

I N M E M O R I A M

Jānis Stradiņš
(December 10, 1933 –
November 29, 2019)



With deep sorrow Latvian scientific community learned about the decease of Professor Jānis Stradiņš (December 10, 1933 – November, 29, 2019), full member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Dr. habil. chem., Dr. h. c. hist. Jānis Stradiņš was a President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1998–2004), Chairman of the Senate of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (since 2004), and the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal "Chemistry of Heterocyclic Compounds" (1975–1985).

The Latvian Academy of Sciences and the whole Latvian scientific community has lost one of its most outstanding leaders. Prof. Jānis Stradiņš' contributions to chemistry and cultural history of science are of great significance, and his decease leaves a void in the hearts of the scientific community members. However, the rich heritage he has created is of inestimable benefit to Latvia, and the indomitable spirit he demonstrated to overcome adversity is an inspiration to us all and will continue to encourage us in the future. We are really proud to have Professor Jānis Stradiņš represent the Latvian scientific community. Academician Jānis Stradiņš is a unique phenomenon in the Latvian science and society, whose contribution will be appreciated by the future generations and whose name is inscribed in the chronicles of science and forever imprinted in the hearts of his colleagues and followers.

Jānis Stradiņš was blessed with the characteristics of the whole Stradiņš family – education, culture, humanity, and inexhaustible work ethic. Born in the family of the famous Latvian surgeon Pauls Stradiņš, Jānis studied at the Riga 35th Elementary School, the Riga 5th Secondary School, and the Faculty of Chemistry of the Latvian State University, which he graduated from in 1956. Jānis Stradiņš began his research career in 1956 as a junior research fellow in the furfural sector of the Institute of

Forestry Problems of the Academy of Sciences, but soon accepted the invitation to become a scientific secretary of the newly founded Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis. This, however, did not impede him from starting his research in the field of polarography, which in the 1960s led to the defense of his chemical sciences candidate thesis "Polarography of some organic nitro compounds" at the Moscow Lomonosov State University, the most prestigious university in the Soviet Union at that time. In 1961, the young scientist founded a laboratory of Physical Organic Chemistry at the Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis and remained its leader up to 2006. The "human factor" of Jānis Stradiņš – his deep intelligence and diplomatic ability, allowed him to gather capable people and motivate them to work in the new fields of spectroscopy (IR, MS, NMR) and other physical methods. The environment of the Laboratory of Physical Organic Chemistry was special. The scientists formed a cohesive team working toward a common aim despite having different specialties. This laboratory culture, collaboration, and cohesion were due to Professor Jānis Stradiņš' unique leadership skills. This work environment, Professor Jānis Stradiņš' approachability and helpful demeanor are now remembered fondly by all former employees.

In 1968, Jānis Stradiņš defended his doctoral thesis in chemistry "Polarography and electronic structure of nitro and carbonyl compounds of aromatic and heteroaromatic groups" (in 1991 he became a habilitated doctor of sciences). Throughout his long scientific career, he authored hundreds of publications in the fields of physical chemistry and history of science. Over the last few decades, his works focused on the areas of history, culture, and science popularization. In the third volume of Jānis Stradiņš biobibliography published in 2017, the total number of publications reached 5983.

Scientific authority of Professor Jānis Stradiņš was recognized in 1973, when he was elected as a full member of the Academy of Sciences of Latvian SSR, followed by the inevitable involvement in the organizational structures of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. He held positions of the Deputy Academic Secretary of the Department of Chemistry and Biology (1976–1992), member of the Presidium of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (since 1990), Vice-President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1992–1998), the President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1998–2004), and the Chairman of the Senate of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (since 2004). At the same time, Professor Jānis Stradiņš was involved in the popularization of science and cultural-historical research. He continually collaborated with various journals and provided scientific appraisal of encyclopedias, etc. The talent of Jānis Stradiņš as a science organizer was also relied upon when he agreed to accept the position of the Editor-in-Chief of the journal "Chemistry of Heterocyclic Compounds" following the decease of the academician Solomon Hiller. He held this position for more than 10 years (1975–1985) and in collaboration with famous scientists organized the publication of the review articles in the journal.

Starting from 1972, Professor Jānis Stradiņš has become increasingly interested in the history of science and culture that helped him to develop one of his greatest characteristics – a concise, often humorous, but always accurate statement of his vision on a wide range of social, scientific, and cultural events both in Latvia and abroad. Numerous public appearances, articles, lectures on the history of chemistry, books about individual chemists, articles and presentations at scientific forums, informative, inundated with facts, often previously unknown, in refined form, and with humor now form a significant part of the Latvian Cultural Heritage Gold Fund. Jānis Stradiņš was very knowledgeable on the topics of history of science in

general and about the history of chemistry in particular in the context of the history of mankind and had an understanding of the laws of the development and the problems of personality in science and society.

Academician Jānis Stradiņš has received various Latvian State awards – 2nd Class Order of the Three Stars (1995) and 1st Class Honorary Cross (2008) and awards of the Latvian Academy of Sciences – Grand Medal (1993) and Gustavs Vanags Award (1995). For his extensive and versatile scientific activities he has received awards named after the Latvian scientists – the microbiologist Augustus Kirchenstein Award (1982), his father's doctor Paul Stradins Award (1983), the chemist Paul Walden Medal (1988), the Solomon Hiller Award (1990), the chemist Gustavs Vanags Memorial Medal (1991), the wood chemist Arvids Kalniņš Medal (1994), the chemist Theodor Grotthuss Prize (1994), the pharmacist David Hieronymus Grindel Medal (1995), the chemist Lidija Liepiņa Medal (2000), and the pharmacologist Oswald Schmiedeberg Medal (2005). He has also received awards from other countries – the Order of the French Legion of Honor (2001), the Order for Merits to Italy (2004), the Estonian Order Maarjamaa Risti teenetemärk (2004), the Order for Merits to Lithuania (2011).

It is the integration of science and culture that made Professor and Academician Jānis Stradiņš the soul of Latvian scientific community. He was an outstanding scientist, historian of science and culture, a writer, a sincere colleague, and a caring family man. We express our deepest condolences to the family, colleagues, and to the entire world of scientists in Latvia and abroad.

**President of the Latvian Academy
of Sciences Ojārs Spārītis,
Academicians Ivars Kalviņš
and Pēteris Trapencieris**