



Press release

CATRIN can push back the boundaries of Czech science—even competitors agree

Olomouc (June 22, 2020) **Facilitation of multidisciplinary cooperation, high-quality fundamental and applied research as well as finding new research guidelines that will stand a real chance of succeeding in international grant competitions, including solving global problems—these are just some of the tasks for the Czech Advanced Technology and Research Institute (CATRIN), which will come into force at Palacký University Olomouc from October 1, 2020.**

“The integration of research centres of Palacký University is a promise for facilitating interdisciplinarity and success in fierce international competition. This may be an important step towards building a strong research infrastructure in both a European and global context,” said UP Rector, Jaroslav Miller, commenting on the establishment of the institute.

The negotiations of the higher education institute CATRIN continued for two years. The decision-making process was finally completed on June 17, resulting in the UP Academic Senate (AS UP) approving CATRIN’s statute. CATRIN will link three UP research centres—Centre of the Region Haná for Biotechnological and Agricultural Research (CRH), Regional Centre of Advanced Technologies and Materials (RCPTM) and Institute of Molecular and Translational Medicine (IMTM), collaborating with the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry of the CAS (IOCB) and the University Hospital Olomouc.

“The coronavirus crisis proved that we complement one another excellently. There are already a number of joint, ongoing projects, which provide a solid foundation for future collaboration. I look forward to fostering it,” said IOCB Director, Zdeněk Hostomský.

All the partners whose names are associated with CATRIN were among the key institutions during the coronavirus crisis. The testing for Covid-19 played an important role, and the team, led by Jan Konvalinka from IOCB in collaboration with other domestic institutions, developed testing kits independently of foreign sources, the basis of which are magnetic nanoballs for viral RNA isolation developed by RCPTM.

The leading Czech biochemist Jana Konvalinka also expressed his opinion regarding the new institute. *“Establishment of new multidisciplinary institutes that go beyond particular disciplines, departments and faculties is an increasing trend responding to the evolution of science. I extend my congratulations to Palacký University on taking such a step,”*

However, two years of intense negotiations were not enough to achieve a broad consensus within the university on the shape of the integration of its research capabilities, and the management of the Faculty of Science remains in opposition. In spite of it, the proposers

believe that the mutual effort will result in overcoming the particular problems in the end and CATRIN will help UP on its route to a research institution succeeding in European competition.

“I believe that the AS UP's decision to open a higher education institute will mark a new era for the university. The establishment of CATRIN must put an end to internal disputes and this new university science and research centre will become an excellent and stable scientific institution”, said the director of the University Hospital Olomouc, Roman Havlík.

For example, three laureates of the country's highest award for science *Česká hlava*—the chemist Pavel Hobza, the plant geneticist Jaroslav Doležel and the Egyptologist Miroslav Bárta—also expressed support for the institute. *“The centres are already among the leading academic workplaces in the Czech Republic, with an international reputation. Their integration will result in an institute of truly European proportions, with the ambition to form a counterbalance to similar institutions abroad, and to make a crucial contribution to the competitiveness of Czech science on a world scale,”* declared recently these three scientists in a joint memorandum.

Julius Lukeš, from the Institute of Parasitology, the Biology Centre CAS, views CATRIN as *“probably the most ambitious scientific institution in the Czech Republic”*. *“As a director of another institution, I should be alarmed at such a prospect, but I'm not. On the contrary, I am glad it came into existence because I believe in its positive and overall impact on Czech science. To me, it is also an example of cutting-edge science done outside the capital, and it is by decentralising science of such high calibre that the Czech Republic will rank among the most advanced countries,”* said this highly esteemed parasitologist and the only living Czech who is a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The integration of scientific capacities has long been supported by the MSMT.