



EUSJA News

Newsletter of the European Union of Science Journalists' Associations

Summer 2011

A word from the editor

One of the major goals of Eusja is to increase the value of Eusja for science journalists across Europe. At our board meeting in Budapest delegates split into working parties and thrashed out a list of strategies and objectives to move Eusja forward.

Free access to scientific literature, mentoring, high-profile social networking and better communications were on the list of priorities. An improved and more focused Eusja News was also called for and I believe this issue, with its concerted effort to examine coverage of the

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Upcoming events:

26–29 June: WCSJ in Doha, Qatar.

26 June to 1 July: Meet the Nobel laureates in medicine in Lindau. 18–20 July: Study tour to EMBL and DKFZ in Heidelberg.

18–23 September: Eusja trip to the the Helmholtz Research Centres in Germany.

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Editorial

Boost for Science in Africa and Arabia

Cheap renewable energy from the Sahara Desert: If this vision comes true, it will be the largest energy endeavour the earth ever saw. Plans are underway despite the current turmoil in the MENA countries, as Middle East and North Africa are called.

But are science journalists in Africa, the Middle East and Europe ready to cope with the proceedings? It will not only be their job to inform the public about solar technology from the desert. They must also explain the science as scientists are starting to see themselves as a kind of diplomat in order to pave the way through research co-operations, even in pure research.

Plans for harvesting the sun in the deserts are not new. In the MENA countries some research, planning and testing for capturing solar energy has been going on for a couple of years. Markets are seen in sub-Saharan Africa and of course in Europe, where energy demand is extremely high and which struggles to get rid of fossil oil and gas. Two main networks are currently co-operating in order to bring the idea forward both in the MENA countries and in Europe: The Desertec Foundation and the Plan Solaire Mediterranéen (Mediterranean Solar Plan), both with the support of the Club of Rome and a number of companies and academic institutions.

SCIENCE TO PAVE THE WAY

Despite the economical interests, scientists are eager to »embark on a joint energy/science partnership«. During the recent conference »Solar Energy for Science« scientists and science administrators from all the MENA countries – except Libya – and from Europe – mainly Germany – came together to discuss intensified scientific co-operation on one hand and the promotion of renewable energy in MENA on the other. »Science is a neutral and important facilitator in driving sustainable development and it may build bridges between MENA and Europe to overcome ... obstacles« which aggravate the realisation of the desert energy vision.

A number of science journalists participated in this conference, an EUSJA trip organised by Oliver Löffken of the German science writers TELI. The conference took place at DESY, the German Electron Synchrotron in Hamburg, which needs enormous amounts of energy to run its accelerators, and which is also active in supra conduction research beneficial for electric grids. Following discussions and the presentation of already running scientific and technological projects in the MENA countries, one got the strong impression that the desert energy vision will considerably boost science in that region. But not only there. Also the Ecowas region, the Economic



Hajo Neubert.

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A manifesto for the
simple scribe –

My 25 command- ments for journalists

Former Guardian science editor, letters editor, arts editor and literary editor Tim Radford has condensed his journalistic experience into a handy set of rules for aspiring hacks. Tim, who is now a familiar face at conferences is the most renowned and admired UK science journalist. His comments should be read, used and stored away for future use.

I wrote these 25 commandments as a panic response 15 or more years ago to an invitation to do some media training for a group of Elsevier editors. I began compiling them because I had just asked myself what was the most important thing to remember about writing a story, and the answer came back loud and clear: "To make somebody read it."

Ultimately, there's no other reason for writing. Journalists write to support democracy, sustain truth, salute justice, justify expenses, see the world and make a living, but to satisfactorily do any of these things you have to have readers. Fairness and accuracy are of course profoundly important. Without them, you aren't in journalism proper:

you are playing some other game. But above all, you have to be read, or you aren't in journalism at all.

I wrote down what was in my mind and once I'd started numbering things, I had to go on. I got past 10, and then 20, and stopped guiltily at 25. I then didn't have time to reduce the text to a formal Ten Commandments. The 25 things got distributed among the Elsevier editors the next morning and then some time later I got asked to talk to some staff at Nature, so I used the same set of prompts, and one or two people asked me for copies.

I gave it the not-very-serious subtitle of "manifesto for the simple scribe" and at around the same time, I realised that when stories that I had tried to write turned out wrong, it was because I'd broken one of my own rules. So I decided I might have written something quite useful, after all.

1. When you sit down to write, there is only one important person in your life. This is someone you will never meet, called a reader.

2. You are not writing to impress the scientist you have just interviewed, nor the professor who got you through your degree, nor the editor who foolishly turned you down, or the rather dishy person you just met at a party and told you were a writer. Or even your mother. You are writing to impress someone hanging from a strap in the tube between Parson's Green and Putney, who will stop reading in a fifth of a second, given a chance.

