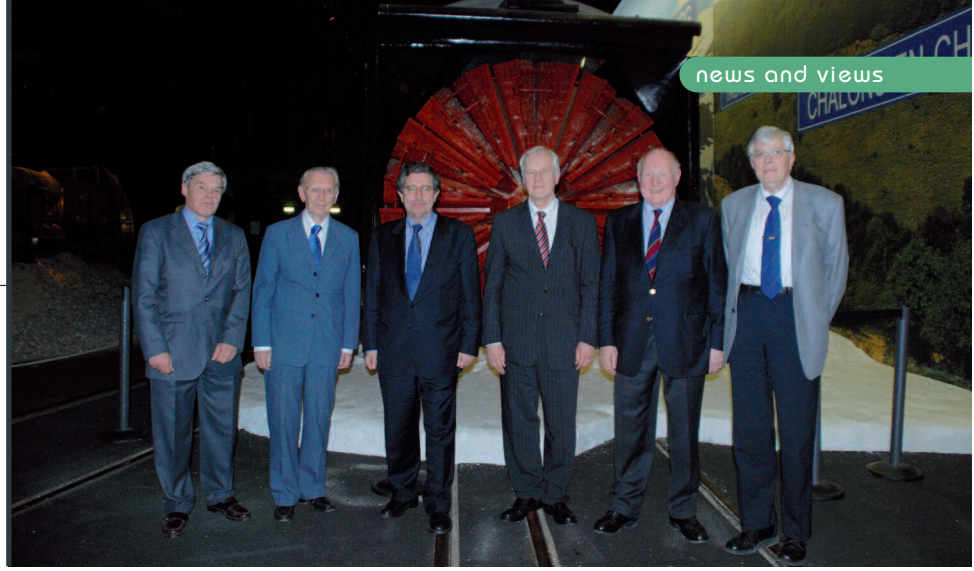

Mariano Gago with EPS past presidents, from left to right : Martial Ducloy, Herwig Schopper, Mariano Gago, Fritz Wagner, Martin C.E. Huber and Ove Poulsen ▶

the growth of activity in the domain, following the example of the biosciences.

In addition physics has been for long too isolated from other disciplines in the traditional university training. However physics is a basic science which has a large impact on other domains from which it should not be disconnected. For instance coupling physics and engineering could greatly enlarge the potential attraction of physics. Similarly the applications of physics to biology and biomedicine would appeal to many students. One could think of a double cursus including both physics and the life science, with the possibility for students to choose either at the end of their studies or to change orientation before completion. It should even be worth considering the elaboration of university multidisciplinary programmes around energy and environment issues. Altogether physics has a larger role to play in society and should consequently build up new partnerships with other fields of science. ■

VIEWS FROM
PRESIDENTS KROO AND SCHOPPER

»» 40YEARS OF EPS

MEMORIES OF MY LIFE WITHIN EPS

Norbert Kroo (Hungary),
EPS President, 1993-1995

▲ Norbert Kroo

In 1972 Prof. George Szigeti, the President of the Roland Eötvös Physical Society (Hungary) invited me, at that time a young physicist, to an eye-to-eye conversation on European physics. He started by expressing his belief that sooner of later Europe would be united and Hungary would be part of it. Those who remember that period of European History will agree with me that that vision looked anything but realistic at that time.

He added also that a united Europe needed an organization of European flavor in physics, too, and this was the European Physical Society. He offered me the opportunity to represent Hungarian physics and our Society in the Council of EPS. The offer surprised me but his strong belief convinced me and after a few days of hesitation I accepted his invitation.

That is how my EPS career started and with many years of experience behind me I still think that my decision was sound. At the beginning, in addition to expressing the views of someone rooted in Central-European culture, I could learn the way my West European colleagues thought and later I could help harmonize it with our Eastern traditions, first of all in scientific thinking. EPS did a great job in helping physicists living and working behind the Iron Curtain to keep in contact and cooperate with colleagues on the other side of the Curtain. To be part of this venture has been a great privilege for me and the experience gained in this period helped me later, in the early nineties to act in my official EPS duties, *e.g.* in pulling down some of the barriers between physics in the East and West of Europe created by the Iron Curtain that had existed for more than four decades.

