

CLIENT CHRONICLES – JOINT CONGRESS OF EUROPEAN NEUROLOGY

PREPARING FOR THE UNPREDICTABLE



Our clients trust us to take care of all the details related to an event, including those which are unpredictable. In a situation with thousands of delegates in a foreign country, a vast array of challenges can arise, sometimes more serious than others. Often there is an indication in advance of a potential issue as was the case at the Joint Congress of European Neurology. In our experience, there are four key steps in preparing for an unexpected issue; anticipate, plan, cooperate, and communicate.

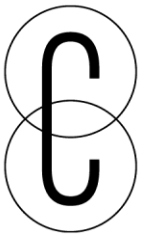
In 2014, we organised the EFNS/ENS Joint Congress of European Neurology in Istanbul, Turkey from 31 May – 3 June. This turned out to be the one year anniversary of the Gezi Park protests. In anticipation of potential unrest in the city, we started to plan early for the worst case scenario. By referencing the four key steps, we were able to come up with a plan to safeguard nearly 6,000 delegates in case of a complete emergency. Below is a partial check list which was used as a basis for crisis planning in Istanbul.

ANTICIPATE

- the worst case scenario, how can we get all delegates to their hotels? Should that not be possible, what would we need to do to allow delegates to remain in the congress centre?
- order busses to be on call and nearby in case they are required quickly.
- request emergency first responder services on site

PLAN

- to use staff to move people efficiently
- prepare an evacuation plan anticipating possible blockades to evacuation routes
- prepare a plan should evacuation not be possible, check supplies of drinkable water onsite
- check emergency exits in the venue – while there are universal regulations, something may have inadvertently been placed in front of an emergency exit door



COOPERATE

- work closely with your local agency
- get the local authorities involved, working with the police helped us get delegates to hotels safely
- meet with representatives from each of your onsite stakeholders regularly to share concerns and amend plans as necessary, include local authorities if appropriate

COMMUNICATE

- share contingency plans with all stakeholders, i.e. staff, venue, local agency, etc.
- assign tasks in advance
- create signage to direct delegates
- maintain close contact with event sponsors
- share evacuation plans with all stakeholder
- let delegates know what is happening and how they should behave

Using the above list as a guideline, we were able to make informed decisions to safeguard delegates and sponsors and promote a positive congress experience. Following the recommendation of police and, in cooperation with our local destination management partner in Istanbul, we ended the networking reception before dark and escorted groups of delegates back to their hotels through the police barricade. Each group was escorted by a trusted Congrex Switzerland staff member and a member of the destination management company who could communicate with the police if necessary and had a better command of the geography in the event that a road block could not be crossed. Escorts were equipped with printed maps, mobile phones and walkie talkies in an effort to maintain communication. The local authorities already had more than 20,000 police and first responders in the area and were actively working to prevent anticipated unrest in the city. The cooperation of all involved resulted in a successful implementation of the plan to get all delegates safely out of the congress centre and back to their hotels with zero injuries.

We learned that it is important to remain flexible and trust staff and partners in any crisis situation. As the saying goes, you are only as strong as the weakest member of your team. We are proud of our staff for handling this unpredictable event with a high degree of professionalism and competence.

Further information: www.congrex-switzerland.com

Twitter [@Congrex](https://twitter.com/Congrex)

LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/company/congrex-switzerland

Facebook www.facebook.com/Congrex