

**IN MEMORY OF EVGENI SEMKOV – THE TEACHER, THE
INSPIRER, THE ASTRONOMER, AND SIMPLY THE FRIEND**

Corresponding Member Evgeni Semkov was born in Sofia on January 7, 1960. He completed his secondary education at the 21st High School “Hristo Botev” (Sofia) in 1978. During this time, his interest in astronomy began to grow, fueled by his passion for popular science books. He devoured most of the translated science fiction books available in Bulgaria. Though he couldn’t become an astronaut, astronomy captivated him deeply. In 1980, he enrolled in the Faculty of Physics at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, where in 1985, under the guidance of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Milcho Tsvetkov, defended his thesis and graduated with a master’s degree in physics, specializing in astronomy.

He began his professional journey in astronomy as a methodologist at the Sofia City Astronomical Observatory (1985–1987). This experience left a lasting impact on his development. After the closure of the City Observatory and the discontinuation of astronomy clubs in Sofia, he consistently advocated for their revival. *“Unfortunately, Sofia still lacks astronomy clubs to this day”*, Corresponding Member Semkov would say. *“There is no planetarium here, unlike other cities in Bulgaria. We cannot compare to Smolyan, Dimitrovgrad, Varna...”*. In 1987, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Milcho Tsvetkov invited him to join the Independent Astronomy Section at the National Astronomical Observatory (NAO) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), where he defended his PhD thesis in 1995 on “Study of Non-Stationary and Eruptive Stars in the Regions of the Diffuse Nebula NGC 7129 and the Open Star Cluster α Per”. Corresponding Member Semkov advanced through all stages of a Bulgarian astronomer’s career: from operator of the 2-meter telescope at NAO Rozhen (1990–1994), physicist at the Institute of Astronomy, BAS (1995–1997), research associate (1997–2000), senior research associate (2000–2006), associate professor (2006–2015), to full professor (2015–2024). In May 2023, he defended his doctoral thesis on “Pre-Main Sequence Stars” and was elected Corresponding Member of BAS in September 2024. He served as Scientific Secretary of the Institute of Astronomy with NAO–BAS (2008–2016), Acting Director (2016–2018), and then Director for two terms (2018 until his passing on December 29, 2024). He was also a member of the General Assembly of BAS and its committees.

Corresponding Member Semkov was one of Bulgaria’s most accomplished and active astronomers in recent years. His research focused on observational astronomy (photometric and spectral variability of stars) and astrophysics (star-forming regions of pre-main sequence stars, young variable stars, and symbiotic stars), as well as accreting supermassive black holes (active galactic nuclei, quasars, blazars). He authored 205 scientific publications and received over 1,700 citations (excluding self-citations). He was awarded the BAS Jubilee Certificate for outstanding scientific

achievements on its 145th anniversary, nominated for the “Successful Leader of International Projects” category in the Pythagoras Awards (2017), and received the “Established Scholar in Natural and Engineering Sciences” award in the 2024 Pythagoras Awards. He specialized abroad and collaborated with observatories and institutes in Armenia, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, the USA, France, Germany, Croatia, and others. Domestically, he worked closely with leading astronomers, including Assoc. Prof. Dr. Milcho Tsvetkov, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Tsvetkova, Prof. Tsvetan Georgiev, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sunay Ibryamov. Under his leadership, the Institute of Astronomy with NAO secured international projects (including ESA and EU Horizon funding) and coordinated two national scientific infrastructure initiatives: RACIO (Regional Astronomical Center for Research and Education) and LOFAR-BG. He spearheaded the design and construction of a new 1.5-meter optical telescope at NAO Rozhen – “the contribution of our generation of Bulgarian astronomers to the future”. He was a member of the International Astronomical Union, the European Astronomical Union, and the Union of Astronomers in Bulgaria.

Beyond his scientific and administrative work, Corresponding Member Semkov dedicated significant effort to mentoring young colleagues. He supervised four successful PhD students and often remarked, “*While training them, I never stopped learning from them*”. His youthful spirit was nurtured by his passion for athletics. He was an ardent supporter of Levski Sofia’s athletics club, where he competed, completing 14 full marathons with a personal best of 2 hours and 52 minutes.

With the passing of Corresponding Member Evgeni Semkov, the Bulgarian astronomical community has lost one of its brightest minds – a teacher, an inspirer, and a true friend.

We bow to his luminous memory!

Collegium of Astronomers from Bulgaria