

1986-2011 : 25 years of Europhysics letters - epl

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In the beginning...

After years of the most thorough discussions on the needs, the means, the structure, the people... during which the physics community of Europe through the EPS Divisions and the national societies has been fully consulted, EPS is able to formally announce the publication from 1 January 1986 of a new fortnightly journal: Europhysics Letters incorporating Journal de Physique Lettres and Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere

With these words - published on the front page of the June 1985 issue of Europhysics News (see the picture) - the journal venture officially started.

The negotiations actually had been going on for 5 years. In fact the first proposal for a European Letters Journal had been formulated in 1980 under the EPS Presidency of Antonino Zichichi, while the final partnership agreement was signed in March 1985 under the Presidency of G.H. Stafford. The initiative was reflecting the collective European effort to harmonize the physics publications in Europe to create a high-quality letters journal that would publish the best communications on new physics wherever it was done: be it from Europe or worldwide. In the 1980s the European Scientific publication landscape was (and partly still is) quite fragmented and

having just one flagship letters journal, created from merging two national letters journal, was seen as a good starting point towards a deeper unification.

Ownership

The partners that made the initial investment, i.e. the French Physical Society (SFP), the Italian Physical Society (SIF) and the UK Institute of Physics (IOP), together with the European Physical Society (EPS) that provided the scientific background, were the initial owners and were supported from the start by several other national societies that guaranteed further capital, should this be needed.

Publishers

Les Editions de Physique (now EDP Sciences), the publishing subsidiary of SFP, and the publishing section of SIF presented a joint proposal to the call for tenders and were awarded the contract for the publishing operations of the journal. EDP Sciences and SIF, that were respectively the publishers of the two merging journals, Journal de Physique Lettres and Lettere al Nuovo Cimento, mutually agree to split the tasks as follows: editing, typesetting and pre-press services were carried out in Bologna (SIF); printing, dispatching and subscription services were handled in Paris (EDPS).

Editorial Management

The scientific control was vested in EPS; the Editor-in-Chief and the Board of Co-Editors in charge to exercise that control, through panel of existing referees, were

The first Editorial Board of Europhysics Letters, in 1986

Editor-in-chief: N. Kurti, United Kingdom

Co-Editors:

G. Barbiellini, Italy	C.J. Joachain, Belgium
F. Bassani, Italy	M. Kaufmann, Fed. Rep. Germany
E. Brézin, France	T.W.B. Kibble, United Kingdom
B. Cagnac, France	F. Mezei, Hungary
J. Demaret, Belgium	R.H. Siemssen, The Netherlands
D. Faddeev, U.S.S.R.	J.P. Toennies, Fed. Rep. Germany
P. Fulde, Fed. Rep. Germany	G. Weber, Fed. Rep. Germany

chosen by EPS, in consultation with the other owners. Listed on p.16 is the composition of the first Editorial Board. The Editorial Office, to manage all editorial steps from paper submission to acceptance, was installed in EPS which had its headquarters located in Geneva at that time.

Management Board (now Board of Directors)

The business management of the journal was exercised by a Management Board (MB). Each of the four initial partners nominated one member to the MB, and the delegate of EPS was acting as the Chairman of the Board. The first MB was so composed: W. Buckel (EPS), F. Read (IOP), J. Des Cloizeaux (SFP-EDPS), A. Taroni (SIF). The Executive Secretary of EPS, G. Thomas (acting as the journal business manager) and the Editor-in-Chief of the journal, N. Kurti, were non-voting members of the MB.

Growth

Europhysics Letters was launched as scheduled on January 1st, 1986 and the contributions began to come in quite steadily allowing to fill in the issues in time. One of the main challenges of the journal was to reach a high scientific standard and reputation, but, as one can guess, not less challenging was the complexity of the project. The main publishing tasks were in fact split among three partners based in three different European countries: France, Italy and Switzerland. In the light of present technologies this could seem banal, but in 1986 communications were only by telephone and the

exchange of information went only through surface mail: no fax, no e-mail, and no electronic file exchanges. Every step required a perfect coordination, high professionalism and great experience to keep the production time at a competition level. But the people involved in this "complex system", i.e. Christine Bouldin, as Staff Editor in Geneva, myself, as Production Editor in Bologna, and Jeanne Berger as Publications Editor in Paris, assisted by Susan Mckie, immediately synchronized on the same wavelength and the operations went on very smoothly from the start.

