The extraordinary story of scientists in East and West combatting HIV

A small group of scientists were doggedly working in the field of antiviral treatments when the AIDS epidemic struck. Faced with one of the grand challenges of modern biology of the twentieth century, scientists worked across the political divide of the Cold War to produce a new class of antivirals. Their molecules were developed by a Californian startup together with teams of scientists at the Rega Institute of KU Leuven and the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry (IOCB) of the Academy of Sciences in Prague. These molecules became the cornerstone of the blockbuster drugs now used to combat and prevent HIV. Cold War Triangle gives an insight into the human face of science as it recounts the extraordinary story of scientists in East and West who overcame ideological barriers and worked together for the benefit of humanity.

'It was in a small town in the Czech Republic that I first met the scientists who moved the fight against viral disease a giant leap forward. As Ambassador of Belgium, I was invited to attend the ceremony at the University of South Bohemia conferring honorary doctorates to the late Antonín Holý and Erik De Clercq. Their cooperation with scientists
of an American company was at the origin of a series of miracle drugs which are the most widely used drugs today, not only to combat AIDS but, to actually prevent HIV infection. It struck me how little the general public knows about the scientists who saved millions of lives and will safeguard millions more in the future. Although I am not a scientist but a retired diplomat, I felt compelled to tell their story.

Cold War Triangle looks beyond Belgian medical research, and covers academic institutions in other countries, particularly in former Czechoslovakia, and how their research was combined with the genius of American science and entrepreneurship. It not only straddles the workings of scientists across oceans and continents but also across deep political and ideological divides.’

Renilde Loeckx

Inhoudstafel:

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