

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF ACTA VIROLOGICA*

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General considerations

The 25th anniversary of any scientific journal offers a good opportunity for considerations whether and to what extent the goals of the journal have been achieved. Certainly, the most proper criticism should be expected from the readers, authors quoting papers published in that journal, or information scientists. The number of subscribers could also serve as a good criterion of the efficacy of a journal.

Another form of evaluation of the standard of a scientific journal is achieved at meetings of its editorial board at which the work done by the editorial office and the scientific quality of the published papers are subjected to critical analysis.

Let us return to the days when the concept of *Acta virologica* (AV) was defined. The necessary basic information has been presented on the very first page of the journal, namely in the "Introduction" signed by prof. D. Blaškovič, the Editor-in-Chief, and prof. A. A. Smorodintsev, the deputy editor (AV 1 : 1, 1957). In the same issue of AV pp. 62—63, Dr. H. Libíková reported in the First National Conference of Czechoslovak Virologists held in Smolenice, 19—22 October, 1955. She had written: "Cooperation between virologists in the People's Democracies and the U.S.S.R. found voice in the proposal to publish an international virology journal, in which the communications on the work being done on virology in those countries should be published. The editorial board should consist of leading virologists from the U.S.S.R. and the People's Democracies. Academician D. Blaškovič was made responsible for the preparations. The presented first number of *Acta virologica* is the outcome of that proposal."

This national Conference of Czechoslovak virologists with the participation of scientists from the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Rumania and the U.S.S.R., should be considered as the first of a number of uneasy steps that led to the establishment of a journal which should publish papers on general, medical, veterinary and plant virology and rickettsiology. The journal should appear in two separate but strictly parallel editions, one in English and the other in Russian.

In the period from October, 1955 to September, 1957, the following important actions were taken. On April 9—10, 1956 in Krinitza (Poland) the first meeting of Ministers of Health of socialist countries was held at which the decision to establish the new international journal in virology was adopted. On June 29, 1956, after the 13th All-Union Congress of hygienists,

* Opening lecture on the international Conference held at the occasion of 25th Anniversary journal in Smolenice (near Bratislava), January 25—26, 1982.

epidemiologists, microbiologists and infection specialists in Leningrad, representatives of all People's Democracies and the U.S.S.R. passed a resolution requesting the publication of an international journal "Acta virologica" and nominated scientists for membership in the International Editorial Board (IEB) of the journal including Prof. D. Blaškovič as Editor-in-Chief and Prof. A. A. Smorodintsev as his deputy. The Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was asked to include the proposed journal into its publication programme.

The Presidency of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences favourably considered the resolution passed in Leningrad and agreed to include both editions of AV into its publication programme. In the autumn of 1956, two letters were mailed from the editorial office of AV in Bratislava to editors of journals publishing virological papers and renown virologists all over the world, respectively. These letters announced the publication of AV, invited virologists to send their contributions to AV, and asked for exchange of publications and subscription to the new journal.

On this occasion the members of the first IEB were announced: Prof. S. Anghelov and Prof. J. E. Todorov as representatives of Bulgaria, Prof. F. Patočka of Czechoslovakia, Prof. E. Farkas and prof. G. Ivánovics of Hungary, prof. H. Röhrer and Prof. H. Urbach of the German Democratic Republic, Prof. Li Den Khan of the Korean People's Democratic Republic, Prof. A. Koziński and Prof. F. Przesmycki of Poland, Prof. D. Combiesco and Prof. S. Nicolau of Rumania, Prof. V. L. Ryzhkov and Prof. V. M. Zhdanov of the U.S.S.R., Prof. L. Stojković and Prof. A. L. Terzin of Yugoslavia. However, a few changes occurred in this list until the appearance of the first issue of AV. The first secretary (executive editor) became Dr. B. Styk from the Institute of Virology, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava. He served till 1961, when his office was taken over by Dr. V. Valenta from the same Institute. By the end of 1981 (after having closed volume 25) V. Valenta resigned.