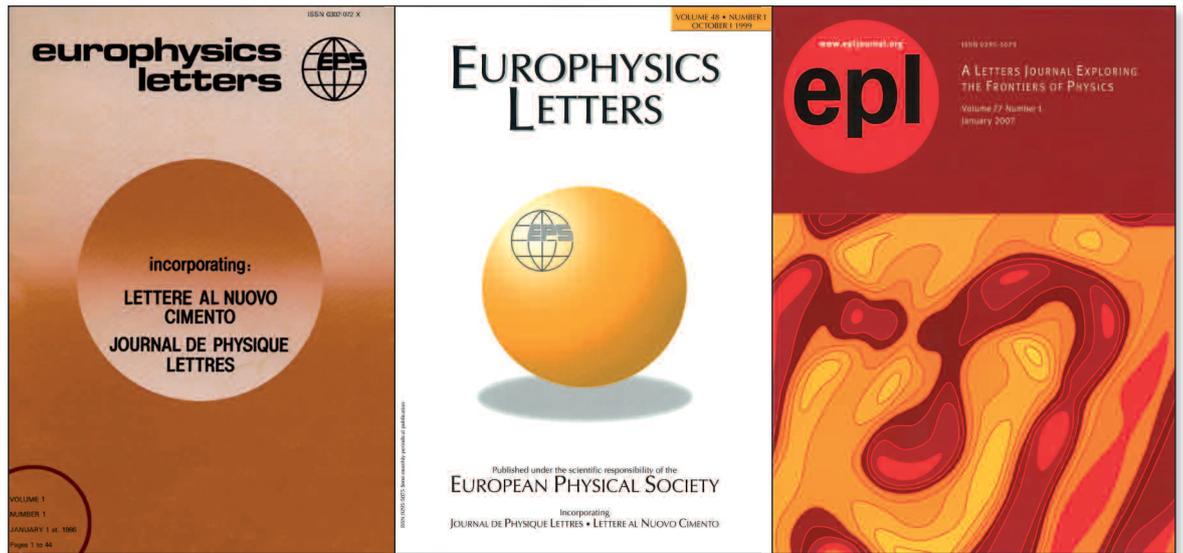
The papers began to come in with a regularly increasing rate and so the journal soon left the cradle. Also the circulation was very healthy, at the outset, reaching already in the first year almost 1000 library subscriptions according to the projections of the publication contract.



The second set of owners of Europhysics Letters

The Austrian Physical Society	Pool of Scandinavian Physical Societies:
The German Physical Society	
The Hungarian Physical Society	Danish Physical Society
Institut "Ruder Boskovic"	Finnish Physical Society
The Netherlands Physical Society	Icelandic Physical Society
The Portuguese Physical Society	Norwegian Physical Society
	Swedish Physical Society
	The Swiss Physical Society
	The Turkish Physical Society

► **FIG. 1:**
 (a) The first cover of Europhysics Letters, (b) a new cover of Europhysics Letters, (c) present style of EPL covers



Already at the end of 1986 the unexpected great success of the journal forced the management to print more pages than allowed by the contract. But the continuation of this success and the increasing inflow of papers created a huge backlog (a disaster for a letters journal) that was partly eliminated by printing an extra volume at the end of 1987. Nevertheless, since the cost could not be recovered from the subscriptions income, the owners had to take the resolution to use the guarantee capital provided by the associated members, who were then asked to become full-partners. A new partnership agreement was signed accordingly in Dresden in March 1988.

Under the new agreement the ownership changed, the new societies combined holding a similar share as each of the initial owners. The new partners societies (see list) also had the right to elect one delegate to the MB, thus the actual members of the MB became five.

