

**A LETTER TO PRESIDENTS OF
NATIONAL EUROPEAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETIES
FEBRUARY 8, 2008**

1. Infrastructures in Mathematics

The office of Commissioner Janez Potocnik who is responsible for research in Europe, has recently produced a document on European (large) Research Infrastructures (ERI), where Mathematical has appeared under the heading Computer and Data treatment. On behalf of the EMS, I wrote a letter to Commissioner complaining about it. In the middle of January I went to Brussels to meet some EU officers, in particular Lorenza Saracco, who ensured me that Mathematics now comes under the heading of Mathematics. I am very glad about it as it is most important for the future standing of Mathematics in Europe. After the creation of the European Research Council (ERC), the development of different ERI is expected to be the next step in supporting European Science.

It is not a given fact that Mathematics will be a part of this development and it is our task to show that research infrastructures in Mathematics exist. In the middle of December I also met Carlo Rizzuto, the President of ELETTRA Synchrotron Light Laboratory in Trieste and chairman of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures. I would like to point out that the Brussels Commission is only one of many members belonging to the European Strategy Forum. Carlo Rizzuto and I have agreed that mathematicians should prepare a document of ERI in Mathematics and Jean Pierre Bourguignon is now preparing a draft.

Whilst in Brussels I also met Mary Minch and Sieglinde Gruber from Directorate-General for Research. I complained bitterly that Frame Programme 7 has concentrated on interdisciplinary projects and left very little room for fundamental research in Mathematics. My complaint has been acknowledged. One does not usually expect direct results from such meetings. Nevertheless we all know how important it is to remind people in Brussels that Mathematics exists and that its support is necessary. I also pointed out that Mathematics is relatively well supported by National European governments, but that this support is not enough and that it is becoming less and less as Brussels, one of the major representatives/agents of research support in Europe, neglects Mathematics.

2. ISE

On the 11th of December I participated in a meeting of the ISE - Initiative for Science in Europe - which is a lobby organisation for Science in Europe. The members of this group are particularly responsible for the creation of the European Research Council (ERC) which has recently distributed its first round of grants to young researchers. About 20 young mathematicians received such a grant in 2007 and on behalf of the EMS I would like to congratulate them on their achievement. At the same ISE meeting it was decided to produce a document concerning ELRI, by the end of January-beginning of February,

3. EMS-ESF conferences

The EMS on behalf of ERCOM is about to sign a contract with the European Science Foundation (ESF) that will provide partial funding of 5-6 conferences a year, beginning in 2009, at different ERCOM centres. The first contract is supposed to be for 5 years. This will be important for Mathematics National Centres, giving them an additional international profile and also additional financial support. The budget of the ESF is supplied by the National Research Foundations of European Countries. It should be noted that the ESF is planning to apply for funding from Brussels for the financial support of EMS conferences rather than obtaining it from their member organisations. Since the ESF is such a very established organisation, it has an excellent chance to succeed (probably much better than the EMS).

Last year the Committee of the ESF Research Conferences Unit sent out a call for proposals for conferences in Mathematics to be held in 2008. Initially maximum three proposals were to be selected. As it turned out only two proposals were received by the deadline that had even been extended to 20 October 2007. It appears that the Mathematical Community in general did not know about this possibility. We have therefore agreed with PESC that in future such advertisements should be given via the EMS which has much better means of delivering information to the Mathematical Research Community.

There still might be a possibility to have a one week conference with financial support from the ESF in Bedlewo (Poland) in October 2008. I suggest that you inform your colleagues about this possibility. Please contact me as soon as possible if someone is interested.

4. Education of Mathematics in Europe

Interest in Mathematics during the pre 18 year old school education has sharply declined in the last 20 years and all European countries are very concerned. The OECD report on the Pisa Study caused particular alarm.

Recently I participated in two events concerning Mathematics Education in Europe. The first was a conference of the future of Mathematics Education Europe, Lisbon, December 16-18, with more than 320 participants. The second was in Oslo and was organised by NHO (Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise) with many politicians involved. Both conferences contributed to public awareness of the problem. I had the impression that the Norwegian government was somewhat confused by the fact that although their schools were given substantial funding, the results of the Pisa study did not show any improvements.

