Foreword

Central-Eastern Europe has its own specific history. For a long time its vast territories were possessed by the great Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, or Russian empires. In XIX century, however, the empires grew weaker and their military defeats, of which the ultimate was the I World War, allowed for a restoration of old national states and birth of new ones like Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia proper. Ambitious but backward, these states strived to reach the level of more developed countries in Central and Western Europe, then leading cultural and scientific centres.

Exact sciences – mathematics, physics, mechanics, astronomy, chemistry – seem to be an area where those struggles for excellence manifested themselves particularly intensely. By their very nature, exact sciences are international in character, but for some time the Central-Eastern Europe was on the receiving side. It was apparent both in long stays of western scientists in Central-Eastern European territories (e.g., S. Lhuillier in Poland, L. Euler and Ch.M. Bartels in Russia, O. Volk in Lithuania) and, more efficiently, in sending young people to leading centres in Western Europe and allowing for development of their talents after return (e.g., professors of Royal University in Warsaw, M.V. Ostrogradski and V.J. Bunjakowski in Russia, W. Bolyai in Hungary). Another instance of this process were voyages of Czech mathematicians to new states of the Balkans (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bulgaria), where they served as pioneers of mathematical life there. These examples pertain to mathematics but analogous ones can be offered for other exact sciences as well, including chemistry, where such exchanges were followed by development of domestic chemical industry, e.g., in Poland.

After decades of more or less passive assimilation of ideas from the West, the general situation became ripe enough to allow for the birth of local mathematical centres of worldwide distinction. The greatest significance was achieved by two of them: Moscow mathematical school, whose most distinct leader was N. Lusin, and Polish mathematical school with Sierpiński at its head. As a result, the Central-Eastern Europe achieved in XX century the equal footing with the world science.

The main motive for organizing a conference devoted to raising the level of scientific culture in backward countries of Central-Eastern Europe was a strong conviction of historical significance of those processes both on a local scale of national cultures and on a global scale of the world science. Perhaps some specific characteristics of that development may serve as a model to adapt in other conditions.

The present volume contains lectures and posters presented at the conference "The reception of exact sciences in Central-Eastern Europe in 1850–1920", which took place in September 2013 in Cracow, along with other papers related to the subject. The Conference met with substantial interest and hopefully will be continued in the future.

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