

Council Meeting

The governing body of the European Physical Society will be holding its annual meeting in Leiden near Amsterdam on the 27th and 28th of March. Among the topics for discussion will be a proposal for a new Division.

Divisions

Proposal for the Formation of a Division for Statistical and Nonlinear Physics

The idea of a home for statistical and nonlinear physicists was presented to Council during the meeting last year at Mulhouse by Preben Alstrøm, President of the Danish Physical Society. The proposed Board of the new Division has prepared this notice for EPS members

Considering that statistical physics underpins many branches of physics it is odd that the European Physical Society (EPS) has never had a Division for Statistical Physics. The omission has not been crucial until now, but it is our belief that the time is now ripe for the formation of a European voice of statistical physics, under the aegis of the EPS, in the form of a Division for Statistical and Nonlinear Physics.

The rationale

Traditional statistical physics, with its focus on equilibrium and near-equilibrium systems, has reached a dignified maturity. However, the field is transforming itself rapidly by embracing challenging problems in domains far from equilibrium, such as those which occur in spatially extended nonlinear systems where structure and patterns are at least as fundamental as disorder. In fact, the basic study of nonlinear systems in various manifestations has taken on a life of its own in recent years, and there now exist new and exciting possibilities for doing fundamental physics at the intersection of nonlinear dynamics and nonequilibrium statistical mechanics. Such challenges arise, for example, in the study of polymers, colloids, liquid crystals, micelles, emulsions, turbulent and plasma transport, other spatiotemporal systems which form the core of modern nonlinear dynamics, solid-fluid interactions, surface kinetics, diffusion limited aggregation, dendrites, porous media, biophysics, econophysics, and so forth. The extraordinary and natural synergism of this rich complex of

interdisciplinary subjects has far outgrown the boundaries of traditional statistical physics, and needs a home that will foster its development. This is the first reason for the proposal.

The second reason is that the large and growing membership of the statistical and nonlinear physics community should have the opportunity to meet as a group (we expect the new Division would, after a very short time, have more than 1000 members). It is our belief that this group will then share perspectives on directions, agree on acceptable standards, strengthen awareness of itself and set higher standards and goals.

Other reasons include: it will restore interest in neglected activities relating to the molecular origin of macroscopic properties of matter; it will provide a natural home for a large number of people who may not presently feel at home in the Condensed Matter Division; it will counter the perception that this area of research has to play second fiddle to other aspects of condensed matter physics; the Division will make it easier to elect EPS fellows in this field; it will give some focus for research funding (the EC already has a funding category in statistical physics).

Altogether, there seem to be many good reasons for the formation of a Division for Statistical and Nonlinear Physics.

Relationship to existing EPS Divisions

It may be remarked that the community which the proposal intends to draw together is presently spread across existing Divisions of the EPS. But this community tends to reside at the fringes of exist-



European Physical Society

News from EPS is published by *Europhysics News*, reaching physicists across all of Europe

e-mail eneditor@univ-mulhouse.fr

BP 2136, F-68060 Mulhouse Cedex, France

tel +33 3 89 32 94 44; fax +33 3 89 32 94 49

ing Divisions. So the Condensed Matter Division, for example, will not lose its core membership to the new Division. In actual fact, with the transfer of non-linear physicists to the new Division, the activities of the Condensed Matter Division may be better focused. We believe the proposed Division will help research that is currently poorly supported because it resides at the fringes of other Divisions.

It is noteworthy to see how the formation of a Commission for Statistical Physics within IUPAP has promoted the field of statistical and nonlinear physics. The well attended tri-annual STATPHYS meeting is proof of its success. Examples of statistical and nonlinear physics groups in Europe are the German Physical Society's Division for Dynamics and Statistical Physics, and the Nordic Statistical Physics Network. The European examples indicate the need for a common European action.

The large size of the statistical and nonlinear physics community is apparent from the huge amount of research work published, and journals long ago introduced sections on statistical and nonlinear physics. *continued over page, bottom*



Due to present herself at the Council meeting is Christine Bastian, soon to become Divisional and Group Services Officer for the EPS. It's a new position, currently being defined; her first challenge will be to find out, via questionnaires, what services Divisions and Groups want from their Secretariat.



Norbert Kroó pays tribute to Gero Thomas

Gero Thomas, the Secretary General of the EPS, retires at the end of March. He has served our Society since 1972. There is hardly a physicist who does not know him, although he himself has never been a physicist. He has been in the best sense of the term a 'civil servant' of European science in general and our Society in particular.

Gero, as he is known, is a precise administrator demanding quality work from himself and from his colleagues. But few can match his remarkable memory from which he can draw precedents and precepts at a moment's notice. This knowledge has been extremely useful for all of us, whether we have been conference organizers, committee members or Presidents. Successive treasurers have been especially grateful for his guidance.

The EPS was born during the Cold War. One of its main tasks was to build bridges between East and West. Gero has helped to realize this goal in many ways. At a crucial moment in the Society's history he moved

to Budapest for two years. He has also devoted a lot of effort to gaining contacts worldwide. He developed cordial relations with large physical societies such as the American and Japanese societies, IUPAP, the Asia-Pacific Physical Society, the European Science Foundation, units of the European Commission, and UNESCO.

The EPS has had to keep delicate balances between big and small national societies, individual ordinary members and national societies, different disciplines and geographical regions and, until recently, East and West. The present state of the Society is clear proof that this balancing act has been largely mastered during the period of Gero's stewardship.

One of the several success stories of the EPS is the Student Mobility Program, which Gero has administered. The students who benefited from the scheme will hopefully be the pillars of our Society in a strongly integrated Europe.

Europhysics Letters is another success

Pictures, clockwise from left, Amsterdam Council, 1975; Bruges Council, 1977; Prague General Conference, 1984 (twice); Gero's favourite drink

story, with significant contribution from Gero this time as Business Manager. The scientific reputation of the journal is increasing and the finances are secure. Gero will remain as Business Manager for another year—so 'stepping back' is an accurate way of describing his retirement.

On a personal note, I am sure that Gero will not like this article; he has never liked praise. But those of us who have had the privilege to work with him or enjoy the fruits of his efforts thank him for everything. If I achieved something during my work for the EPS, especially as President, I could not have done so without his help. I hope that successors will learn many lessons from him, and have the benefit of his vast experience.

Norbert Kroó

Gero started at the EPS in September 1972

Additional remarks

If the present proposal can be brought to fruition a large community that now resides at the fringes of several organizations can be drawn together. The annual Dynamics Days meetings (which has a mailing list of 3000 or so physicists) need not exist separately once the Division is formed; it has been conceived that it will be integrated into the new Division.

By giving focus to a rapidly developing branch of interdisciplinary physics

presently lacking in precise definition, the Division could be expected to strengthen Physics as a basic discipline and the EPS as an organization: just as unity in Physics is important in certain contexts, a strong focus is equally important in others.

signed by The Proposed Board
 Tapio Ala-Nissila, Finland
 Preben Alstrøm, Denmark
 Tito Arecchi, Italy
 Daniel Beysens, France

Jean-Pierre Boon, Belgium
 Jean-Pierre Eckmann, Switzerland
 Jens Feder, Norway
 Daan Frenkel, Holland
 Janos Kertesz, Hungary
 Maxi San Miguel, Spain
 Heiner Müller-Krumbhaar, Germany
 Alan Newell, England

For further information contact:
 Preben Alstrøm
 e-mail alstrom@cats.nbi.dk