

Roman Teisseyre – the Pride of the Academy

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From among colleagues remembering Prof. Roman Teisseyre, I am probably least qualified to write about his achievements. Neither the scientific discipline that he dealt with, is my own; nor I had a chance to directly collaborate with him. When I started my work at the Institute of Geophysics in 1988, Prof. Teisseyre was already a legend and it was too high threshold for me at that time. But soon it turned out that Prof. Teisseyre was very straightforward, open person ready to share his knowledge with younger fellows. It so happened that I had Professor Teisseyre on board when I served as the Director of the Institute of Geophysics. When I had this privilege to play various roles at Polish Academy of Sciences, among them as its Vice President, I could observe how important was Roman for the entire Polish scientific community. I am absolutely sure that others will tell in much better way about Roman's scientific accomplishments (he primarily was a scientist) but let me just mention his invaluable role for organization of Polish science, particularly at the Polish Academy of Sciences. This brief memoir is based on preliminary research of the documents that can be found at the headquarters of the Academy. Let me mention that I had this privilege to get onto first-name terms with Prof. Teisseyre so further in the text I will from time to time call him simply Roman.

The first document that attracted my special attention was Roman's own biography written when he was a candidate to become the corresponding member of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a very elite and that time extremely demanding society. His candidacy was supported by three members of the Academy, the giants in Polish science – Professors Stefan Piotrowski – an astronomer, founder of Warsaw School of Astronomy, Julian Lambor – one of the most famous Polish hydrologists in the 20th century, and Leonard Sosnowski – the founder of semiconductor physics in Poland. They prepared a letter of strong support for Roman in March 1969. From a one-page biography written by Roman one can conclude what was really important for him at that time. He stressed his education (3 classes of gymnasium) at the underground schools which he managed to attend until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. He mentioned his early work in the mill in the neighborhood of Kraków. He graduated from the fourth grade of high school after the liberation of Cracow lands. Then he moved to Zielona Góra to work as an industrial guard. He went through the first grade at Lyceum in Jelenia Góra and the second one in Wrocław. It shows a turbulent period in his life. In that short document, he also explained the choices he made. So in 1955 he was nominated the scientific secretary of the Polish Committee of International Geophysical Year and he resigned from it to be able to

chair the expedition to Vietnam where he went three times, in 1956, 1957, and 1958. Noteworthy are also his fellowships in UK and France (1959 and 1960), participation in a summer expedition to Spitsbergen, and also very prestigious position in Japan as an international expert of UNESCO. Note that we talk about times of communist despotism in Poland when international traveling was not an easy undertaking. He was not a member or not even a supporter of the leading party but even then was allowed to travel overseas. Roman was accepted at the Academy as a corresponding member in 1969. Note that he was then only 40 years old and I want to stress that even nowadays it is not very common that the Academy accepts so young members. It proves how well his research and organizational achievements were taken by academicians that time. It was already most prestigious scientific society in Poland. In their explanations, Professors Piotrowski, Lambor, and Sosnowski stressed not only Roman's scientific achievements but also the support for the scientific discipline that he was active in. In their opinion geophysics at that time was a fledging research domain. In my own judgment, it was also a milestone in the development of seismology and in perceiving geophysics by the Polish scientific community.

Figure 1 presents the last page of the original letter of support to elect Prof. Teisseyre the corresponding member of the Academy.