A new period started in a true positive European spirit with 17 countries participating in the journal, perfectly in line with the aim of the project.

Maturity

During 1991 the number of accepted papers was greater than any of the first five years. Again, to keep the acceptance to publication times within the current standard, the resolution was taken to publish the last 1991 volume on a weekly basis, rather than semi-monthly, so that it was completed already in October, while the first volume of 1992 was anticipated by two months, keeping the weekly periodicity until the backlog was worked out. Since it was clear that the journal had steadily grown, starting from 1993 the periodicity was changed to three issues per month.

But the 1990s will be remembered as the years of the revolutionary innovation that deeply affected the scientific publishing landscape: Internet and online publications. Since the physics community pioneered this change, the physics journals were the first to switch to the new technologies. So, in 1995 a new production contract that included also the online version was negotiated between EDPS and SIF and already in January 1995 EDPS began to host and distribute on its website the electronic version of the journal. This change of scenario also coincided with the slow but continuous decline in subscriptions - a general phenomenon involving all scientific publishers. Luckily the new production technologies were less expensive, so the loss in income could be balanced by the decrease in expenses. During the remainder of the 1990s the manuscript inflow showed a small decline, and since the frequency of the issues was no longer so important, in mid-1997 the journal switched back again to a semi-monthly periodicity, followed by a change in the cover design.

In 1995 another important event happened. The Council of EPS, for financial reasons, decided to move the EPS Secretariat from Geneva, Switzerland to Mulhouse, France. The EPS President, H. Schopper, offered the MB of EPL the opportunity to move at the same time, but in the first place this offer was declined. As a result of the movement of the EPS Secretariat to Mulhouse at the end of 1996, the

The Editors in Chief of Europhysics Letters then EPL

Europhysics Letters	
1986-1989	N. Kurti, United Kingdom
1989-1992	W. Buckel, Germany
1992-1995	R. Balian, France
1995-1997-2001	F. Gianturco, Italy (2 terms)
2001-2004	H. Müller-Krumbhaar, Germany
2004-2007	D. Jérôme, France
EPL	
2007- 2010	V. Dose, Germany
2010-now	M. Schreiber, Germany

EPL Editorial Office remained isolated in Geneva and the EPL organization lost its institutional umbrella.

It was necessary to form an independent association having as a mission the promotion of the advancement of Physics in Europe and worldwide. The EPL Association (EPLA), that mirrored the existing partnership, was founded and all the partners in Geneva signed the articles of the new association in March 1997. EPLA is presently still ruled by that document.

At the beginning of the 2000s though, the EPLA MB (now the Board of Directors) decided that the Geneva office was becoming too expensive and made a call for tenders for a new location for the Editorial Office. All four founding partners submitted their offers, but the EPS President of that time, M. Ducloy, firmly invited the BoD to make the more politically convenient choice, i.e. to have again the Editorial Office at the EPS Secretariat in Mulhouse. The BoD accepted and in January 2004 the Editorial Office had moved.

Rebranding

At the turn of the century it was clear that the journal was quite static both in size and impact while the traditional subscriptions continued to decline. At the same time, it was also clear that the electronic journals were superseding the paper ones, which were progressively serving only archival purposes.

As a consequence new and more flexible distribution channels, like electronic-only subscriptions packages, consortia, pricing by size of institutions etc., appeared on

the scene. In 2004 the EPLA management called for a brainstorming session to analyse the status of the journal and discuss possible ways to increase its prestige, visibility and distribution. It was decided that EPL needed a clearer definition of the marketing strategy and that the production process had to be redefined and streamlined. A new production contract taking into account the changing environment of the journal was needed.

IOP, SFP and SIF were invited to tender an offer for production either separately or jointly.

Since none of the presented bids reached the required majority, the Board of Directors called for a meeting of the Presidents of the founding members in order to find guidance on how to resolve the stalemate. The presidents of the respective societies, M. Huber (EPS), Sir J. Enderby (IOP), E. Brezin (SFP), G.F. Bassani (SIF), who attended the summit, privileged a solution that would include all the three partners, in line with the spirit of EPL.

