

# Draft Report on the Meeting of Presidents of Mathematical Societies, in Warsaw

Stephen Huggett

9 and 10 May 2009

## Section A: Preliminaries

**A1** Ari Laptev, President of the European Mathematical Society, welcomed everybody to the meeting. He proposed thanks to Stanisław Janeczko and the Banach Centre for their invitation to hold the meeting in Warsaw, and this was enthusiastically agreed by acclaim.

**Please refer to the separate list for attendance.**

**A2** Janusz Grabowski described the arrangements for dinner.

**A3** The agenda was agreed, although people were encouraged to add further items for the Sunday morning session.

## Section B: Introductions

**B1** Each person introduced themselves, explaining which Society they represented.

**B2** Stanisław Janeczko gave a brief history of the Mathematical Institute, and its publications, since the Second World War. In 1948 the Institute was incorporated into the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1972 the Banach Centre was formed, and now has the Bedlewo Conference Centre near Poznań.

**B3** Stefan Jackowski gave a brief history of the Polish Mathematical Society, of which he is now the President. It was formed 90 years ago in Krakow, and held the first Polish Mathematical Congress in Lvov in 1927. It moved to Warsaw in the late 1930s. After the war, its publications were all taken over by state organisations. He noted that the European Mathematical Society was founded in Madralin, near Warsaw, 20 years ago.

## Section C: The European Mathematical Society

C1 In his President's Report Ari Laptev repeated his thanks to to Stéphane Jaffard and the Société Mathématique de France for having hosted the first of these meetings in Luminy last year. He went on to thanked the organizers of the 5th European Congress of Mathematicians in Amsterdam, and to draw attention to the 6th ECM, to be held in Krakow in 2012. The Executive Committee of the EMS was in the process of selecting Chairs of the Programme Committee and Prizes Committee for 6ECM. He also announced that there would be a new prize, to be awarded for the first time at the 6ECM. This would be the EMS/Springer prize in the history of mathematics. The Executive Committee is currently working out the details. On the EMS web site, to be described in detail later, he intends to use the "President's Message" more frequently as a means of communication, and he noted that he had recently used this message to give public congratulations to Mikhail Gromov on his Abel Prize. The meeting endorsed these congratulations.

Turning to membership of the EMS, the President gave a warm welcome to Susan Oakes, and briefly described her rôle. He explained that increasing the individual membership of the Society was very important for its future influence, and asked people to give Susan every assistance in her work. The EMS Newsletter is now one of the best in the world, and in addition to this, EMS members now have free access to Zentrablatt.

The major projects on which he had been working included, first, the European Science Foundation/EMS "Forward Look" in mathematics and industry, now led by Mario Primicerio, with 150,000 euros, and secondly the ESF/EMS/ERCOM conferences.

The biggest project, however, was the new call, due in July 2009, for support for the European research infrastructure. The mathematical component of this call will just be under one theme "infrastructures in mathematics and its interfaces in science, technology, and society at large", for about 10 million euros over 4 years. Originally, mathematics had not featured at all, but after some intense lobbying we are now in a position where a good bid is very likely to be successful. In addition, the definition of "infrastructure" is very good for mathematics, and in particular it will be possible to devote some resources to projects like Zentralblatt, the EMS Newsletter, and the Digital Mathematical Library. The deadline is the 3rd of September, and the President, Mario Primicerio, and Jean-Pierre Bourguignon are working together on initial plans.

[Item G4 was taken at this point.]

The President commented briefly on other activities as follows.

- The EMS Publishing House continues to be successful, and is looking for more journals.

- Ulf Rehmann is the new Chair of the Electronic Publishing Committee.
- Konrad Krainer is the new Chair of the Education Committee.

He concluded his report by inviting everybody to suggest new ways in which the EMS can be active and even more closely involved with the activities of national societies. He also offered solidarity from the EMS, in cases where national societies needed support from outside.

In the ensuing discussion it was noted that the position of the ESF is changing now that the ERC has been formed, but that the 10 million euros for research infrastructure is only the beginning, and the ESF is at present very supportive of mathematics. The year of mathematics in Germany had been hard work but very successful, with more students coming in to the subject, and funding from foundations which had not previously considered mathematics. There was a growing contradiction between the increasing value of mathematics in subjects such as engineering, chemistry, and biology and the decreasing amount of mathematics taught to students of these subjects.

**C2** Jouko Väänänen, the EMS Treasurer, gave an overview of the finances of the Society, and then focussed on the numbers of individual members coming from each country. He noted that these numbers are sometimes hard to understand, and urged national societies to make it as easy as possible for their members to join the EMS. [The presentation is available as a separate document.]

**C3** Helge Holden, EMS Vice-President, showed the “new” EMS web site to the meeting, and asked that national societies set up highly visible links to it from their own web sites:

`http://www.euro-math-soc.eu`

Indeed, as far as he could see, only three societies had already done this! He further asked that, if possible, national societies use a stable domain name and email address, so that contact with an individual society does not have to be re-established each time its President changes.

The EMS web site was explored, in front of the meeting, page by page, and suggestions for further developments included a list of European funded projects. This was agreed to be valuable, but it might be difficult to be comprehensive. It was also suggested that a wiki page be set up. This was definitely planned, and would be valuable in many ways, not least in providing a community for individual members of the EMS.

Helge Holden was congratulated on the success of the new site, and thanked for all his hard work.

**C4** Helge Holden gave a brief description of the work of the EMS Publishing House, during which it was asked where and when the Proceedings of

the 5ECM will be published. The representative from the Royal Dutch Mathematical Society said that he would find out.

