

125th anniversary of the Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists

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NEWS and NOTICES

125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNION
OF CZECHOSLOVAK MATHEMATICIANS AND PHYSICISTS

On 28 March, the Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists celebrated the 125th anniversary of its foundation.

The beginning of the sixties of the last century was marked by the fall of despotism represented by the Austro-Hungarian minister of interior Alexander Bach. This meant certain new possibilities for the social life in Bohemia, and the young generation naturally was the first to exploit them. Already in 1861 several students of mathematics drafted the statutes of the "Society for Free Lectures in Mathematics and Physics in Prague". The constituent meeting was held on 28 March, 1862. The Society soon obtained support from University and started to develop its activity. While the number of participants of the first meeting was only fifteen, after ten years the Union of Czech Mathematicians — as it was renamed in 1869 — had already 332 members. It was at a festive meeting held to commemorate the tenth anniversary that the participants obtained the first issue of the *Časopis pro pěstování matematiky a fysiky* (Journal for Cultivation of Mathematics and Physics). The present Czechoslovak Mathematical Journal is one of the continuators of the *Časopis*, this fact being expressed by assigning also the original number to each of its volumes.

The Union developed successfully, especially when the independent Czechoslovak Republic was formed in 1918, gaining respect for its serious and beneficial activities both in science and education. Even during the years of Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia its activities did not cease, even if, due to the Nazi terror, it lost a number of its members, among them its President, Prof. F. Závíška.

Following the changes in the social system in Czechoslovakia, the position of the Union changed as well. In the year 1952, after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, it obtained the statute of a learned society attached to the Academy.

Today, the Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists has more than six and half thousand members (together with the Union of Slovak Mathematicians and Physicists, which was founded in 1969). In more than twenty cities it has its chapters, whose activities cover all the territory of Czechoslovakia. It also has four sections, which organize the members of the Union according to their interest in Mathematics or Physics, in research or education. The Union actively cooperates with the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, with the Ministry of Education, with research institutes, universities and other institutions.

The Union has always striven to promote international cooperation in science. This is done on the one hand through its membership in and active cooperation with international organizations, in particular the European Physical Society, European Mathematical Council, Bernoulli Society, and on the other hand, through bilateral agreements with the societies for mathematics and physics in Bulgaria, GDR, Hungary and Poland. The Union aims at extending and deepening the existing international cooperation, believing that the less formal contacts between researchers and teachers can beneficially contribute to the progress of science as well as to better mutual understanding.

The manysided possibilities the Union offers to its members – the informal contacts with colleagues from other institutions and branches of science, direct participation in the organization of scientific events, voicing one's own opinions on problems of broader significance, asserting one's scientific "hobbies" – represent a contribution to the continuous progress of science, which any other organization could hardly provide. It has become a tradition that the Union provides a platform not only for researchers and university teachers, but also for teachers of mathematics and physics of secondary and even of primary schools. Following the agreement with the Ministry of Education, the Union takes active part in the preparation and assessment of new curricula, syllabi and textbooks. It organizes events intended to help the teachers to master new topics and methods of instruction. It takes care of pupils talented in mathematics and physics, organizes competitions – especially the Olympiads – in the subjects, and popularizes and explains new methods of teaching mathematics and physics among the public.

The 10th congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists, held in Prague in August 1987, has been not only a festive event, but above all a convention which has critically assessed the achievements and set new tasks and goals.