

Editorial – Message from the President

Pavel Exner, President of the EMS

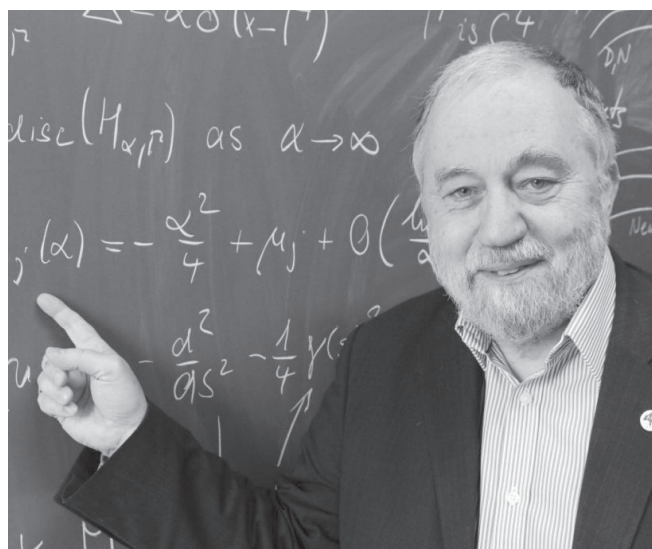
Dear EMS Members, Dear Friends,

Any society's life contains both climactic and anticlimactic periods. The year just concluded was full of major events but while the New Year promises many things we look forward to, it is day-to-day work that will provide the leitmotiv of the coming months. This includes the implementation of the decisions taken at our council meeting in Berlin last Summer. To begin with, the society's leadership has been substantially renewed. With deep gratitude for their devoted work, we part with Franco Brezzi and Martin Raussen and we wish success to Volker Mehrmann and Armen Sergeev who replace them as the society's vice-presidents. We also thank the other departing members of the Executive Committee: Alice Fialowski, Gert-Martin Greuel and Laurence Halpern. We welcome the new members: Nicola Fusco, Stefan Jackowski, Vicente Muñoz, Beatrice Pelloni and Betül Tanbay.

Equally important is the renewal of our standing committees, which form the backbone of the EMS. Around half the chairs and a number of the members have reached the end of their tenure. Their replacements were decided at the recent meeting of the Executive Committee in Tbilisi. Let me express our gratitude to all of them, with personal thanks to follow separately. In some committees, the changes run particularly deep. This is especially true for the Education Committee, which will see a majority of new members. We wish them success and hope that the committee's scope will broaden and include some hands-on activities.

Another big change concerns the Publication and Electronic Publication Committees. As technology advances, this separation has become gradually less justifiable and we have invited their members to discuss the formation of a unified committee within the next few months. Before leaving the topic of committees, let me also mention the generous support the EMS has received from the Simons Foundation, targeted at mathematics in Africa. Our Committee for Developing Countries has worked hard to create appropriate grant schemes and its five year programme is now underway.

While none of the largest mathematical meetings will occur this year, some are already looming on the horizon. On a global scale, we look forward to ICM 2018 in Rio and are delighted that the following meeting in 2022 will return, after 16 years, to Europe: either Paris or Saint Petersburg. The EMS, as a society representing the entire European mathematical community, will express no preference between the two bids but we are confident that both offer the prospect of a wonderful meeting. At the European scale, the Berlin Council has decided to hold the 8th European Congress in Portorož in 2020. Our Slovenian colleagues have started working



intensively and we are certain of an attractive meeting, which will do much for the standing of mathematics in this part of Europe.

Even if it is still a long time ahead, I encourage you to contemplate possible candidates for the EMS prizes in 2020. Our main award is highly renowned – recent confirmation can be seen from two of its latest laureates, Hugo Duminil-Copin and Geordie Williamson, winning the 2017 New Horizons in Mathematics Prize just a few days ago. It is in all our interests to keep the flag flying high.

A New Year message generally strikes an optimistic tone. However, I hope it won't do any harm to add a few words about our worries. Some of them, frankly, are of our own making; if I were to characterise their common root, I would suggest a lack of loyalty to the mathematical community. To give a few examples, numerous colleagues registered for the Berlin congress but did not then pay, causing a financial headache for the organisers (and we know that at least some such individuals did indeed attend). On the other hand, far from every member of the organising committee of the congress opted to attend the meeting whose programme they had designed!

You may also have noticed the council amending the society's By-Laws (Rule 23) to state that committee members must be individual EMS members "in good standing". While this requirement should be self-evident, we have spotted committee members (and even chairs) ignoring it. (I add that this has happened despite our membership dues being far lower than those of mathematical societies on other continents.) A few of our corporate members are also perpetually in arrears. We are, of course, conscious of difficult economic situations in parts of our continent and will never introduce the spirit

of “juste retour” to the EMS. Nevertheless, we need at least to see sincere efforts to deal with this matter.

These are problems we can resolve ourselves, with the will to do so. That is less true of difficulties in our relations to the “outside world”, including European funding schemes. In last year’s message, I spoke about the ERC, a very valuable instrument that covers, however, only a limited segment of mathematical activities. During 2016, the European Commission led an open consultation on the role of mathematics in Horizon 2020. This was a useful exercise in which many of us participated but it would be overly optimistic to expect an enduring effect. It is a task for each of us to seek out opportunities within the funding system and I would like to praise members of the EU-MATHS-IN initiative and other colleagues who have devoted their energies to such activities. This matter regularly features at the annual Meeting of the Presidents of the EMS Member Societies and no doubt will be raised again in April in Lisbon.

Then, we come to a still wider political scene, in which our ability to influence things is close to zero. We received a harsh reminder of this on the eve of the Berlin congress, when an attempted coup (or whatever we should call it) prevented our colleagues in Turkey from attending. An immediate consequence was that the second Caucasian Conference (planned with EMS support) had to be postponed; subsequent events in Turkey have thrown its new date into further doubt. In other countries, we see processes unfolding that may not be as violent but that signify deep instabilities in the political climate. In such a situation, it is useful to keep in mind a double inclusion: geographical Europe is wider than political Europe and mathematical Europe is wider than geographical Europe. We can and must hold together, even as we sail through rough waters.

Let me end on an optimistic note after all: these political tumults are temporary but – as we all know – mathematics is eternal. Happy New Year!