

EuChemS Historical Landmark Award

Banská Štiavnica, 22 September 2026

Madam Mayor, Distinguished representatives of the Slovak Republic, Dear representatives of the Slovak Chemical Society and the Slovak National Committee of IUPAC, Honoured guests, colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure and privilege to join you in Banská Štiavnica for the unveiling of the EuChemS Historical Landmark plaque.

On behalf of the European Chemical Society, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Slovak Chemical Society for nominating this remarkable place and for bringing its scientific heritage to wider European attention. I would also like to thank the City of Banská Štiavnica, the Slovak National Committee of IUPAC, and the national and local authorities for their support and for organising today's ceremony.

The EuChemS Historical Landmarks Award was established to identify and celebrate places where important events in the history of chemistry occurred—whether scientific, educational, industrial or societal. The programme recognises sites that have made a significant contribution to the chemical community and that foster a sense of shared regional or European identity.

Its purpose, however, is not simply to commemorate the past. These landmarks help us connect the history of chemistry with the communities of today. They make scientific heritage visible and accessible, particularly to younger generations, and remind us that scientific progress always takes place within a broader human, social and cultural setting.

Banská Štiavnica embodies these aims exceptionally well.

In the eighteenth century, this city and the surrounding mining region were among Europe's most important centres for the extraction and processing of gold, silver and other ores. The practical challenges of mining created an urgent need for scientific knowledge, technological innovation and highly qualified specialists.

In response to this need, Empress Maria Theresa decided, on 13 December 1762, to establish a higher school of mining here. The Department of Chemistry, Mineralogy and Metallurgy was established in 1763, with Mikuláš Jozef Jacquin as its first professor. Further departments followed, and in 1770 the institution became known as the Mining Academy.

The Academy is widely recognised as the world's first technical university. Its significance arose not only from what was taught, but also from how it was taught. Education combined theory with practice, while laboratory exercises, measurement, weighing and direct observation occupied a central place in the curriculum.

This experimental approach contributed to a new understanding of chemical processes. It helped advance the oxidation theory associated with Antoine Lavoisier and supported the gradual rejection of the phlogiston theory of combustion. The Academy therefore became an important centre of European chemical, mineralogical and metallurgical research.

Its reputation was strengthened by internationally distinguished scholars, including Mikuláš Jozef Jacquin, Giovanni Antonio Scopoli and Anton Leopold Ruprecht. Ruprecht's place in European chemical history was later recognised by the EuChemS predecessor organisation, the Federation of European Chemical Societies, which included him among one hundred distinguished European chemists from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

The educational model developed here also travelled beyond this region. The strong emphasis on practical and laboratory-based instruction attracted international attention and influenced thinking about technical and scientific education elsewhere in Europe.

Although the Mining Academy ceased to operate in Banská Štiavnica in 1918, its intellectual legacy did not disappear. It continues through universities and faculties in Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic that regard themselves as heirs to its traditions. Even more broadly, it continues wherever chemistry is taught through the close integration of scientific knowledge, experimentation and practical application.

The plaque we unveil today is therefore more than a marker of something that happened centuries ago. It is a visible symbol of continuity: between history and the present, between education and research, and between local achievement and European scientific progress.

It also reminds us that Europe's scientific heritage is not located only in its largest capitals or most famous institutions. It is found in places such as Banská Štiavnica, where local resources, practical needs, intellectual ambition and international exchange came together to transform the way science was taught and practised.

EuChemS is proud to recognise Banská Štiavnica as a European-level EuChemS Historical Landmark. We hope that this distinction will encourage residents and visitors alike to discover the city's contribution to chemistry and to appreciate the enduring importance of its scientific and educational heritage.

May this plaque honour those who taught, studied, experimented and innovated here. And may it inspire future generations to approach science with the same curiosity, rigour and determination.

Congratulations to the City of Banská Štiavnica, to the Slovak Chemical Society and to everyone who has helped preserve and promote this extraordinary legacy.

Thank you.