

EUROMECH Colloquia

These notes are intended to indicate to potential Chairpersons the purpose and character of EUROMECH Colloquia, and to outline general rules for their conduct based on past experience.

EUROMECH Colloquia are organized under the auspices of the EUROMECH Council which comprises about fifteen members drawn from the various countries in Europe. The Chairperson of each Colloquium is appointed by the Council, and once appointed, the Chairperson is wholly responsible for the planning and running of his Colloquium. The Chairperson may ask international or local committees of colleagues for help, but the important decisions must be taken by him. This devolution of responsibility is an important feature of EUROMECH policy, and has made possible the holding of many Colloquia each year despite limited central resources. It will continue to work well as a policy only if Chairpersons make themselves familiar with the expected character of a EUROMECH Colloquium. Sometimes two Co-Chairpersons in different countries are jointly appointed to organize a EUROMECH Colloquium, in order to ensure that different aspects of a topic are covered or different parts of Europe are well represented. In such cases one of the two Co-Chairpersons is responsible for the local arrangements but both are responsible for the selection of participants and for the scientific programme.

The Purpose of EUROMECH Colloquia

The objective is to provide opportunities for scientists from all parts of Europe to meet each other and to discuss their current research. The scientists and engineers in the small and medium-sized countries in Europe are in special need of mutual support and scientific exchanges, since none of these countries by itself can adequately cover all aspects of mechanics. Because Europe is a compact geographic area, rapidly-planned inexpensive meetings are possible, and by holding such meetings we hope to improve scientific communication and thereby advance the development of mechanics.

Essential features of EUROMECH Colloquia are that they are specialized in content, small in size and informal in character. This type of scientific meeting has been found in practice to give good results and to meet a definite need.

Participation

Participation in a EUROMECH Colloquium is at the invitation of the Chairperson; the success of the meeting will depend vitally on the quality and relevance of the participants chosen by the Chairperson. The typical number of participants at a EUROMECH Colloquium has been about 50, and experience shows that this number is large enough to provide variety of representation and small enough for serious and close discussion. Chairpersons should aim at a number between 40 and 60, and the number from outside the host country should always be at least half the total.

Provided the topic of the Colloquium has been chosen carefully and made sufficiently narrow, the number of the scientists in Europe who would want to take part should not be unduly large; nevertheless a Chairperson does need to be selective.

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Participants should be actively interested in the subject of the Colloquium, and should have made useful contributions to it. People who have the capacity to discuss problems in an illuminating way are especially welcome. Many of the active and productive workers may be too young to be known internationally, and a special effort should be made to identify these individuals. Considerations of prestige should be ignored when choosing participants, and formal representatives of organizations are not normally appropriate. There is no objection to the presence of a few research students from the host institution, but other ‘observers’ should not be included.

Scientists who are working in the field of the Colloquium will be the best judges of suitability, and a Chairperson may seek suggestions and advice from the first few participants whom he/she identifies from his personal knowledge. Non-Europeans who are working in Europe at the time are of course eligible for invitation. A Chairperson should feel free also to invite a few scientists from outside Europe who are likely to make especially valuable contributions to the meeting.

Identifying the best participants is the most important part of a Chairperson’s job, and also the most difficult. He/she should not rest content with his list of invitees until it contains reasonable representation from all parts of Europe.

Finance

The cost of holding a EUROMECH Colloquium should be kept low; only in this way can a suitable number of Colloquia be held each year. The host institution is automatically assured a EUROMECH grant, which should preferably be used to support young participating scientists. The cost of organizing the meeting has to be covered by the host institution. A contribution to organisation expenses should be included in the registration fee. Further details can be found in the document ‘*Important Items for Chairpersons of EUROMECH Colloquia*’.

The Council asks the Chairperson of each EUROMECH Colloquium to include, as a part of the full registration fee, three units of the annual subscription for each participant who is not a member of EUROMECH. This is additional to the amount which the Chairperson charges in order to cover local costs, and is to be paid by the Chairperson to the Treasurer of EUROMECH within one month after the Colloquium. In order to be entitled to the reduction in registration fee all members of EUROMECH should identify themselves as such on the registration form. At the registration desk the membership card or the member number may be required for identification. In some cases scientists attending a Colloquium may be in possession of a voucher, which also entitles them to the reduced registration fee. This voucher should be taken by the Chairperson and returned to the Treasurer. In all announcements the two categories of registration fee should be indicated as follows: (I) Non-member, the full registration fee and (II) Member, the reduced registration fee.

Participants are mostly expected to cover their own travel and subsistence expenses, but the Council would be grateful for any support which a Chairperson is able to obtain from local, national or other sources, and which he/she can use where needed.

