surgical complications,” speaking on intraoperative cardiac arrest within a panel moderated by Paul Barach (USA) that also confronted medical error, communication breakdown and fire in the operating room — scenarios every surgeon hopes never to meet and must nonetheless rehearse. He then co-chaired “Shall we repair hiatal hernia during sleeve gastrectomy? When and why?” with Vasileios Drakopoulos (Greece) and Luigi Angrisani (Italy), a question still under active debate in bariatric practice. Later, Vasile Bințințan co-chaired “Contemporary management of complex and acute surgical conditions” with Thalia Petropoulou (Greece). The day also carried two named lectures: the Presidential Lecture at midday, introduced in a fitting gesture of continuity, by the Association's President-Elect, Alberto Arezzo (Italy); and the Sir Alfred Cuschieri Technology Lecture, in which Santiago Horgan (USA) retraced a career's journey from laparoscopy through robotics and NOTES to augmented reality - a personal history that doubled as a history of our field.

The final session of that day, “Young Minds, Big Ideas: Rising Stars Academy projects,” proved the high point of the congress for the Romanian delegation. Tudor-Alexandru Popoiu and his team were announced as winners of the 2025–2026 EAES Rising Stars Academy for the project MASTER — Mentorship and Surgical Training for Excellence and Resilience, presented during the session. The Rising Star Academy is the Association's principal vehicle for cultivating leadership, mentorship and non-technical skills among early-career surgeons across Europe, and the award crowns RAES's sustained engagement with the programme. Two further RAES members of the association's youngest generation, Ioana Cosmina Teslaru and Andrei Evanghelides, were admitted to the incoming edition, and Clarisa Birlog was appointed the programme's new coordinator, in recognition of her established role in EAES educational activities.

The closing day, Friday 26 June, set aside the

parallel clinical format of the preceding three. It was devoted to very attractive and well attended post-graduate masterclasses and courses: MC3 Systematic review and meta-analysis - Course directors: Dimitris Mavridis (Greece), Stavros Antoniou (Greece) ; MC4 Artificial Intelligence - Masterclass directors: Pietro Mascagni (Italy), Martin Wagner (Germany), Jennifer Eckhoff (Germany); MC5 How to become a successful innovator: medical device innovation bootcamp - Masterclass directors: Kiyokazu Nakajima (Japan), Paul Barach (USA), Yoav Mintz (Israel); MC6 Surgical safety strategies: beyond the checklist (The basics of patient surgical safety) - Course director: Oleksii Potapov (Poland), Paul Barach (USA), Tania Triantafyllou (Greece) and MC7 Transanal approaches to neoplasia, leaks, and IBD Course director: Michel Adamina (Switzerland).

There was a certain logic in ending here: after three days of innovation on display, the congress closed on the discipline of evidence — the methods by which the profession will separate the technologies that improve outcomes from those that merely impress.

Viewed in its entirety, the Athens Congress distinguished itself through an outstanding scientific program and the participation of more than 1,500 attendees, reaffirming the EAES's position as the leading European forum for endoscopic and minimally invasive surgery. For the Romanian delegation, it proved to be a particularly rewarding and impactful edition. Seventy-one Romanian delegates attended the congress, and twelve of them held podium roles in the proceedings recounted here — as session chairs, invited lecturers, expert-table faculty, and free-paper, competition and project presenters. To these were added a successful UEMS certification candidate and, within a single edition, the winning Research Sandpit team and the winning Rising Stars Academy project, together with the newly admitted Academy cohort.

These results span the full arc of a surgical career, from residents entering the EAES programmes to established faculty chairing award sessions — and a national school of surgery is ultimately judged not only by its established names, but by the generation visibly forming behind them. That all of this unfolded under the banner “From Hippocrates to Modern Surgical Innovation,” in the homeland of the physician whose oath still frames the ethics of our profession, lent the meeting a resonance beyond its scientific content. The Romanian participants left Athens as one leaves a good operation: satisfied with the result, ready to apply what they have learned and already thinking about the next EAES Congress.

We look forward to welcoming more members of the Romanian Association for Endoscopic Surgery to the 35th EAES International Congress, taking place in Düsseldorf, Germany, from 15 to 18 June 2027.