

European Physical Society

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A New Year – A New Beginning

The end of a year provides an opportunity to review the achievements of the past and risk a look into the future. The transition from 1996 to 1997 is a special one for EPS: it marks the end of an epoch and opens a new chapter in its history.

In 1996 Council adopted a Strategy Plan aiming to focus the actions of EPS more efficiently. Particularly important are the efforts to convince the public of the significance of physics to society: the nurturing of young physicists; improving the relationship between academe and industry; and assistance for the East and developing countries.

First steps have already been undertaken. The Interdivisional and Action Groups' submitted plans were discussed and subsequently accepted by the Executive Committee. 1997 will see the first funds allocated to new actions and we hope that tangible and therefore useful results will follow. As a next step, the mutual interaction between EPS and its Divisions shall be enhanced. After all, the Divisions establish the direct links to the community of physicists who help to accomplish the most important task of the EPS, that of fostering physics.

The move of the Secretariat from Geneva to Mulhouse in January 1997 constitutes a major change for EPS. The decision was not taken lightly, nor was its implementation easy, particularly in view of the excellent work the Secretariat in Geneva had always done. But some Member Societies had been pressing for better returns on their contributions to EPS and asking for more effective operation. So relocation of the Secretariat, which had been variously discussed in the past, had to be seriously considered. Happily, we received several offers from National Societies, but in the end the particularly favourable offer from the University of Mulhouse won the day. Another reason for the move was that the seat of the Society will now be in a member state of the European Union.

The most important relocation consequence is that there will be essential savings in 1997, with further economies in following years when the cost of the transition will have amortized. From estimates provided by the Treasurer, the EC noted that the anticipated economies can indeed be realised. This constitutes the basis for the funding of the Strategy Plan outlined above. Besides this, Mulhouse also provides other benefits: the allocated premises offer more space and so the EC and other committees will no longer be obliged to meet in overcrowded rooms. Also, using university facilities, it will even be possible to organise smaller conferences. In fact, IGAPPI organised a successful meeting of industrialists there last November.

However, there are no benefits without some sacrifices: the employment conditions of the staff in Geneva were such that they declined to move. The Secretary General, Gero Thomas, the hub of the Secretariat for so many years, retires in the summer of 1997, but will continue to manage *Europhysics Letters*. Peter Boswell, the competent editor of *Europhysics News*, decided to move on to other activities. Most of the remaining staff will stay in touch with EPS, working for *Europhysics Letters* which will be managed independently in future. We are greatly indebted to all these people whose dedication and enthusiasm helped EPS to fulfil its task successfully and to survive in difficult times. I should particularly like to thank the EC and the Secretary General for their help in relocating the Secretariat and in recruiting new staff.

New challenges have to be faced. Science in general, physics in particular, are losing politicians' interest because the latter are unable to cope with the immediate problems of unemployment and state deficits. It is often said that the 20th. century was the era of physics, whereas the next will be that of biology. Biotechnology has certainly gained economic importance, yet many other issues will require physics, both fundamental and applied. Examples are: energy production, transport and safety, information technology, environmental problems, medical diagnosis and therapy, and more.

Let us never forget that physics has made major contributions to every aspect of our life on Earth, and will continue to do so. EPS will take up the challenge with vigour, but to fulfil its promise it will need the active support of all of its members.

The President of EPS, Herwig Schopper