The challenge was to identify an equilibrated and mutually satisfactory task redistribution that exploited each partner's own expertise. It took a lengthy negotiation process and the true will of IOP, SFP, and SIF to collaborate, a solution was found and the new contract signed in Bologna in February 2006.

The journal was successfully re-launched in January 2007 with a new format and a new cover image (see picture). I can only add that I pride myself on having participated all along to this so challenging European venture.

Happy birthday EPL! ■



europhysics news
BULLETIN OF THE EUROPEAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

J.A. Volume 16 Number 6
Directory Issue
June 1985

Europhysics Letters
Your Letters Journal

After years of the most thorough discussion on the needs, the means, the structure, the people... during which the physics community of Europe through the EPS Divisions and the national societies has been fully consulted, EPS is able formally to announce the publication from 1 January 1986 of a new fortnightly journal:

Europhysics Letters
Incorporating
Journal de Physique Lettres
and
Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere

Readers of *Europhysics News* have been kept informed of the progress of negotiations, but no apologies are made for recalling some of the information already published as we bring together the threads that have been woven together to produce the pattern that has now emerged.

What is it?
Europhysics Letters is a journal made up entirely of letters that are judged to be of high quality on topics that fall within the fabric of what we call physics — and to quote George Marx, "physics is what physicists do".
A letter is a short communication normally of about 3000 words equivalent, i.e. including headings, illustrations and references, designed to fit into about four pages of the journal. A certain flexibility on length will be retained, but an absolute limit has been set at six pages (4500 words equivalent).
A letter should contain sufficient argument and supporting information for the results or formulations that are the essence of the communication to be intelligible to other physicists working in the same field. It is assumed that a full paper will later be prepared for publication elsewhere.
In the past, the phrase "general letters" has been frequently employed to signify that it is letters of general interest that should be submitted — but no definition is offered of what this means precisely. In practice, almost all letters will be essentially specialised in that they will relate to a fine detail in the cloth of physics, but there is a level of fineness at which nicety turns into triviality and abstruseness into obscurity. The borderlines are necessarily subjective. Nevertheless authors are urged to try and make their work understandable to physicists working in other fields.
And Euro? — does it refer to authors or to readers? To neither: Euro signifies the collective European effort that has gone into the creation of the journal and which will motivate its organisation and its management. Readers and authors worldwide are to be encouraged, and communications on new physics wherever it is done will be welcomed.

What will it look like?
Europhysics Letters will be type-set and published as a B5 format — 16 cm x 24 cm — twice per month (the first and 15th). The number of pages per issue is expected to approach 64. Letters may be submitted in English, French, German or Russian and if accepted will be published in the original language.

Who edits it?
Editorial control is vested in EPS and EPS chooses the people who exercise that control. With the Editor-in-Chief, who has a general responsibility, are Co-Editors each of whom has a specific responsibility in a given sector of physics. They are the people who decide on acceptance or rejection of a contribution on the advice of referees who are themselves physicists of reputation. The names of the Editor-in-Chief and Co-Editors are given below:

Editor-in-Chief: N. Kari, University of Oxford
Co-Editors: G. Barbiellini, CERN, Geneva
E. Bassani, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa
E. Brezin, CERN, Saclay
B. Cagnac, Université Pierre & Marie Curie, Paris
J. Demaret, Université, Liège
L.D. Falcov, Academy of Sciences, Leningrad
P. Fulde, MPI für Festkörperforschung, Stuttgart
C.J. Foot, University of Liverpool, Braxfield
M. Kaftmann, MPI für Plasmaphysik, Garching
T.W.B. Kibble, Imperial College, London
F. Kopp, Academy of Sciences, Budapest
R.H. Stroomer, K.V.I., Groningen
J.P. Toennies, MPI für Strömungs- & Gitterphysik, Göttingen
G. Weber, DESY, Hamburg

Who are the publishers?
The publishers are the Partners who make the initial investment namely:

- The French Physical Society** — which donates *Journal de Physique Lettres*.
- The Italian Physical Society** — which donates *Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere*.
- The Institute of Physics (UK)** — which provides an initial working capital of Sw.Fr. 150,000.—
- The EPS** — which provides the scientific background.

