

# EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Winter 1997

## EUSJA on-line

### Rouse yer browser

Quality information is certainly out there in cyberspace and a lot of it can come your way by e-mail. You don't even have to wake up your web browser software to get it.

Top of the list of course is the daily digest of postings on the EUSJA-L mailing list. This has pointers to hot new information, along with European gossip from fellow journalists.

There has also been an increase lately in science news 'pre-digesters' that will e-mail you tips and summaries. Quadnet has been doing a valuable service for some time now, but there's also Science-Week, Science-Guide, EurekAlert!, Medpulse, Biomednet and many more. Some of these services may be free 'tasters' for fuller services you will have to pay money for. But relying on these sources can give a rather lop-sided view of the world, because they're mainly American.

It's up to us to encourage and cajole our European sources to get their electronic act together.

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## Editorial

### Memories are made of this

I'm one of the members of the EUSJA List, EUSJA's on-line discussion group where around 200 EUSJA members log on to share useful information and gossip. The most active list members seem to be British colleagues, and after reading their many messages I feel I know many of them, even though I've never actually spoken to them or met them. Sometimes I also come across names of old friends on the list and wonder what they are up to. But mainly I am just a silent observer, and never think of answering requests or replying to comments.

Although it is easy to get in touch with a member of the EUSJA List personally by e-mail if ever I want or need to, I can't help feeling that a flesh and blood contact is always more meaningful and better than a virtual one.

What is true for human relations is also true for investigations. All those web sites are helpful providers of information and e-mail is a useful tool. But I appreciate the value of telephone interviews, because sometimes a hesitation in a voice or just laughter during a conversation tells me a lot more than a long list of words or terms, especially if I interview somebody personally in her or his office, lab or even home.

Similarly magazines and TV films show me many people or places on our globe and introduce me to science, culture and everyday life in foreign countries. However, I learned much more on my real visit to Vietnam earlier this year. By actually visiting the country I felt I gained a much better insight into the progress and problems in family planning in a developing nation than I ever would have achieved by reading thick books and conducting long interviews with experts at home.

My colleagues who went on this year's EUSJA visit to Slovenia and Finland will recognise my feelings. Surely the personal contacts they made gave them a special insight into life and science and technology activities in the countries they visited – insights they were able to pass on to their public.

Several EUSJA visits are scheduled for the coming year – for more details keep an eye on the EUSJA web page at <<http://www.esf.org/eusja/>>. But let's think about organising more. Why not follow the example of the Swiss Association for Science Journalism, which has so far organised five study tours outside Europe and several visits to neighbouring countries? These experiences generate valuable insights that last for ever.

*Rosmarie Waldner, President, EUSJA*

### Keep in touch!

News, views, stories, announcements ideas or even cautionary tales – they could all be of interest for the next EUSJA newsletter, due out next May. Send me yours by 10 April 1998. Get in touch by phone or fax (the number is the same for both) on +44-1608-676530, by e-mail to [ninamorgan@compuserve.com](mailto:ninamorgan@compuserve.com) or by old-fashioned post at: Rose Cottage, East End, Chadlington, Oxon OX7 3LX, UK.

*Nina Morgan, Editor, EUSJA News*

## News from a new country

**S**lovenia, the northernmost republic of the former Yugoslavia, has only been an independent nation since June 1991, but it is already well on its way to joining the EU, and its science and technology infrastructure is fully up and running. There is much to interest science journalists here – but where to begin?

The public relations department at the Ministry of Science and Technology is an obvious and a good place to start. The head of PR, Vladimir Vajda, or the state secretary for international co-operation, Verica Trsenjak, can suggest useful contacts (tel +386-61-131-11-07; fax +386-61-132-41-40; e-mail vlado.vajda@mzt.sl). Don't be surprised if they suggest you go straight to the top and interview the relevant government minister. Open and easy access to information seems to be a Slovenian policy.

### Small, but beautiful

**W**ith a territory measuring 20 256 km<sup>2</sup> Slovenia is a small country, but as the science journalists taking part in the June 1997 meeting hosted by the Slovenian Science Journalists Association found, it packs a lot of science into that compact space. There was something to interest just about everyone.