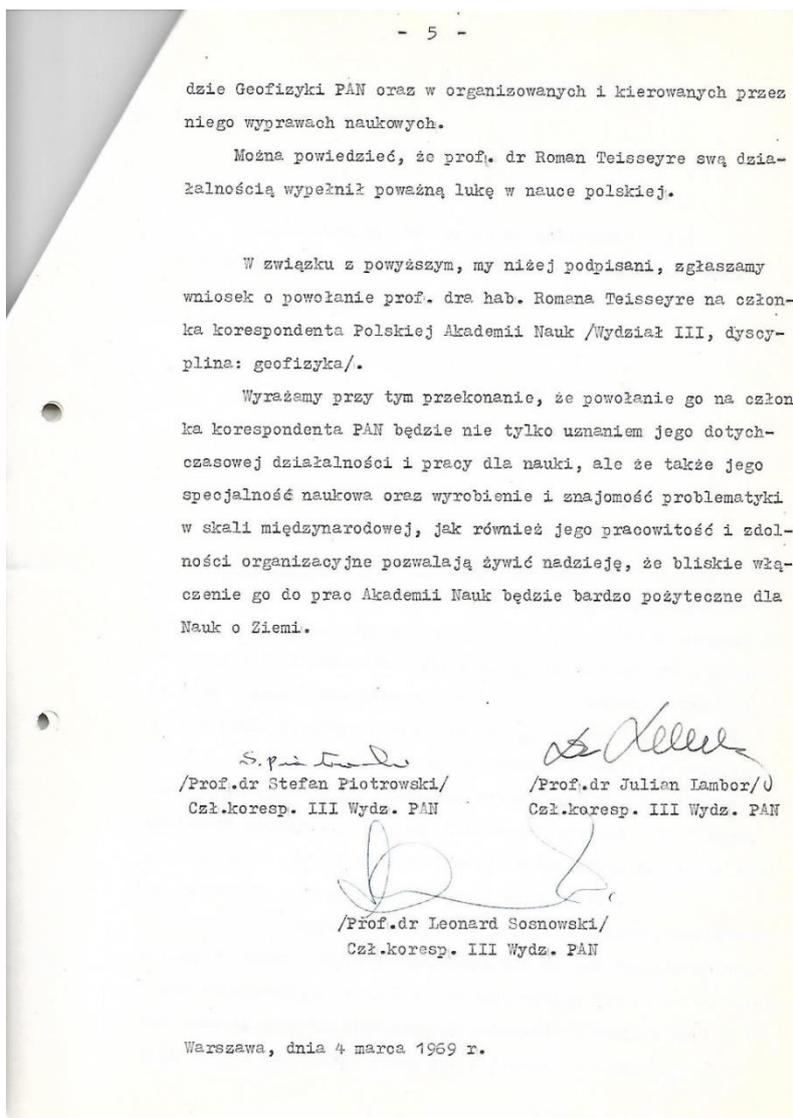


Fig. 1. Last page of the original letter of support in the process of Prof. Teisseyre's election to the Polish Academy of Sciences with original signatures of Profs. Stefan Piotrowski, Julian Lambor, and Leonard Sosnowski (Excerpts translated by the editors: "... we are convinced that his election (...) will not only be a recognition of his past activities and achievements (...), but his diligence and organizational skills make us believe that his forthcoming participation in the activities of the Academy of Sciences will be of great benefit to Earth Sciences").

The next step in Roman's career in the Academy was an application to nominate him as an ordinary member of the Academy. That time the letter of support written in November 1979 was signed by Professors Jerzy Kostrowicki – a Polish geographer specializing in economic geography and two leading Polish geologists – Roman Ney and Władysław Pożaryski. It was to some extent the coping stone of his academic achievements and the administrative services to our community. Note that in the years 1970 through 1972 he was the director of the Institute of Geophysics and, after that, also at the time when he was accepted as an ordinary member of PAS – he was the deputy director of the Institute responsible for scientific affairs.

He was always active as a member of scientific councils of various institutions and when awarded the ordinary membership of PAS he was seating in the Scientific Council of Geophysical Department of PAS, he was the head of the Scientific Council of Applied Geophysics at AGH University of Science and Technology, and a member of many other organizations. On a different note, I happened to travel with him a lot when we were both members of the scientific council of the Institute of Oceanology PAS starting from 2011. He was already in advanced age but his approach to this task was always conscientious. And as long as he was in a good health condition the time spent with him in Sopot or in the train on the way to Tricity was extremely joyful. His remarks and advise given to that Institute were always to the point.