I started my EPS activity in the Council in the seventies, as a member of the Executive Committee in the eighties, and as president-elect, president and past president in the first part of the nineties. This latter was the period of the difficult transition of the former COMECON countries from Communism to Democracy, from planned to market economy. The borders started to melt down and in the more fortunate part of Europe there has been a lot of goodwill and enthusiasm to help the newcomers catch up. EPS started this activity earlier than perhaps anyone else, being one of the forerunners of European integration.

It was clear for us already at that time that a united Europe needed not only an organization in physics on the European scale, but a European Research Council as well, financing basic research on the ▶

basis of Europe-wide competition, with a single selection rule, *i.e.* excellence. It took more than a decade to realize this dream, but finally we started to build up this Council based on the finances of the Ideas specific programme of the 7th Framework Programme with a not yet satisfactory but nonetheless sizeable financial back-up, namely 7.5 billion €. Since this Council is not only a grant awarding organization but a body authorized also to shape European science policy by the activity of its leading body, the Scientific Council, it is in line with our dream and still existing ambition in EPS to shape European science policy for the future.

One of the problems with EPS has for a long time been that the pool of good ideas waiting for realization has always been larger than that of available finances. Therefore our activity depended strongly on sponsors. Individuals, the business world, national and international institutions were approached to support our activities.

The European Commission has been one of the sponsors from the early times of the existence of our Society. The support came mainly for the organization of various conferences. One of the new ideas was the Student Mobility Program. The idea was to send selected physics students from one university in one country to another university in another country for one or two semesters. The universities involved in the program would mutually recognize the credits of the student and tuition fees in the host university would be waived. We succeeded in convincing the European Commission to finance this program but it could be done only within the borders of the European Union.

EPS membership, however, has been broader from the very beginning than the Union and the idea to cover the total European family lacked the necessary financial support. That was the point when Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros and his Open Society Programme came to our help. I succeeded in convincing him in a short time to finance the launch period by covering the expenses of students coming from the non-EU member East-Central and East-European countries. The support EPS received from this generous philanthropist has been in the order of half a million US$. We should still be grateful to Mr. Soros for helping us to extend this program to contribute to the integration process that has led a decade later to the EU membership of most of the countries involved.

Another problem was the visibility of EPS within and outside the scientific community. The EPS label on a series of European science journals where a set of rules had to be followed was useful for this purpose but a journal of its own was the real target to be realized. After a slow start, Europhysics Letters turned out to be a success, increasing the visibility and improving the finances of the Society. It is still a broadly recognized and much-used journal first of all in condensed matter physics.

In the early nineties the attention of the European Commission started to scale up the activity in competitive research funding (programmes, networking, support of work at large facilities and the Marie Curie scholarship program). There was an idea on the table that EPS could take over part of the physics-related programs to be managed on the basis of a contract with the European Commission. The technical details and the professional content were successfully cleared, but unfortunately due to the resistance of the financial authorities of the EU the idea perished before the contracting process started. My feeling is that that failure was a great loss not only to EPS but to the whole physics community.

Europe and the European research landscape have changed significantly in the last few years. During my presidency we were asked to write a supporting letter for LHC and now it is about to start its operation. Several of the member countries from East-Central and Eastern-Europe are now within the Community and we are together working on a homogenized, competitive European Research Area. And EPS with its 40 years history is an efficient, active and strong organization participating in all the important events of the pan-European research effort.

I wish for our Society further fruitful and intellectually challenging years, ■

A NEW HOME FOR THE EPS

Herwig Schopper (Germany),
President of the EPS (1995-1997)

▲ Herwig Schopper

How fast time runs - EPS has now existed for 40 years and is in great shape! However, during this period EPS has gone through highs and lows. When I was elected President in 1995 I considered it a great privilege to be entrusted with such an important task enjoying the confidence of my European colleagues. However, having served on the Executive Committee for several years I was also aware of the looming problems.

Indeed when Norbert Kroo handed over to me the presidency he stressed that a restructuring was needed and a new phase had to be initiated. He emphasised the importance of strengthening the Society's Divisions and Groups, its visibility and its capacity to handle professional matters, notably concerning education and applied physics. An interdivisional Group for Applied Physics and Physics in Industry was established and started its successful work chaired by Peter Melville (Birmingham). Norbert Kroo had already improved effectively the contacts between colleagues in East and Western Europe and this activity was intensified by creating a group for East-West cooperation. I managed to persuade Nadrchal (Prague) to chair this group. Achieving a stronger involvement of the National Societies in the East European countries was one of the tasks that was very close to all our hearts. Fortunately this is an issue that has been solved in a way that we would not

have dared to dream of in those days. Who would have thought that in 2008 most of the East European countries would be fully integrated into the EU! The EPS can be proud to have contributed to the perforation of the 'iron curtain' and one essential 'tool' was the EPS Office at Budapest. I remember with great pleasure Maria Lazar who served as a devoted, faithful and loyal secretary at Budapest for many years.