I have looked carefully at the results of the OECD report and some figures were most surprising. For example, one of the arguments for a "slow start" of the study of mathematics in schools is that it is important not to lose weaker pupils and to achieve an equal speed of learning for all pupils. With this argument it is assumed that weaker pupils are not left behind and get much better than if they would not have received so much attention. It appears that this is not the case. If for example one looks at the performance of the group of weaker students in Finland (which does not use the slow start method), it is much better than that of the respective group of Swedish pupils. It seems that with the slow start system even weaker students lose their motivation and gain as much knowledge as they would have with the "old fashioned" education.

5. Meeting of Presidents in Luminy

A large number of the National Mathematical Societies were delighted with the initiative of the French Mathematical Society to host a first meeting of Societies' Presidents or their representative in Luminy. There were two possible suggestions: either at the end of April or at the beginning of May. The majority of possible participants voted for the end of April and therefore we shall have this meeting on the 26-27th of April. This meeting is aimed to develop closer relations between the EMS and the National Societies. The EMS needs manpower and support from all European mathematicians in promoting Mathematics in Europe and making it more visible.

There are many issues to be discussed and I shall try to send you a draft of an agenda with my next letter. However, I would like to ask you and members of your Society to let me know as soon as possible, what you would like to discuss.

6. 5ECM

Registration for the Fifth European Congress (5ECM) in Amsterdam on July 14 - 18, 2008, has been open. Please do not miss the opportunity to have a cheaper rate. This offer expires on April 15. For the EMS members the

fee is 220 and for non-EMS members it is 260. For those who are planning to go to Amsterdam, this could be a good opportunity to become an EMS individual member. Unfortunately it is still not possible to pay via the web, but only via respective societies. We hope however, that a new EMS web-page, which will be launched very soon, will allow direct payment of EMS individual membership fees.

We are all waiting for this exciting event which will surely lift the profile of European Mathematics. The short information of the Plenary speakers was published in the last issue of the EMS Newsletter, see:

www.ems-ph.org/newsletter/pdf/2007-12-66.pdf

7. Council meeting in Utrecht

Just before the 5ECM, on July 12-13, there will be a EMS Council meeting in Utrecht. There is a web-page of this meeting:

<http://www.math.ntnu.no/ems/council08/>

Please send the name of the delegates at your earliest convenience:

to the EMS Secretariat: ems-office@helsinki.fi

or the EMS Secretary Dr Stephen Huggett: s.huggett@plymouth.ac.uk.

If you would like to propose items for the agenda, please send them to the EMS Secretariat by the 28th of February. We also expect nomination for new members of the EMS Executive Committee.

8. Mathematical Weekends

On February 29 - March 2, 2008, there will be a EMS Mathematical Weekend in Copenhagen organised by the Danish Mathematical Society and the University of Copenhagen, see:

<http://www.math.ku.dk/english/research/conferences/emswweekend/>

It would be good if your Societies would advertise this event in to members of your society. The EMS is also looking for future venues for Mathematical Weekends which proved to be very interesting. Please discuss with your colleagues a possibility of having such an event in your country.

9. Summer School in Dubna

In the last issue of the EMS Newsletter there was an article by Michael Eickenberg, a third year student of Mathematics and Physics at the University of Luxembourg, see:

www.ems-ph.org/newsletter/pdf/2007-12-66.pdf

Michael participated in the Dubna Summer School and shares his very positive experience with us. I take this opportunity to promote the next Summer

school "Contemporary Mathematics" will take place in Dubna July in 18-30, 2008. Here is the text which I have received from Vitaly Arnold, one of the organisers of this school:

As usual, the best Russian high school students and first two years university students will participate in this school. Professors Dmitry Anosov*, Vladimir Arnold, Fields medalist Sergey Novikov, Vladimir Tikhomirov, Vladimir Uspensky, Fields medalist Andrei Okounkov* are invited to give classes (* participation is to be confirmed). Among the lecturers there are famous mathematicians from the best Russian, European and American research centers (mostly belonging to the Russian mathematical School). The lectures will be given either in Russian with simultaneous translation into English or specially in English. Organization fee for the foreign participants will be 450 EUR (it covers accomodation, food, scientific and cultural program, but neither travel to/from Russia no visa expenses).

Further information will be published on:

<http://www.mccme.ru/dubna/eng/>

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