To support the editorial office in Bratislava in its difficult and responsible tasks, an advisory board of leading Czechoslovak virologists was set up. They helped the chief editor in selecting appropriate referees, and fulfilled several other duties, like acquisition of the best papers from Czechoslovak virological laboratories, establishment of contacts with virologists from abroad, preparation of the individual issues of the journal, etc. The conclusions of these meetings in the form of bulletins were mailed to all IEB members to keep them informed about the activities of the editorial office and about the actual problems of the journal. The bulletins also contained personal, technical and organizatory items. As the work at the chief editorial office in Bratislava and of the Soviet branch office in Leningrad became stabilized, the meetings of the Czechoslovak advisory board were discontinued as was also the publication of the bulletins.

To publish a highly professional scientific journal in two foreign languages is a rather difficult task. Therefore, help to the English edition was kindly provided by Dr. A. Goffe, Welcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, and

a group of British virologists. Since the early sixties we had to desist from this help, because the management of English corrections proved to be rather time consuming and we also encountered increasing difficulties in paying for them.

The situation with the Russian edition has been easier. In the early days, translations into Russian were prepared in Czechoslovakia, but sent for correction to Leningrad, where the deputy editor gradually established a branch editorial office. With O. V. Baroyan becoming deputy editor in 1965, this branch editorial office was transferred to Moscow. Since 1971 it works under Prof. O. G. Andzhaparidze at the Moscow Research Institute of Virus Preparations; it is well organized and fulfils several duties: refereeing and primary editing papers of Soviet authors before their submission to the Editor-in-Chief, translation into Russian of papers by non-Soviet authors, as well as most translations into English of papers by Soviet authors. This work has been generously supported by the publishing house Meditsina, Moscow.

Activities of the International Editorial Board

In the first 5-year period (1957—1961), during which the chief and executive editors had learned how to fulfil their responsible duties and attempted to overcome many difficulties encountered in publishing of the journal, the IEB met three times. Since 1964, the IEB meetings were held more regularly, almost once a year. A total of 17 meetings were held until 1981.

The first meeting held in Prague on 19 September, 1957 was attended by 11 IEB members. On this occasion they received the first issue of AV (the rest of the first volume was in press). In addition to the introductory note, 31 experimental papers, 3 book reviews and 4 reports appeared in vol. 1 on 256 pages. The editors followed one goal: to publish a high standard journal that would adequately represent virology of socialist countries. The final decision as to whether a paper would be accepted for publication was taken by Prof. A. A. Smorodintsev (papers from the U.S.S.R.) and Prof. D. Blaškovič (other papers). As in every other journal, practically all accepted papers required some amendments and a number of submitted papers were refused irreversibly.

In vol. 1, the numbers of printed copies were 1200 and 800 for the Russian and English editions, respectively. As with any new journal, the sales in the first year were lower than these figures. The publication of AV was favourably commented, e.g. in *Lancet* (vol. II, p. 784, 1957).

Vol. 2 (1958) appeared again in 4 issues; it contained 34 experimental papers, 3 reports and 3 book reviews. The numbers of printed copies reached 1000 (Russian ed.) and 1200 (English ed.). The latter number remained almost constant or increased slightly up to the present days.

The reports by the chief and executive editors at the first IEB meeting in Prague and at the second one in Smolenice near Bratislava (October 15, 1958) were detailed and critical, the discussions were very lively. Resolutions were passed at both meetings requiring that papers submitted for publication

in AV should be supported by an IEB member from the respective country. IEB members should propagate the journal among their colleagues home and abroad. It was emphasized that preference should be given to papers dealing with general and medical virology. Papers in the fields of veterinary and plant virology would be accepted only if representing a contribution to general virology. The Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was requested to increase the periodicity of the journal from quarterly to bimonthly (this became effective by vol. 4/1960).

Vol. 3 consisted of 4 regular issues and a 116-page Supplement (this was the only supplement of AV published so far). The latter contained selected papers presented at the 2nd Conference of Czechoslovak virologists on 14 to 17 October, 1958 in Smolenice, with the participation of a number of scientists from abroad.