With less pleasure I realised rather soon that my main problem as President would be rather down to earth. EPS was criticised by some of its Member Societies that its operations were not cost effective and hence National Societies were not willing to maintain or even increase their contributions. EPS was having persistent deficits, too little funds were available to cover on-going activities and no money could be found for new activities.

An inspection of the cost structure revealed immediately that the expenses for the Secretariat, located in Geneva were too high. The Secretariat had been managed for many years with great competence by Gero Thomas and was intimately interwoven with the editorial office of European Physics Letters operated by Edith, Thomas's wife. A careful evaluation revealed that it was impossible to achieve essential savings by streamlining the operation of the Secretariat, since the main expenditures were the rent for the offices and the salaries, relatively high because of the living cost in Geneva. Therefore after long and extremely difficult discussions it was decided to transfer the Secretariat to another country and National Societies were encouraged to come forward with proposals. Thanks to Claude Sébenne an attractive offer was obtained from the Université de Haute Alsace at Mulhouse, France. Not only the University but also the local authorities were in favour of accepting EPS since they were guided by a policy to attract more European organisations to the region.

Complicated but fruitful negotiations followed concerning mainly the accommodation of the EPS headquarters. A new building was envisaged as a final solution which would house the physics Department of the university and EPS and in that way a better symbiosis between EPS and the university was hoped for. As a temporary solution the EPS was offered office space in a building of the Technopole de la Mer Rouge, a technology campus unfortunately not very close to the university.

Such a fundamental decision as moving the headquarters required a two-thirds majority of the EPS Council. This was not easy to achieve since quite a number of colleagues doubted that the move would yield the expected financial results but rather feared that a well-established office would be lost. Finally at a Council meeting at Lisbon on 22/23 March 1996 the necessary amendments to the EPS Constitution were narrowly approved. This was achieved thanks to the strong support of Secretary J-Ph. Ansermet (Lausanne) who had taken care of the staff problems and J. L. Lewis (UK) who as treasurer assured Council that the move would produce savings, albeit only beyond the period of additional expenses for the move. The move of the EPS headquarters to France provided also a reason for Council to decide to change the currency of the unit fee from Swiss francs to ECU in order to reduce the harmful effects of the strong Swiss francs on the budget and on members'fees.

After further negotiations with the President of the University, Prof. G. Prado, and representatives of the city of Mulhouse a formal agreement was signed in May 1996 and at the beginning of 1997 the EPS office moved. The first Council meeting took place at Mulhouse on 21/22 March 1997 in the Council chamber of the University where it was welcomed by university president Prof. Gresser. In his speech he expressed the hope that the EPS office could move later to the university campus, which indeed happened even though it took longer than originally expected.

Unfortunately the EPS office staff was not prepared to leave Geneva, except for Gero Thomas who, until his retirement in August 1997, in great loyalty to EPS agreed to organise the building up of a practically new Secretariat with new staff. To our regret the Europhysics Letters partnership, however, decided to keep the journal's editorial office in Geneva.

In the end it turned out that the expectations related to the move were fulfilled. No deficit appeared anymore in 1996 and for 1997 some free money became available. Among other things these measures became the basis for the implementation of a new Strategy Plan which I could present to Council and which was accepted. In 1999 Secretary General, David Lee, who eventually had followed Gero Thomas and who since then serves EPS with the same engagement, could report that EPS was entering into a more active phase. The budget had a positive balance of EUR 100.000 at the end of 1998 and in 1999 the spending could be increased by 20%. New activities could be started with additional personnel, e.g. developing a better conference service for Divisions, or a full-time staff position for communication with members.

This stormy period is now part of history but thanks to the engagement and solid work of many colleagues in the Executive committee, in Council, in the Divisions and other parts of EPS it became an essential element of revitalization so that today we can celebrate the 4^{0th} anniversary of a strong and efficient EPS. ■

Erratum

In the article on L.V. Shubnikov and the 70 years of type II superconductors, Europhysics News 39/3, p.35, the picture of A. V. Shubnikov was published by mistake. Here is the picture of L.V. Shubnikov. ■