For natural history buffs, the chance to visit the Kras region, the type area for karst topography, was unforgettable. Other attractions included the chance to discuss Slovenia's participation in the multinational Pierre Auger Observatory (high-energy cosmic rays), biotechnology, the wine industry and the controversial but interesting BION Institute (see their web site at <http://www2.arnes.si/guest/ljbion1s/>).

Slovenian helpfulness, hospitality and wine are renowned, and we were not disappointed. If you'd like to experience Slovenian science for yourself, Goran Tenze, President of the Slovenian Science Journalists Association and the able and enthusiastic leader of our trip (tel +386-61-131 1336; fax +386-61-133 4007; e-mail: [goran.tenze@rtvslo.si](mailto:goran.tenze@rtvslo.si)) can help you get started.

*Cormac Sheridan, ISJA*

### Where nature and technology meet

**A**n August 1997 visit to Finland hosted by the Finnish Science Journalists Association and the Finnish Technology Development Centre (Tekes) offered European science journalists the chance to see Finland at one of the nicest times of the year and to experience the best of Finnish science and technology.

As well as an agenda which took in industrial projects, a high-tech ice hockey arena and a range of

science projects at research institutes in southern Finland, the hosts offered to set up individual programmes to cater for special interests – an opportunity that several people took up enthusiastically. And when the work was done, the famous Finnish hospitality came into play. An excellent time was had by all. To get a toehold into the world of high-tech Finland, make Tekes your first port of call (see *EUSJA News*, spring 1997).

*Pirjo Rötönen, Technology Development Centre, Finland (Tekes); e-mail [pirjo.rotkonen@tekes.fi](mailto:pirjo.rotkonen@tekes.fi)*

### Keeping Russian science writing alive

**E**conomic problems mean that both Russian science and science journalism are suffering. With issues such as science funding, the non-payment of scientists' salaries and the brain-drain caused by Russian scientists leaving for jobs abroad prominent in the Russian press, science journalists have little chance to write about scientific work. To add to the problem, editors argue that their audiences prefer to read about sex, crime and politics – not science. So to make a living, science journalists have to change their stripes.

As a result, there is a distinct shortage of science articles in the Russian media, especially when you consider the number and ability of the scientists we have here. Of course we know that the media tide will eventually turn again to favour science stories. But will our journalists be prepared for that beautiful future?

To make sure that they are, Intellect, the Russian association for science writers and journalists, is working with the Ministry of Science and Technology to organise a seminar for young journalists interested in science, with the board members of Intellect serving as 'mentors'. In addition, Intellect has been able to obtain grant money from business to finance the publication of monthly science and higher education supplements in two major newspapers, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (NG-Nauka) and *Moskovskaya Pravda* (Intellect). We hope to expand this undertaking to other papers too. With efforts such as these, I believe we can keep the tradition of Russian science journalism alive.

*Viola Gikova, vice president, Intellect*

### ... Rouse your browser

*from page 1*

If we show interest in picking up information off the Internet, maybe they'll begin to oblige. The downside could be a 'wall of data' that swamps the really useful stuff. Selective browsing should be our skill. Try:

<http://www.esf.org/eusja/>  
<http://www.quad-net.com/>  
<http://www.eurekalert.org/>  
<http://www.medscape.com/>  
<http://www.scienceguide.com/>  
<http://members.aol.com/sciweek/>  
<http://biomednet.com/>

*Mike Tomlinson, ABSW  
e-mail [100564.561@compuserve.com](mailto:100564.561@compuserve.com)*

# Want them? train them!

With an eye to the future of Irish science journalism, the Irish Science Journalists Association has intensified its media skills training activities during the first half of 1997. Events included one- or two-day courses for members of the Irish Research Scientists Association and for technical staff at the Environmental Protection Agency.