- C5** Stephen Huggett, the EMS Secretary, gave a brief presentation of the history of the “Joint Mathematical Weekends”, and invited the meeting to consider making proposals for future such events. He then did the same for the “EMS Lecturer” scheme, and one name was immediately proposed for the Executive Committee to consider.

The governing body of the EMS is its Council, which next meets in the summer of 2010. The venue has not been fixed, and some suggestions were made, for which he thanked the meeting. Finally, he also described the pattern of meetings of the Executive Committee, and asked member societies to consider hosting a meeting. This could be an extremely valuable way for the EMS and the host society to forge closer links.

- C6** Tsou Sheung Tsun presented the work of the EMS Committee for Developing Countries, which she chairs. She explained that as the CDC only had access to small amounts of money it concentrated on the coordination of efforts funded from elsewhere. She asked whether national societies would consider making it easy for members to make donations at the time of their membership renewal. The CDC was reviewing its book donation scheme, which was undoubtedly valuable, but expensive, and it may be arguable that this money would be better used in support of an African workshop on the use of electronic resources, for example. A new project for the CDC was the concept of “emerging regional centres”, which she described. Finally, Tsou Sheung Tsun gave a brief introduction to the work of CIMPA, noting that it would in future be supported by the Spanish government as well as the French, and that indeed even broader European support was hoped for.

Nuno Crato commented that there is a committee for the development of mathematics in Portuguese speaking countries, and it was agreed that there should be collaboration between this committee and the CDC.

Stéphane Jaffard welcomed the fact that another European country would now be involved in backing CIMPA, and he observed that the EMS was a good framework for further such developments.

The meeting thanked Tsou Sheung Tsun for her work.

## Section D: ICIAM

Rolf Jeltsch, President of the International Council for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, gave a presentation highlighting the forthcoming conference in Vancouver in 2011. [This presentation is available as a separate document.]

## Section E: Evaluation of Mathematics

Stéphane Jaffard described how the evaluation of mathematics, and the procedures for the distribution of research support, had changed in France over the last two years. Firstly, under the heading of “increased autonomy” for universities, each university now has far greater power in deciding how to allocate research funding. Consequently, many universities, especially the smaller ones, are using entirely inappropriate metrics to evaluate research. Secondly, overall funding is decreasing, and the new agency ENR prefers to award large grants to groups of universities, for short term projects, on currently fashionable themes. All of these effects act against mathematics. He proposed that the EMS work towards some sort of collective response to these problems.

Brian Davies said that sadly the UK was “ahead” of France in many of these developments. The Research Council is increasingly choosing to award grants in larger amounts, on currently fashionable themes, and the total amount available for foundational work in mathematics has dropped from £21 million to £12 million over 5 years. Many people, not just mathematicians, are opposed to this, and it needs to be resisted at the highest level. Also, the support through university funding suffers from the same difficulties as those described in France: the universities decide how to distribute their research money. There has been some success in explaining what metrics would be appropriate in mathematics. Humanities subjects face similar difficulties, and it is now beginning to be realised that the method of evaluation is subject dependent.

Zvi Artstein reported that in Israel the politicians argue to the academics that “the UK is doing this so it must be right”, which reinforces the need for a collective response from the EMS.

Rolf Jeltsch drew the meeting’s attention to the report on the use and misuse of citation data in the assessment of scientific research written by the International Mathematical Union, the International Council of Industrial and Applied Mathematics, and the Institute of Mathematical Statistics.

[This report is available at the following address.]

<http://www.mathunion.org/publications/reports-recommendations>

It was proposed by Portugal to have a statement signed by all Presidents of European Mathematical Societies about the importance of mathematics and fundamental, curiosity driven research.

## Section F: Open Discussion

- Sabir Gusein-Zade informed the meeting about the Dubna summer schools.
- The representatives from Moldova described the mathematical society in their country. It has 100 members, most of whom are school teachers. Conferences are being organized, and they publish several journals and books. The financial situation is difficult. The intention is to apply for membership at the next EMS Council meeting. (Their attendance at this

meeting was supported by the Società Italiana di Matematica Applicata e Industriale.)

- There was a brief discussion about requirements for membership of the EMS, focussing on two independent issues. Firstly, how far does Europe extend? Secondly, member societies should be sufficiently stable (with regular elections of officers, a stable financial situation, and well-defined membership).

## Section G: European Funding for Mathematics

**G3** Michael Günter (ECMI) gave a presentation of the “Forward Look” project (supported by the ESF) on Mathematics in Industry. It is coordinated by Mario Primicerio, and has three working groups:

- training and career development
- academia–industry interface
- opportunities and challenges

[The presentation is available as a separate document.]

**G4** Pavel Exner described the work of the European Research Council, of which he is a member. It is now about two years old, and is intended to become the dominant European research funding body, comparable to the NSF. There are two funding streams, starting grants and advanced grants. The grants have no nationality restrictions, and are not for networks. The only criterion is the scientific excellence of the research proposal. Given that this is a long term enterprise, the system must be improved and simplified, and the “mid-term review” currently under way will decide the future structure of the agency. There is a concern that the structure which is likely to emerge will not be optimal for competing with the NSF.

In response to questions, it was noted that some countries have acknowledged the strength of the original field of applications by providing support for the “semi-finalists” in various ways. Some countries are concerned about a “brain drain” within Europe. Finally, the NSF has recently had a big increase in its funding, and although the funding for the ERC is growing, it is hard to imagine that it will be able to match the NSF.

Pavel Exner was thanked for his work and his report.

## Section H: Any Other Business

Radu Gologan invited the EMS Executive Committee to have a meeting, and for there to be a meeting with the Presidents, on 15–18 April 2010 in Konstanta, Romania.