

Maria Skłodowska-Curie

Physicist and chemist. The first and only woman in the world to receive the Nobel Prize twice, as well as the only scientist honored in two different fields of natural sciences

She was recognized as a scientist of all time by the British weekly *NewScientist*. At the beginning of the 20th century, Maria Skłodowska-Curie was the only woman to participate in the meetings of eminent physicists and chemists - Solvaya Congresses - together with the celebrities of that time, Albert Einstein or Max Planck. She was friends with Einstein, they went hiking in the Swiss Alps several times. He claimed her to be 'of all celebrated beings, the only one whom fame has not corrupted'.

She was born in Warsaw in 1867. At that time, in Poland, which due to partitions was divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria, women were not allowed to study. The only chance to make the dream come true was a costly move to Paris. So, she made a contract with her older sister: Bronislawa first went to study in Paris, and Maria worked as a governess to maintain her. Later, they switched roles and thanks to this Maria could start education at the Sorbonne. There she studied mathematics and physics, which she graduated in as the first woman in history. She gained recognition in the academic environment and the opportunity to cooperate with the best scientists. In Paris, she also met her future husband - Pierre Curie. They went cycling on their honeymoon, breaking the conventions of the era.

Together with Pierre and Henri Becquerel, in 1903 she won the Nobel Prize in Physics for her research on the phenomenon of radioactivity discovered by Becquerel. She received the second prize in 1911 in chemistry for discovering new elements: polonium (Po) and radium (Ra), isolating pure radium and studying the chemical properties of radioactive elements. Her discoveries have become a breakthrough in the fight against cancer.

Maria was the first female professor at the French Sorbonne. She believed that the didactic methods used at the time did not serve children's development, so together with her friends they established a school, in which they taught their own children,

and classes were held in the Sorbonne building. As one of the first women, she obtained a driving license to help soldiers on the front. During World War I, she constructed special small X-ray machines for quick diagnosis and, together with her daughter and military doctors, they were bringing them to field hospitals. In this way, she saved thousands of soldiers from the amputation of arms or legs - because X-ray images enabled the precise detection and extraction of missile fragments.

She died of leukemia in 1934, the reason for the disease was her research activity. She rests in the Paris Pantheon as the first and only woman honored in this way for her scientific achievements. She is also the only non-French woman who has been buried there.