The third IEB was held in Prague on 20 October, 1960. At this meeting it was concluded that the initial shortage of papers was overcome and that a stock of good papers was accumulating in the editorial office. The Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was therefore requested to increase the size of the journal from 64 to 96 pages per issue. It was also decided that a section "Letters to the Editor" be established starting with vol. 5 (1961). In 1960, the work by the editorial offices in Bratislava and Leningrad became consolidated; the supply of new manuscripts became regular and the number of foreign subscribers reached a satisfactory level. The participants in the Prague meeting recommended that the editorial policy of AV should be discussed at IEB meetings organized on the occasion of international virological conferences rather than as separate undertakings. Consequently, there was no IEB meeting in 1961 and 1962. The IEB members were kept informed about important editorial matters by bulletins circulated at irregular intervals.

In 1961, as already mentioned, Dr. B. Styk resigned because of his health; he was succeeded by Dr. V. Valenta. The activity of Dr. B. Styk was highly appreciated because he had most efficiently contributed in overcoming the various obstacles encountered during the most pretentious period of the existence of AV. Dr. V. Valenta had been engaged in the publication of AV in various ways since the issue 3-4 of volume 1. In 1963, the IEB members present at a Congress of the All-Union Society of epidemiologists, microbiologists, immunologists and infection specialists in Leningrad (2 February) discussed the most urgent items of the editorial policy of AV. They concluded that regular meetings of the IEB would contribute to a smooth running of the journal. Personal contacts between IEB members were considered highly desirable.

The next regular meeting was held in Bucharest on 16 September, 1965. In the meantime, Prof. O. V. Baroyan replaced Prof. A. A. Smorodintsev as deputy editor, but the latter remained associated with the journal as member of the IEB. In volumes 7-9 (1963-1965), the numbers of experimental papers were approximately 95 per year, including about 20 Letters to the Editor. At the Bucharest meeting, the shortage of book reviews and reports

Table 1. Topics of papers published in *Acta virologica*

General virology, molecular virology	38.04*
Pathogenesis of viral infections	5.90
Immunology	11.23
Medical and veterinary virology	21.94
Antiviral substances	1.45
Ecology of animal (human) viruses	5.42
Plant viruses	1.59
Bacteriophages, insect viruses, algal viruses	0.78
Methodical papers	5.52
Rickettsiae	6.73
Description of viruses	1.21

* Per cent of total of 2137 articles.

was pointed out. The IEB evaluated the scientific standard of the journal as increasing. The IEB members were requested to stimulate an increased supply of papers on molecular biology, genetics, on the structure and function of viruses and their components and on the mechanism of viral replication (for comparison see Table 1). Starting with vol. 7 (1963), Academic Press (Inc.) London Limited became the sole distributor of AV in all western countries. After the Bucharest meeting in 1965, the IEB met annually with the exceptions of 1968 and 1977. The most important events and conclusions reached at these meetings will be summarized below.

At the Moscow meeting (23 July, 1966) it was again stressed that IEB members should improve their activities, especially as concerns propaganda for the journal and more rigour in recommending papers for publication in AV. The Prague meeting (15 September 1967) had to deal with the fact that two new international virological journals started to appear (Journal of general Virology in the U.K. and Journal of Virology in the U.S.A.), signaling enhanced activities in virus research throughout the world. It was stressed, therefore, that the scientific standard of AV should be further improved. The IEB members acknowledged the sympathies with which AV had met so far at home and abroad. In 1967, the journal got a new cover which remained essentially unchanged since then; 90 normal papers and 21 Letters to the Editor were published that year.

In 1969, the IEB met in Warsaw (21 October). It was found that the proportion of papers on basic virological problems published in 1968 (46%) and 1969 (49%) is not satisfactory. The Budapest meeting (15 September 1970) noticed the frequently insufficient technical standard of the submitted manuscripts. The number of papers published in 1970 decreased, mainly due to the reduction in size of the journal mentioned above.

