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## European Polymer Journal

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## Editorial

## Farewell Note from the Editor-in-Chief



Dear Reader, Dear Friends of the European Polymer Journal,

Following my recent announcement of leaving EPJ as Editor-in-Chief I think that it is now time to say goodbye to the broad readership, authors, supporters, colleagues and friends in a Farewell Editorial. Effective by September 30, 2019 I shall step down as mutually agreed with Elsevier, at the end of a period of 17 years in service as Editor (at present Editor-in-Chief) of the Journal. I do not wish to let this happen without addressing those who have made this long period and journey a highly rewarding experience.

When I look back, the first thought that crosses my mind is to note that publishing as we know it has dramatically changed during the last two decades. Time is accelerating in all facets of life, connectivity is instantaneous with any part of the world, and publishing (with far reaching consequences) is not an exception.

The time I served EPJ is “historical” in length, thus a few milestones could be mentioned regarding the chronicle of our journal. The first issue of European Polymer Journal was printed in 1965, with Pergamon Press as publisher. The first ever paper came from Sweden, on “A Viscosity-Molecular Weight relationship for Cellulose in Cadoxen and a Hydrodynamic Interpretation, by W. Brown and R. Wikstroem” from Uppsala. Seven scientific papers and a note appeared in the first issue, and the abstracts of the papers, written in English, were provided in French, Italian and German as the other official languages of EPJ; with each language that could be used to publish. It is interesting to mention that the annual subscription cost of the journal (initially published quarterly) was back then 50 US \$.

Regarding the history of the journal, in April 2015 EPJ celebrated its 50th anniversary, and on this occasion Dr. Rumen Duhlev, who was the Senior Publisher at that time, wrote a nice editorial and a note on the journal history:

<https://www.journals.elsevier.com/european-polymer-journal/news/50-years-of-publication-of-the-european-polymer-journal>  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0014305715000816>

The original scope as described in the first issue was that “*This journal acts as a medium for the exchange of research in the area of macromolecular substances, both synthetic and natural, and publishes results bearing on the physics or chemistry of polymers. Papers may fall either into the category of original papers dealing with substances of high molecular weight, or that of review articles covering the literature on topical aspects of polymer science*”. The scope has been sharpened when we launched the Macromolecular Nanotechnology section in 2005 with me as founding Senior Editor:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0014305705004258?via%3Dihub>

The Macromolecular Nanotechnology section has quickly become

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very popular and highly cited and has been at, or near, the top of the statistics for average citations per paper.

However, the broad scope was kept until the recent revamping of the target areas of EPJ, when Elsevier with Dr. Leanne Mullen, our current Senior Publisher, and the respective editorial teams have sharpened the focus of the two broad Elsevier polymer journals, EPJ and Polymer. By doing so, Elsevier bundled the polymer journals in a “family” across the knowledge chain, as part of the extended Materials Today collection

My journey with EPJ started in 2002 with Dr. Rumen Duhlev leading the team of editors and ends now with Dr. Leanne Mullen, both as my Senior Publishers. When Rumen took over EPJ, it was in a shape which called for some changes. He appointed a group of six new (very enthusiastic) editors, including me, with Dave Haddleton as Editor-in-Chief. I am the last remaining active editor in service since the beginning of the “new EPJ era”. We took over the journal in full from the previous team by January 1, 2003. During the years EPJ has remained a broad polymer journal but perhaps published more “chemistry” and less “physics” articles, following the line of a natural evolution. When we took over, the impact factor value was 0.952 in 2002, and it reached 3.741 (with 553 papers published) as so far the highest level last year (at present 3.621). Comparing the current and past volume of papers published, it is striking that not only the impact factor, but also the journal volume has gone through enormous growth.