The Partners are supported by the following societies which have given guarantees of further capital should this be needed:

- The Austrian Physical Society**
- The German Physical Society**
- The Hungarian Physical Society**
- The Portuguese Physical Society**
- The Scandinavian Physical Societies** acting as a group
- The Swiss Physical Society**
- The Turkish Physical Society**
- The Yugoslavian Physical Societies**

Editions de Physique, Paris, a subsidiary of the French Physical Society, together with the Italian Physical Society have been awarded the contract for the publishing operations. Manuscripts will be prepared for the printers and set in Bologna; the printing will be done in Paris from where the journal will be distributed.

As an Author what should I do?
Manuscripts suitable for publication in *Europhysics Letters* — typed in double spacing and accompanied by illustrations in ink on paper (or positive glossy photographs) and prepared according to the *Europhysics Style Manual (Europhysics News, Sept. 1979)*, copies available on request from the EPS Secretariat) should be sent to the EPS Secretariat where they will be dealt with immediately.

As a Reader what should I do?
First make sure your institution will be receiving *Europhysics Letters* and that it has taken out a subscription through Editions de Physique; forms will be circulated shortly. If your library is already a subscriber to either *Journal de Physique Lettres* or *Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere*, it will automatically receive notification of the transfer mechanism and any special terms.
Then if you are an individual member of EPS, Category 4a), 4b) or 4c) (not just a member of one of the EPS member societies) you may receive a copy at run-on price by ordering through the EPS Secretariat on the form provided or when paying your annual membership fee.
Basic prices are as follows:
Institutions: Sw.Fr. 550.— / a
EPS Individual Members: Sw.Fr. 55.— / a
Note that the standard price to institutions is well below the combined price of *Journal de Physique Lettres* and *Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere*. The price to individual members is obviously exceptionally low.

Other names may be added in due course.
For monitoring the scientific levels of acceptance and rejection adopted, the balance between sectors and the overall operation, a body of Advisory Editors is being assembled. These are more numerous and chosen, in contrast to the Co-Editors, with a conscious awareness of geographical coverage. They are additionally expected to encourage "use" of the journal by both readers and authors, and to help with refereeing and finding referees in special situations.
A panel of referees able to make impartial judgments and act rapidly has been selected by the Divisions to span all sectors of physics.
Each letter submitted will be sent to two appropriate referees whose opinions will then be passed to the relevant Co-Editor. If both recommend instant acceptance or outright rejection this problem is simple. In the case of disagreement it will be up to him to act as sees fit. A rejected MS will be returned with a brief note signed by the Co-Editor of the reason, but the names of the referees reading a particular paper will not be given. A Co-Editor has no obligation to enter into correspondence over any submission although he may offer recommendations for improvement or for an alternative outlet.

MSS should be addressed to:
Staff Editor, Europhysics Letters
EPS
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CH - 1213 Petit-Lancy 2 (Switzerland)

Four copies in total are required including one set of original figures. Marked on the MS should be the field of physics concerned as defined in the ICSU A/B (PACS) Classification. This is reproduced in the *Style Manual* to two significant figures but a more detailed classification may be helpful in certain instances. Authors are asked to circle not more than 20 words in the text which can act as key words when preparing the index published at the end of a volume. A standard guide to authors giving more details of all these aspects is in preparation.
Provided a manuscript is acceptable without or with only very minor modification, the author can expect it to be published within three months of receipt at the EPS offices.
Manuscripts can be accepted by the Staff Editor from 1 September 1985.
Manuscripts submitted to *Journal de Physique Lettres* or *Il Nuovo Cimento Lettere* and which will not be published in 1985 will automatically be submitted to *Europhysics Letters*, unless already rejected or other objects.

Europhysics News, June 1985

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◀ FIG. 2: EPN announcement of Europhysics Letters in 1985