

## Community

# Interview with Jyrki Saarinen, the new Executive Director of EOS

**After the resignation of the former Executive Director in the Hannover (Germany) based office, the European Optical Society worked on a strategic re-orientation of its office. As a result, the office has moved to the campus of the University of Eastern Finland. Recently, the Board of the EOS appointed Jyrki Saarinen as the new Executive Director of the society. Andreas Thoss, Publisher of *Advanced Optical Technologies*, spoke with Jyrki Saarinen about his decisions and ambitions.**

**AOT:** You have worked more than a decade in industry. Why did you return to academia?

**Jyrki Saarinen:** I really enjoyed my work in building a high-tech company: from a one-man startup to international large corporation with thousand employees. But it was time for change and to do something new. Academia was a kind of dream among several other, more realistic options in or close to industry.

**AOT:** With your startup, you moved to Silicon Valley and lived there for many years. Why did you return to Finland?

**Jyrki Saarinen:** When considering various options I got an invitation for a new professorship in photonics applications and commercialization at UEF in Finland. Knowing the high quality of R&D at UEF and challenges of international commercialization in high-tech in Finland, I was excited to take this new position in beautiful Finnish Lakeland.

**AOT:** Why did you take over the position as EOS Director?

**Jyrki Saarinen:** Before my career in industry I was involved in founding and developing the Finnish Optical Society. Now I want to contribute in building a strong joint organization for pan-European optics and photonics activity. I believe that we need that in Europe. My position also gives me the opportunity to network, especially in European



Jyrki Saarinen is the new executive director of the European Optical Society.

education and research, areas that I have been away from in recent years. Being active both in academia, entrepreneurship, and industry in Europe, Asia, and North America, I hope to have a good skillset for the position.

**AOT:** Why did you offer to move the office to Finland?

**Jyrki Saarinen:** The idea came from my colleague, Professor Seppo Honkanen, President Elect of EOS, when he learned that EOS office is looking for new leader and strategy.

**AOT:** What parts of the EOS activities do you want to strengthen and which parts are under scrutiny?

**Jyrki Saarinen:** First of all, my goal is to run financially healthy activities based on the portfolio the EOS already has: nothing to add, nothing to cut as yet. Then I want to listen to our members (private and corporate members, and national member societies) as to how they want to improve the EOS. Only after that can I tell, how the EOS activities may be changed in future.

AOT: The conference business is a difficult one in a highly competitive market. How do you want to continue the success of the Hannover based team?

Jyrki Saarinen: We already have excellent topics for conferences series we want to keep, and new topics are welcome. We have professional scientists across the Europe who plan these events and create excellent programs. We can only compete with other conferences if we continue organizing the high quality events which are required and appreciated by our members and other European and even American or Asian attendees. We also have professional people from the old Hannover team who continue to work for the new EOS office.

AOT: The EOS has good coverage within Europe with 23 local societies and about 6500 members. What are the benefits from EOS for a new member that a local society can't give him?

Jyrki Saarinen: EOS is the academic voice of optics and photonics in Europe. Together we are strong and large enough to talk to the European Commission and to our equivalent societies in Northern America and Asia.

National societies are too small for that. Both the EOS and national societies have their own important role for each member in Europe and elsewhere. Pan-European collaboration is vital in today's global world.

One typical example for our activities is the formation of pan-European focus groups. In these we establish networking among experts in certain fields of optics and influence European policy in these fields via Photonics21 and recommendations to the European commission. In this way, our members can influence very important political decisions.

AOT: There is competition between the various professional American societies. What value does the EOS add for a European scientist, who often is a member of an American society as well?

Jyrki Saarinen: I'm also member of OSA and SPIE. But only EOS has its main concern in optics and photonics education, R&D, and industry in Europe. As I mentioned already, EOS can talk to European governments and the European Commission representing the Pan-European voice. And all of us, who live and work in Europe, are dependent on European governments, the European Union, and European industry exploiting optics and photonics.



The EOS office moved to the Joensuu campus of the University of Eastern Finland.

**Jyrki Saarinen, D.Sc. (Tech.), MBA, Professor**

Jyrki Saarinen DSc (Tech.), MBA is Professor at the Institut of Photonics at the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) in Joensuu, Finland. He received his Doctor of Science in Technology degree from Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) in 1995. He headed the Diffractive Optics and Micro-Optics research group there. Since 1997 he has been Adjunct Professor of Micro-Optics at TKK, now Aalto University. In 1998 he started a fulltime employment at Heptagon, which he had co-founded in 1993. With several managing positions he was the driving force behind Heptagon's growth to being

a leading provider of advanced micro-optics solutions with 1000 employees. From 2006 to 2013 he lived in Silicon Valley establishing Heptagon's US business.

His areas of research have been diffractive optics, ion exchange technology, micro optics, and optical scatterometry by applying neural networks. Besides continuing research on novel applications and manufacturing methods, he is interested in improving photonics business and increasing international knowledge on photonics business opportunities.