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Memories of Professor Alessandro Ballio

I first met Sandro Ballio at the 16th meeting of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies in Moscow in 1984. At this meeting we were both invited by Professor Kees Libbenga of Leiden University to join a small consortium in the EU Biotechnology Action Programme studying plant hormone receptors, which was at that time a relatively new but very rapidly advancing field of research. We were all somewhat in awe of Sandro – who already had an outstanding reputation in his field going back many years – quite apart from his seminal work on fusicoccin. However, it became clear to all of us that Sandro was a very modest man who did not expect to be treated with deference and we soon appreciated his kindness, his ability to form lasting friendships and his desire to help young scientists – from whatever country. All this together with an incisive and rigorous contribution to the work of the group. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that we considered him as the «father figure» of the consortium. This collaboration continued for many years – including memorable visits to Rome for meetings – and led to the production of many groundbreaking publications. There is no doubt that in great measure this was due to Sandro's input. Perhaps his most outstanding quality was his ability to «suffer fools gladly», that is, to tolerate those scientists who failed to measure up to his own rigorous standards – he treated such people with unfailing courtesy and support (often undeserving).

Sandro was an outstanding role model for scientists young and old across Europe and beyond, he was not only a great scientist but also a gentle man and a gentleman. He will be sorely missed.

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