

ERCOM (EUROPEAN RESEARCH CENTRES ON MATHEMATICS)

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Chairman of ERCOM

The Director of the *Centro Internacional de Matemática* (CIM) is a member of ERCOM. What does it mean? How can CIM benefit from this membership? Shortly, what is ERCOM?

This article has been written, in the fourth year of my ERCOM chairmanship, with the aim to explain what ERCOM is, which are its objectives, how it is structured, which role can play in the European mathematical community.

ERCOM is a committee of the European Mathematical Society created in 1996 consisting of Scientific Directors of European Research Centres in the Mathematical Sciences, or their chosen representatives. Only European centres, predominantly research oriented, with a large international visiting programme and covering a broad area of the Mathematical Sciences are eligible for representation in ERCOM. The eligibility of centres is decided by the EMS Executive Committee.

The aims of ERCOM are to contribute to the unity of Mathematics, from fundamental to applications, with the purposes of constituting a forum for communication and exchange of information and to foster collaboration and co-ordination between the centres themselves and the EMS, to promote advanced research training on a European level, to advise the Executive Committee of the EMS on matters related to activities of the centres, to contribute to the visibility of the EMS, and to cultivate contacts with similar research centres within and outside Europe.

The 25 centres at present represented in ERCOM have different working and organisational structures, they are also different in size and scope, but they can be grouped in three different classes. Centres mainly for meetings, centres without permanent researchers, only visitors and post-docs, and centres with a small permanent staff and a large number of visitors. They broadly cover the European Geographical Area, from Russia and Sweden to Portugal and Israel. A Chairman, at present as Director of the *Centre de Recerca Matemàtica*, and a Vice-chairman, Kjell-Ove Widman, Director of the *Institut Mittag-Leffler*, co-ordinate the annual ERCOM meeting and the other initiatives proposed by the ERCOM members. Sir John Kingman,

Director of the Isaac Newton Institute, acts as link between ERCOM and the EMS Executive Committee.



Prof. Manuel Castellet talking about ERCOM at the General Assembly of CIM, May 21, 2005.

In mathematical research, exchange of ideas plays a central role and needs a deep human contact. A contact which is the true mathematical laboratory, and, as Friedrich von Siemens said at the end of the nineteenth century, “Laboratories are the fundamental basis of knowledge and power”. The high degree of abstraction of mathematics and the compact way it is presented need direct personal communication, since mathematics is an attempt to develop tools that can be used to achieve a better understanding of the world’s measurable aspects and to identify processes that appear in very different natural situations but that are essentially analogous.

In order to foster this deep human contact as well as collaboration and co-ordination between the European research institutes and to provide communication and exchange of information, ERCOM meets yearly, usually in March, in one of the member institutes. Since the 1999 meeting in Cambridge the Administrators have been invited to discuss separately and jointly with the Directors matters of their competence.