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Some Chairpersons of Colloquia have been able to obtain grants from bodies in their own countries to meet the cost of receptions and/or entertainment of participants. This is of course welcome, but no Chairperson should feel obliged to provide social hospitality. Good fellowship is not incompatible with simplicity in the arrangements.

Preparations for a Colloquium

As soon as a EUROMECH Colloquium proposal has been accepted by the Council (normally at a meeting in April of the year preceding the Colloquium), the Chairperson should start on its preparations. The first step is to decide definitively on the precise title, date and location of the Colloquium. This information should be sent within the month, together with the title, initials, family name, address, telephone number, fax number and email address of the Chairperson and their Co-Chairperson, to the Secretary General of EUROMECH. These details will be used for publicity of the Colloquium in scientific journals and in the EUROMECH Newsletter. The next step should be to prepare an announcement for the Colloquium, with a description of the intended scope and the topics to be discussed. This should be sent to prospective participants, to anyone who could help to find participants, and to the Secretary General of EUROMECH. The Secretary General will use the announcement when scientists ask for information about a Colloquium, and also for further publicity in the EUROMECH Newsletter. Participants should be asked to provide a summary of the work they wish to report, and the programme will eventually be made up on the basis of these summaries. The Chairperson will usually combine them all into a booklet for distribution to participants at the meeting. Speculative research and unfinished work may be presented, since an important objective of the meeting is to stimulate and assist current and adventurous research.

The Chairperson will of course need to provide participants with all information relevant to the Colloquium venue, accommodation and travel. The objectives of EUROMECH Colloquia are furthered by local arrangements which allow all participants to be accommodated in the same place and within easy walking distance of the meeting room.

Scientific Programme

EUROMECH Colloquia should normally extend over three or four days, according to need. It is usually desirable to divide the programme into several sessions which allow coherent discussion of particular aspects of the topic of the Colloquium. In many cases introductory or review lectures are valuable, and the Chairperson may wish to ask well-qualified people to give them. Ample time should be left in the programme for breaks and for unprepared discussions. Parallel sessions are not appropriate. A Chairperson may wish to include one or two poster sessions. Some time should be set aside near the end of the Colloquium for a final discussion when some of the new developments reported at the meeting may be taken up and ideas for further lines of research considered. This final discussion might be initiated by a small panel of speakers. A possible further item for consideration is whether there is need for another Colloquium on the same or a related topic after two or three years.

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Typescripts of papers presented at a Colloquium are not requested, and a volume of proceedings is not normally published. The Chairperson or one of his colleagues may think it worthwhile to prepare a report on the scientific developments discussed at a Colloquium and submit it (within a month or two, to avoid loss of topical interest) for publication in an appropriate journal. It has also occurred that papers from a Colloquium have been published in a special issue of a journal after a normal reviewing procedure.

Running a Colloquium

The Chairperson may decide to take the Chair himself throughout the Colloquium, or he/she may ask a few experienced participants to act as Chairpersons for the different sessions. The Chairperson, and his Scientific Committee, if he/she has one, should remain in control of the Colloquium and, if desirable, adapt the programme in the light of the discussion and papers given up to that point. More than anyone else the Chairperson will influence the way in which the discussion is conducted and the ‘atmosphere’ of the Colloquium. The discussion in an ideal Colloquium should be lively, informal and penetrating. There must be no parallel sessions; this also applies to poster sessions. Any timetable which is specified in the programme need not be adhered too rigidly, since it may be assumed that all participants are attending all sessions, and if spontaneous discussion is becoming interesting it should be allowed to continue. Any language problem should be recognised and overcome. A speaker may choose to use his own language, and the Chairperson should ensure that no-one is left unable to understand what is being said, if necessary by arranging on-the-spot translation or explanation of crucial points. English has become a common language of most scientists; however, if English is used during most of a EUROMECH Colloquium there is a special obligation on the Chairperson to slow down the delivery of those speakers whose native language is English so that they remain comprehensible to everyone.

After a Colloquium

After the Colloquium is finished there remain three important tasks which are directly related to EUROMECH. First, the Chairperson is asked to prepare a brief final report on the Colloquium for the EUROMECH Council (using the two-page Final Report form provided by EUROMECH). This report should include information on the scientific developments discussed at the Colloquium, the numbers of participants from different countries, the financial arrangements and any opinions or suggestions for the future. Second, the Chairperson is asked to compile a set of the documents prepared for the Colloquium participants, including the programme and a list of participants, and send this material together with the final report to the Secretary General of EUROMECH within a month of the Colloquium. Third, as soon as possible (and within a month of the end of the Colloquium), the Chairperson should contact the EUROMECH Treasurer and send him a list of all participants (indicating EUROMECH members and non-members) as well as the EUROMECH component of the registration fees collected from all non-member participants.

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