When I assumed my position in 2002, according to ISI Web of Science there were nearly one million scientific articles published worldwide, while in 2017 this number was 2.5 million. This 2.5 fold increase has brought about a corresponding increase in the number of reviews needed for the peer review process. However the number of scientists has not even nearly grown by a factor of 2.5 so the reviewing load has tremendously grown on every member of the scientific community. We publish more, we must review more, and the question is: for how long can this be maintained? If this swift growth process continues, soon there will be a “phase transition”, a collapse of the reviewing system as we know it, which would inevitably result in a decline of the average quality. The immediate consequences of this trend for an editor are that in order to receive on average two pieces of meaningful reviews for a submission, it is not rare to be forced to invite 10–15 reviewers. Many do not respond, many decline, and sometimes, some just simply do not deliver. And the times, when reviewers were really looking into every detail of a submission, are essentially over for most journals, perhaps with the exception of the very top of the literature. But another question is, whether the 2.5 fold increase in publication volume has brought about a proportional progress and growth also in the quality and achievements in science? I personally have some doubts. Perhaps instead of counting numbers and watching impact factor values (by e.g. funding agencies), we as scientists could exercise some self-constraint,

and publish really the best and novel (original) results that contribute to true, original and significant progress.

My wife, Dr. Klara Vancso, has helped me tremendously providing moral as well as physical support during this period, as she has been looking after all communications with authors and reviewers, book-keeping, and daily issues. Klara counted all submissions that we handled to date, and obtained the staggering final count of 5866 manuscripts! Of course during these long years in service I have been in touch with thousands of authors, tens of thousands of reviewers, publishers, fellow editors, members of our editorial advisory boards, Elsevier managers, EPJ journal managers and other publishers. I would like to thank all for making my journey a worthy and enjoyable exercise. In particular, I would like to thank my wife Klara for her relentless support, my publishers Rumen and Leanne for their thoughtful leadership, and my journal managers for their attention and help. There were too many fellow editors with whom I worked together on regular, as well as on special issues, and my thanks go out to all of them for the joint work, collegiality and friendship. I should mention, however, one person by name: Professor Nikos Hadjichristidis, who has actually talked me into taking on this editorship almost 20 years ago. As an expression of my appreciation, as Guest Editor I assembled an issue in 2011 honoring Nikos' oeuvre in designer polymers, which has become (probably) the best ever Special Issue of EPJ so far as far as citation statistics are concerned.

<https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0014305711001005?token=4F5C22C3312B4A51697BE831DBAFC9A506496178B3FC573BC8B6B52A2655E84EB2D1263F9C43D6A5C7F1F79514B2E9BA>

I am particularly grateful to all authors who contributed to the journal. On average roughly only every third submission would eventually become accepted, and the rest rejected. Receiving a rejection is surely not pleasant news, yet choices and decisions had to be made to

maintain and enhance the quality of our journal. Of course we all make mistakes, and whenever I received complaints or appeals questioning my decisions, I always treated them with the most serious attention. The journal is out there to serve the community and the authors, and the quality of the reviews and editorial decisions make a crucial impact on the standing and caliber of every journal. Reviewers are anonymous, and do their job as they realize that they also benefit from a good reviewing system, when they function as authors. There is a group of dedicated reviewers, on whom we can always count, and without names, I wish to express my great appreciation to them and to all reviewers who contributed to making EPJ become that it is now.

When I recently had a “farewell dinner” with Leanne in Oxford, she asked me to name the three most important highlights that I would recall at that point, characterizing my time as Editor. It must be evident that lifting the journal up to its current strong level and reaching high impact factor values come first; the macromolecular nanotechnology section as second; and serving young people (helping for example with papers that PhD students must publish for graduate schools) comes as third, without any priorities among these three points. But there is a very important fourth point, and that is the collegiality, friendship and camaraderie I experienced from all with whom I interacted as Editor. I leave the Journal with a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction, and I am certain that the future is in good hands with my successor Richard Hoogenboom as Editor-in-Chief, and with Remzi Becer, Cyrille Boyer, Bert Klumperman, Mike Shaver and Yanlei Yu as executive Editors at present time. Thank you all! I wish all of them, and the entire team, publishers, authors, and reviewers, all the best for the future.

G. Julius Vancso

*EPJ Editor 2002–2019*  
G. Julius Vancso