At the meeting in Belgrad (27 September 1971) we welcomed the new deputy editor Prof. O. G. Andzhaparidze along with the new Soviet members of the IEB, namely Professors Y. Z. Ghendon and B. F. Semenov. At this meeting also another request was addressed to the Academies of Sciences in Czechoslovakia, namely to increase the size of the journal to 96 pages per issue, i.e. to return to the size existing up to and including 1969. At the

Table 2. Number of papers published in *Acta virologica*, volumes 1—25 (1957—1981)

Volume	Year	Papers	Letters to the Editor	Short communi- cations	Total
1	1957	31	—	—	31
2	1958	35	—	—	35
3	1959	53	—	—	53
4	1960	54	—	—	54
5	1961	55	17	—	72
6	1962	77	23	—	100
7	1963	69	24	—	93
8	1964	78	24	—	102
9	1965	78	25	—	103
10	1966	92	22	—	114
11	1967	88	22	—	110
12	1968	69	17	22	108
13	1969	59	13	27	99
14	1970	51	14	21	86
15	1971	58	18	14	90
16	1972	53	22	19	94
17	1973	54	26	17	97
18	1974	58	14	19	91
19	1975	61	16	18	95
20	1976	58	14	26	98
21	1977	59	9	19	87
22	1978	53	14	23	90
23	1979	54	5	25	84
24	1980	54	9	14	77
25	1981	47	18	9	74
Total:		1,498	366	273	2,137

Moscow meeting on 30 September, 1974, two new IEB members were welcomed: Prof. M. Kaňtoch (Poland) and Prof. I. Béládi (Hungary), replacing respectively Professors F. Przesmycki and G. Ivánovics who both retired due to serious illness. At this meeting it was proposed to publish critical reviews on selected topics in AV.

At the Warsaw (23 November 1978) meeting, a continuous drift towards papers on molecular biology could be noted, but the first signs of a decreased supply of new manuscripts were announced. At the meeting in Bratislava (10 October 1978) Prof. E. Geissler (G. D.R.) was nominated as new member of the IEB to replace Prof. H. Urbach. Another nomination concerned Prof. L. Borecký, the new director of the Institute of Virology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava. According to Czechoslovak press law, this institute is the ex offio publisher of AV. At the Bratislava meeting the problem of reviews was raised again and it was decided that IEB members will suggest topics and authors so that the chief editor could prepare a time plan of reviews. In 1979, the IEB meeting took place in Szeged (Hungary) (3 October). The IEB members were informed there about a serious decrease in the number of submitted papers. It was agreed that the IEB meetings should be held at a time in close connection with any virological gathering in the given

Table 3. Distribution of the papers published in *Acta virologica* according to countries of origin

Country	Per cent*
Czechoslovakia	45.5
U.S.S.R.	29.5
U.S.A.	3.5
German Democratic Rep.	2.8
Poland	2.7
Hungary	2.3
Japan	2.2
Rumania	1.7
India	1.7
Italy	1.1
Belgium	1.1
United Kingdom	0.9
Bulgaria	0.6
Arab. Rep. Egypt	0.5
Canada	0.4
China	0.4
Yugoslavia	0.3
France	0.2
Austria	0.2
Fed. Rep. Germany	0.2
Argentina	0.2
Others	2
Total	100.0

* Out of 2137 articles

host country. This conclusion was materialized on 22 October 1980, when the IEB met on the occasion of a conference of GDR virologists held in Greifswald. At this IEB meeting it was announced that the number of papers published 1980 decreased to 84 as compared to 94 papers published in 1977. It was regretted that only one review was submitted for publication and that the time plan for their publication was a failure. It was decided that the next meeting, commemorating the 25th anniversary of AV, will be organized by the Institute of Virology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, early in 1982, when the 25th volume of the journal will be completed. The latter contained 74 experimental papers, 1 review, 16 book reviews and 4 reports on 440 pages (Table 2). A survey of the papers according to countries of origin is given in Table 3.

