Sir Michael F. Atiyah

ATIYAH led a long endeavour aimed at the creation of the European Mathematical Society. On the occasion of having been awarded the Axel Prize, ATIYAH and SINGER were interviewed by RAUSSEN and SKAU (see [2]) and one of the questions to ATIYAH was the following:

RAUSSEN and SKAU: You, professor ATIYAH, have been very much involved in the establishment of the European Mathematical Society (EMS) around 1990. Are you satisfied with its development since then?

ATIYAH: [...] It started an awful long time ago, probably about thirty years ago. When I started trying to get people interested in forming a European Mathematical Society in the same spirit as the European Physical Society, I thought it would be easy. But [...] we spent years arguing about differences. [...] We went on for probably fifteen years before we founded the EMS. [...] Having been involved with the setup, I withdrew and left it to others to carry on. I have not followed in detail what has been happening except that it seems to be active. I get my newsletter, and I see what is going on.

Roughly at the same time as the collapse of the Berlin Wall, mathematicians in general—both in Europe and in the United States—began to be more aware of their need to be socially involved and that mathematics had an important role to play in society. [...] The EMS took on this role at a European level, and the EMS congresses—I was involved in the one in Barcelona—definitely made an attempt to interact with the public. [...] It is good that the EMS exists; but you should think rather broadly about how it is evolving as Europe evolves, as the world evolves, as mathematics evolves. What should its function be? How should it relate to national societies? How should it relate to the AMS? How should it relate to the governmental bodies? It is an opportunity! It has a role to play!

The excerpts in the images are from the first page in [1].