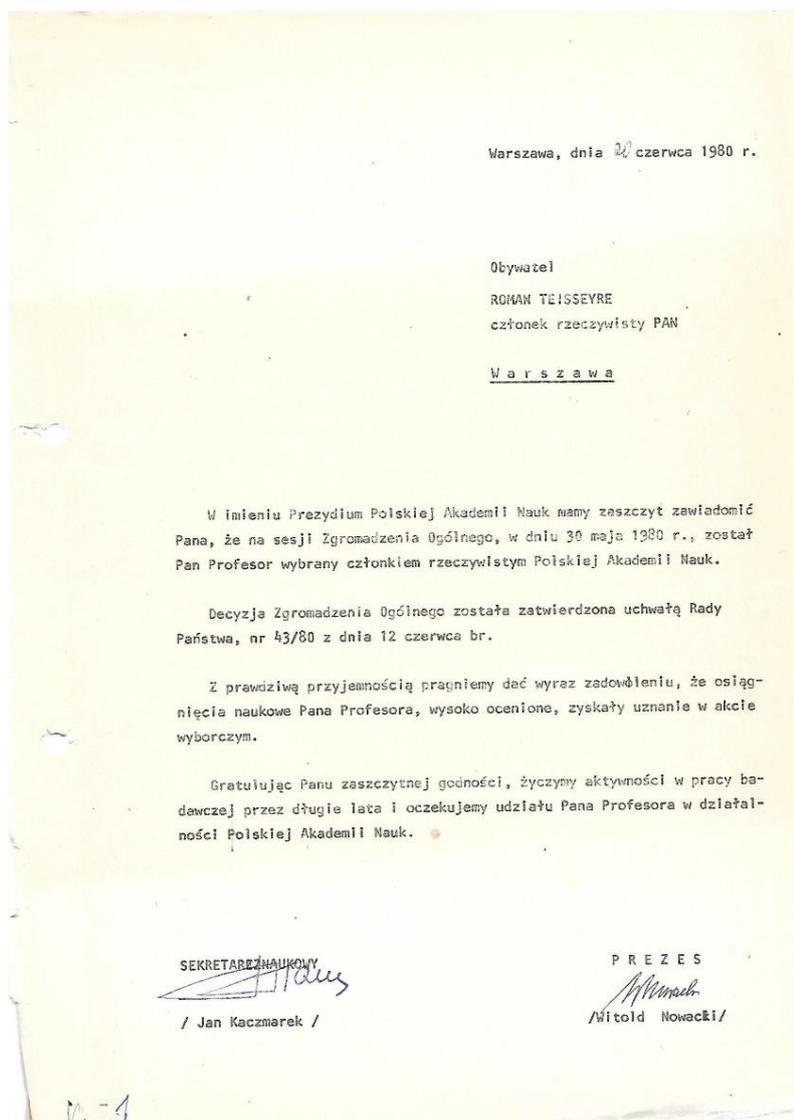


Fig. 2. Letter of the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences informing about electing Prof. Roman Teisseyre as an ordinary member of the Academy.

Coming back to his application to become an ordinary member of PAS, it was the time when he also served in the Board of the National Committee of Geophysics and Geodesy. And notably, he was the Deputy of the Secretary of Division 3 (Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry) of the Academy from 1973 to 1976. And starting from 1973 he was also a member of the Presidium of PAS. A special opinion was then prepared by Professors Roman Ney and Zdzisław Kaczmarek. He was elected ordinary member on the 30 May 1980 (see the letter of the President of PAS, Prof. Witold Nowacki, and its Scientific Secretary, Prof. Jan Kaczmarek, Fig. 2).

People very often recall Roman as somebody not interested in any administrative work but it contradicts the facts. He was extremely active member of PAS. I myself remember Roman solving his equations during long meetings, treated by him as the boring ones. At the same time, he was aware of what was being discussed, he simply did not like to unnecessarily lose time. So it is hard to judge what indeed was in his heart. But to provide those contradictory facts showing how frequently wrong is our image of Roman – in 1980 he became the Secretary of the Division 7 of the Academy (Earth and Mining Sciences) and fulfilled that task until 1983. It was an extremely demanding and prestigious job! He had to play the leading role in assessing the institutes working under the umbrella of the Division, was responsible for organizing the elections of the directors of these institutes, and also had to coordinate the work of committees

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KARTA OSOBOWA CZŁONKA AKADEMII

1. Imię i nazwisko Roman Teisseyre

2. Adres 02-057 Warszawa, ul. Filtrów 62 m 26
tel. służb. 22-53-43 tel. dom. 25-98-88

3. Data i miejsce urodzenia 11 kwietnia 1929, Lwów

4. Studia ukończone na Uniwersytet W-wski - Wydz. Fizyki

5. Działalność naukowa rozpoczęta w roku 1952

6. Stopień doktorski nadany przez Wydz. Fizyki Uniwers. W-wski
w roku 1959 /zgodnie z brzmieniem dyplomu uzyskanego
na podstawie przewodu doktorskiego/
Fizyki teoretycznej

7. Przeprowadzona habilitacja w zakresie geofizyki
w /uczelnis, placówka naukowa/ Wydział Fizyki
Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w roku 1961

8. Powołanie na stanowisko /przyznanie tytułu naukowego/:

a. docenta 1962r.

b. prof. nadzw. 1967 r.

c. prof. zwyczaj. 1974 r.

Fig. 3. Personal data form of the Academy member from 1986 – from archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

working for the Division. The divisions also awarded various prizes and the Secretary of the Division played one of the major roles in this task. He is well remembered from that period and he was the boss that everybody really liked. Roman used to avoid conflicts, and was rather a man of consent. Let me also remind one of the activities that I myself appreciate very much. For many years he served as Editor in Chief of *Acta Geophysica Polonica* and it was he that we discussed the process of transferring that journal into its new appearance as *Acta Geophysica*. As the director of the Institute I undertook that task and he was extremely supportive and well understood that we needed a change to make this journal listed in international databases.

Figure 3 presents the first page of personal data form as found in the archives of PAS. One can see Roman's picture and this is how he is remembered from that time.

Let me in the final words mention how I remember Prof. Teisseyre. He was a man of outstanding intelligence capturing the most important issues even from beyond his area of expertise. Discussions of scientific matters with him were tough since he understood more than most of his interlocutors. He was also a man of generosity, a fantastic comrade with absolutely fantastic sense of humor, and, as mentioned before, an extraordinary scientist. His spontaneous kindness to others, unheard-of honesty and modesty were what made him unique. Knowing him was a great privilege!

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