

Partnerships are the Key

An interview with O.G. Folberth who retires this month as the first Chairman of the East-West Task Force.

— *Editor: The EPS East-West Task Force has been involved with some specific initiatives including an inventory of library subscriptions, a back-issues appeal, financing journal subscriptions, a very successful study conference to review science policy, extension of the academic computer network, support for restructuring physical societies, and institute peer reviews. Which directions do you feel initiatives should take in the immediate future?*

The task force should concentrate on the continuation of the tasks in progress, specifically library aid, peer reviews, improvement of the academic computer network, and the preparation of a list of the significant research institutions in eastern Europe.

— *The American Physical Society has indicated that it could envisage cooperating with the Society and the Task Force. Eddy Lingeman, Chairman of the Physics and Society Committee, has recently discussed possibilities with Irving Lerch, his opposite number in APS. In which areas do you think cooperation could develop?*

The APS and EPS have agreed to coordinate their respective efforts for the revitalisation of physics in eastern Europe. In particular, we hope that the APS will cooperate with contributions in the organisation of meetings. At the end of May this year we will have a joint APS-EPS meeting in Budapest in order to initiate a programme.

— *Do you feel enough is being done to help individual physicists? And if not, why not? How can immediate help be provided?*

All activities of the EPS are aimed for the benefit of the individual physicist. This holds, of course, also for the activities of the Task Force. In eastern Europe, the restructuring and revitalisation of physics is in progress and the Task Force helps with assistance and advice wherever possible. In this respect we are dealing with the national societies, avoiding carefully, however, direct interference in their own affairs. Therefore, if we may reach the individual physicist only indirectly, that's allright.

— *Do you see Professor Buckel's appeal for the sponsoring of individual physicists with help in paying membership fees as the start of a form of partnership agreement between physicists, with one helping the other in several different ways?*

Werner Buckel's appeal is just one of several means to try to initiate partnerships. I wish that his appeal will generate many

partnerships between individual physicists involving, for example, financing scholarships as well as invitations to come to an institute. I myself will join Buckel's initiative and will sponsor personally an IOM for a Romanian physicist for three years.

— *Let us consider some of the areas you would like to see more initiatives to help individuals. Training in research, for instance. Can you indicate the number of new training posts that have been generated these past two years in western Europe? Companies and research centres have fellowship programmes, but is enough being done?*

Post-doctoral fellowships have always been in high demand, usually exceeding the offerings. While most programmes of this type have been extended to include now also physicists from eastern Europe, the total number of such positions has not increased. To the contrary, the worldwide tight economic situation causes some institutions to reduce such efforts. This holds especially for fellowships in the USA. Of course, my impressions are a bit subjective as it is difficult to collect numbers with many industry labs involved, and it is hard to compare results. The situation changes rapidly so an EPS survey would probably be out of date.

— *Relatively few new bilateral agreements appear to have emerged between organisa-*



O.G. Folberth, formerly President of the German Physical Society, retires this month as the first Chairman of the EPS East-West Task Force after serving on the Executive Committee for four years. Until recently Director of Research and Technology at IBM Germany, he continues as Professor of Computer Technology at the University of Stuttgart. He was Chairman of ACAPPI in 1969-73 and has been on the EPS Council since 1983.

tions to facilitate the transfer or exchange of students, staff, equipment, etc. Most arrangements seem to have developed from personal contacts. Would it help to know in more detail what is happening via EPS sponsored surveys? Could more be achieved with more formal initiatives?

I would have appreciated it if more, and more effective, partnership agreements on various levels would have emerged between

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eastern and western partners during the last two years or so. I feel that the present situation is highly unsatisfactory. It is really a riddle to me and not compatible with the overall mood. We physicists have been proud about our spearheading position in Europe by having created a truly European-wide EPS already 25 years ago, comprising at that time all of Europe, east and west.

In order to keep us in the forefront of the development we have to develop new initiatives. In this respect, let me volunteer a suggestion: each national physical society in the west should adopt a specific partner society in the east and try to help it in every way possible. I am sure that the western partner would also profit from such a link. I hope with regard to partnerships with institutes and companies that more is ongoing than I am aware of. I feel a sponsored survey would once again be outdated as things move fast, quite apart from the large resources needed: it is not a priority.