Personal

In addition to those mentioned above there were several other changes in the composition of IEB. The members' names have appeared on the cover of each issue and therefore it seems unnecessary to list them all here. However, we feel that at least the names of those members should be mentioned who deceased during their membership: St. S. Nicolau († 1967), F. Przesmycki († 1974), H. Urbach († 1975) and J. Brill († 1981). We shall keep their scien-

tific legacy and their contribution to the activities of the IEB of AV in good memory. A high respect should be expressed to all those members of the IEB who actively contributed to the publishing of our international journal. There was no change in the editor-in-chief, Prof. D. Blaškovič fulfilling this duty since the onset of the journal. During the 25-year period, three changes occurred on the post of the deputy editor: Prof. A. A. Smorodintsev was acting from 1957—1965, Prof. O. V. Baroyan from 1965 till 1971, and Prof. O. G. Andzhaparidze since 1971. The duties of the executive editor were fulfilled by Dr. B. Styk till 1961, when he was succeeded by Dr. V. Valenta, who resigned by the end of 1981.

The editor-in-chief wishes to express on this occasion words of thanks and deep recognition to the collaborators of the editorial offices, who devoted their efforts to the establishment of the journal and to maintain it at a satisfactory level during the first 25 years of its existence. We also thank those authors and reviewers who were ready to cooperate with us.

Recognition of AV

Evaluation of a journal is a most difficult task as it should be critical about the scientific level of the papers and their presentation as concerns both the form and language. In the latter respect we are doing our best but are sure that improvements are possible. The members of the IEB, despite their repeatedly expressed critical remarks, feel that the journal keeps a good scientific standard. Many authors of papers published in AV told us about their high appreciation of AV. But such evaluations are rather subjective.

Two more or less objective criteria should be mentioned. In 1980, nearly 1200 copies of the English edition and 510 copies of the Russian edition of AV were sold. The second criterion follows from data published in an editorial article published in *Current Contents* a few years ago (vol. 19, No. 45, pp. 5—12). In this article, the impacts of 73 East European scientific journals were compared. In this evaluation, AV ranked on place 7, immediately and closely following an older and highly recognized journal, the Czechoslovak *Chemical Communications*.

AV are not a strictly specialized virology journal that would publish only selected topics in some fields of this scientific discipline. However, some themes were prevailing for some periods, like medical virology and immunology, molecular biology (including physical and chemical properties of viruses) and rickettsiae. Much work has also been devoted to arboviruses, influenza and interferon.

The future of the journal

There is no need to establish a new programme or develop new guidelines for the editorial policy of AV. We attempted to materialize what was proclaimed as the scope of our journal. Let us to call the attention again to the note introducing AV (AV 1:1, 1957), signed by Professors A. A. Smorodintsev and D. Blaškovič: "The journal will appear in two parallel editions with the same contents and form, one in Russian and one in English. This

decision was made as the result of discussions by the members of the editorial board. It is aimed at making contact with all virological laboratories and obtaining as many contributors as possible. We affirm that mankind benefits from the efforts of scientific workers whose dual concern is the safeguarding of human health and the investigation of the origin, development and biological significance of those smallest particles claiming the property of life; we are convinced that the efforts of scientists working to the same end draw them together in bonds of friendship. An atmosphere of segregation, of ignorance of the results of human labour and effort in other countries, does not contribute to progress. Progress can influence life and work and become common property only if people base themselves on the results of work which serves the welfare of mankind, no matter where that work is done. We hope that our journal will be a step in this direction."

Nothing more should be added to the 25th anniversary of AV except one sentence directed to our young virologists striving to do solid virology with new discoveries: Consider AV as your journal, enabling you contacts with virologists of socialist countries as well as with those working anywhere in the world.

In conclusion let me to say words of thanks to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and to the Slovak Academy of Sciences for the moral and financial support of AV. Once again we express our thanks also to all who helped the editorial offices and the IEB in their work. The future of the journal is in your hands as it is in the hands of those who are directly responsible for its editorial policy. Let us hope that this future will be prosperous.

D. Blaškovič
on behalf of the editors
of *Acta virologica*