These 'media skills for scientists' courses, developed in 1995-96, are tailored to the customer's requirements. The basic courses always include an introduction to media organisation and a survey of the challenges of presenting complex scientific information in simplified form. Training for radio interviews on news or magazine programmes, and a simulated press conference under the heat of television lights, followed by a review of the videotaped evidence, are other options.

In addition, we ran a week-long workshop for teenagers participating in the Youth Science and Arts Week organised by the Royal Dublin Society. This new venture exposed ISJA members to the test of maintaining the interest of 20 teenagers over four days.

Media skills course fees range from £IR 100-150 per participant. The courses raise our profile and help to demystify the media among scientists. The income from these courses has allowed ISJA to provide travel subsidies for members participating in EUSJA visits.

*Brian Trench, president, ISJA*

## Libri nuovi

Sai leggere l'italiano? Allora questi libri fanno per te! *Biotechnology, the Evolution of Biology: Theory and Applications*, by M Cristina Ferri (tel/fax +39-45-534709) is published by Società Editrice Internazionale, Torino, and aimed at the general public and schools. English and Spanish translations are planned. *The Words of Science* is edited by the Unione Giornalisti Italiani Scientifici and published in Italian. Details from Paola de Paoli, tel/fax +39-2-437476. Buona lettura!

Kiosque à journaux... Edicola... News stand

## A good read from France and Italy

Away from home, waiting for a plane or train and interested in finding a good science magazine to help to pass the time? Looking for potential new international markets for your freelance work?

When in France take a look at the main popular science journals: *Science et Avenir*, *La Recherche*, *Eureka*, *Ciel et Espace*, *Science et Nature* and *La Science Illustrée*. Even though they don't buy articles from freelancers, you may also enjoy *Pour la Science*, the French edition of *Scientific American*. Also look out for *Science*

et Vie, *Science et Vie Junior*, *Science et Vie Hors Serie* and *Les Cahiers de Science et Vie*.

In Italy the top science titles are: (general science) *Le Scienze*, *Le Scienze Quaderni*, *Scienza & Vita*, *Focus*, *Newton*; (astronomy) *Prometeo*, *Astronomia*, *Orione*, *Il Cielo*; (health/medicine) *Riza Psicosomatica*, *Top Salute*; (natural sciences) *Airone* and *Oasis*.

*Reporting by Luc Allemand in France and Giorgio Santocanale in Italy*

## Do science journalists need science?

In 1996 the Italian ministry for universities, scientific and technology research (MURST) opened up the opportunity for communication science students to specialise in journalism. Students taking up this option would then be granted a qualification. If the Italian journalists' professional board gets its way, this qualification could eventually become a requirement for anyone wishing to work as a journalist.

It's too soon to debate whether the proposed qualification should be a necessary professional qualification for journalists (although I believe it should not). However, one general point does deserve discussion. In the proposed journalism curriculum (24 courses studied over five years), with the exception of one optional course in mathematical logic, a grounding in science is apparently considered unnecessary.

This is only one symptom of the current sorry state of science journalism in the Italian media. Science and environment-related stories are often assigned to any available member of the editorial staff, regardless of their scientific illiteracy. What happens in the rest of Europe? Comparisons could be interesting.

*Gianni Fochi, UGIS*

A word in edgeways

## Secrets of clichés uncovered

Science writers are nearing a breakthrough, perhaps a major breakthrough, in their age-old quest to unlock the secrets, even the ultimate secrets, of cliché-free prose, researchers reported yesterday.

Using cutting-edge, state-of-the-art, high-tech and other dash-laden methodologies, the science journalists sifted obscure clues to reach their tentative conclusions. 'This is statistically significant,' one senior researcher said. 'It is an important step forward,' said another. 'This is science in action,' they agreed.

And while the latest results do not offer a cure, they point the way to better understanding of the underlying basic cellular causes of this ancient affliction. 'We may never know all the answers but this is an important piece of the puzzle, said everybody. 'It's a lesson for us all,' said Nina Morgan, editor, *EUSJA News*. Debate is sure to continue.

*With apologies to Charles Pettit, Science Editor, The San Francisco Chronicle, USA*

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Planning a journey? Your colleagues in Europe can help

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