– *Physicists in east and central Europe tend to be well trained. Is it therefore necessary to boost educational opportunities via special courses, summer schools, revised curricula, visiting lecturers, and new text books?*

EPS has always arranged conferences, etc. in eastern Europe. Indeed, with such activities EPS established a substantial coherence between physicists. It is understood that efforts of this kind will be extended, being now facilitated by the new political situation.

– *I am sorry. I may not have been clear. My question is this: is there a priority need for training opportunities?*

Definitely. This is because eastern physicists are generally well trained in basic physics but they need postdoc and other opportunities for new physics, especially applied.

– *Hungary reported at the last meeting of*

the Task Force that peer review had enhanced institute standings leading to a significant increase in visits and a reversal in the trend to loose experienced physicists? Does this mean EPS should undertake a country-by-country review of physics research once the Directory of European Physics Institutes now being compiled by Eddy Lingeman is completed this year? ►

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bis **30. April 1992** erreichen.

EPS should offer its help for every aspect it can provide. But EPS and its western national societies should carefully avoid a patronising attitude. Reviews may be helpful: they should, however, be performed only upon request.

— *It has been suggested that EPS should help east and central Europe by negotiating access to research facilities and the creation of joint research groups. Is this feasible, given that most centres are nationally funded or operate under defined international statutes? If one cannot go so far as active negotiation, is it possible to envisage another EPS rôle?*

One of the main results of the Dagstuhl study conference last year was the realisation that none of the research organisations in the west have special programmes and earmarked funds for joint projects with eastern partners. Each organisation has established its own ways and means on a modest scale and much of what exists is informal. I think EPS can act as a meeting ground for potential partners: without EPS we would not know what roughly needs to be done. For example, Romanian colleagues learnt through EPS of sources for support for a summer school in Breda that is a success story. But I doubt the Society has a formal rôle to play in negotiations.

— *You have been very active in approaching funding bodies, notably foundations and international agencies, for support for EPS initiatives. How can EPS improve its ability to attract funds for east-west initiatives? Is a formal structure needed for the east-west programme? If so, will there be sufficient back-up to ensure delivering the results expected by funding bodies?*

In this respect I have to stress again the importance of the personal initiative of individual physicists. The financial situation of EPS is tight. Therefore, from its regular budget no funds can be provided for east-west initiatives. Only lobbying by individuals has yielded some funding. Predominantly our colleagues in The Netherlands have been very active and successful in this respect. I would like to thank especially Eddy Lingeman for his engaged efforts, always looking for alternative ways. Given this situation it may not help to institutionalise such efforts.

— *With your background as a Romanian who has worked for many years in Germany, do you feel that countries in east and central Europe are more interested in openings towards the West than in consolidation regional links?*

I was born as a Romanian citizen but I am not a Romanian proper. My insight into the Romanian scene is too superficial as to answer this question with some credibility. Of course, I hope — as most of us — that Europe will come closer together in all respects. We are lucky to have EPS as one of the instruments. Let's make the best out of it. There is certainly a recognition that strong links to the west are needed but

I must say some countries are not doing all they can. France and Czechoslovakia have a partnership agreement and Austria and Germany have maintained existing agreements. But other countries have little.

— *My final question: you have worked in industry so you appreciate the importance of balancing applied and basic research? In central and eastern Europe, however, the trend until recently was to separate the two. One assumes governments will now emphasise applied work. How can EPS encourage an appreciation of the importance of basic research?*

We have to realise that in market-driven, western-style economies, the majority of physicists are working in industry, most

of them in applied areas. While in some eastern countries (e.g., Hungary) we find a similar structure, in most of these countries applied work has been done at specialised institutes in the framework of the Academies of Science. This pattern is steadily disintegrating, with the consequence that many physicists are looking for jobs. Some models presented at Dagstuhl could be helpful for restructuring. Hopefully by such means jobs can be preserved. There is a large variety of motivations for a physicist to seek employment in industry. A missed opportunity to do basic research is the wrong argument. This statement may lead to a long chain of arguments, but this interview is probably not the occasion for elaborations.

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