3. So the first sentence you write will be the most important sentence in your life, and so will the second, and the third. This is because, although you – an employee, an apostle or an apologist – may feel obliged to write, nobody has ever felt obliged to read.

4. Journalism is important. It must never, however, be full of its own self-importance. Nothing sends a reader scurrying to the crossword, or the racing column, faster than pomposity. Therefore simple words, clear ideas and short sentences are vital in all storytelling. So is a sense of irreverence.

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Community of the West African States, will be interested in joining.

SCIENCE JOURNALISTS NEED TO COPE

However, as big visions and plans are underway, journalists in Africa and also in Europe seem not to be fully aware of these great changes, which may happen within the next decade – or they might not have the capacities to follow the developments. It will not be done with just reporting on the progress of the coming developments in order to take along the citizens of MENA and in sub-Saharan Africa: It is also about exploring the connections between money, commerce, economy and politics. Thus a broad field for science journalists on both continents opens up.

As European science, economy and politics are strongly involved in this, I suggest EUSJA should tighten its bonds with the Arab Science Journalists Association (ASJA) and the African Federation of Science Journalists (AFSJ). EUSJA and AFSJ have



been twinned since the 5th World Congress of Science Journalists in Melbourne in 2007. No activities happened until now, but now the time seems ripe to strengthen the networks in the same the way as science does.

Hanns-J Neubert
Eusja president

5. Here is a thing to carve in pokerwork and hang over your typewriter. "No one will ever complain because you have made something too easy to understand."

6. And here is another thing to remember every time you sit down at the keyboard: a little sign that says "Nobody has to read this crap."

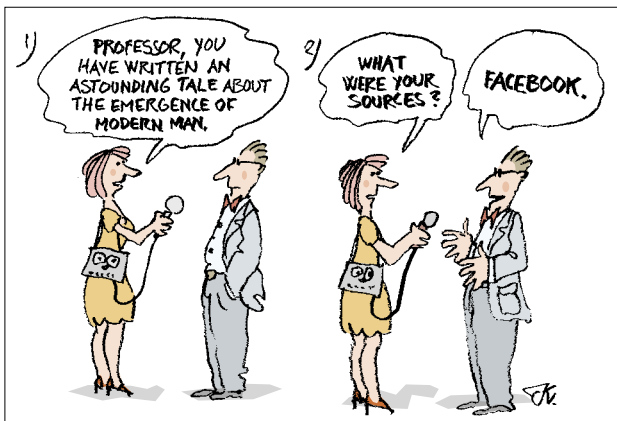
7. If in doubt, assume the reader knows nothing. However, never make the mistake of assuming that the reader is stupid. The classic error in journalism is to overestimate what the reader knows and underestimate the reader's intelligence.

8. Life is complicated, but journalism cannot be complicated. It is precisely because issues – medicine, politics, accountancy, the rules of Mornington Crescent – are complicated that readers turn to the Guardian, or the BBC, or the Lancet, or my old papers Fish Selling and Self Service Times, expecting to have them made simple.

9. So if an issue is tangled like a plate of spaghetti, then regard your story as just one strand of spaghetti, carefully drawn from the whole. Ideally with the oil, garlic and tomato sauce adhering to it. The reader will be grateful for being given the simple part, not the complicated whole. That is because (a) the reader knows life is complicated, but is grateful to have at least one strand explained clearly, and (b) because nobody ever reads stories that say "What follows is inexplicably complicated ..."

10. So here is a rule. A story will only ever say one big thing. If (for example, and you are feeling very brave) you have to deal with four strands of a tale, make the intertwining of those four strands the one big thing you have to say. You may put twiddly bits into your story, but only if you can do so without departing from the one linear narrative you have chosen.

11. Here is an observation. Don't even start writing till you have decided what the one big thing is going to be, and then say it to yourself in just one sentence. Then ask yourself whether you could imagine your mother listening to this sentence for longer than a microsecond before she reaches for the ironing. Should you try to sell an editor an idea for an article, you will get about the same level of attention, so pay attention to this sentence. It is often – not always, but often – the first sentence of your article anyway.



Tim Radford, The Guardian.

12. There is always an ideal first sentence – an intro, a way in – for any article. It really helps to think of this one before you start writing, because you will discover that the subsequent sentences write themselves, very quickly. This is not evidence that you are glib, facile, shallow or slick. Or even gifted. It merely means you hit the right first sentence.

13. Words like shallow, facile, glib and slick are not insults to a journalist. The whole point of paying for a newspaper is that you want information that slides down easily and quickly, without footnotes, obscure references and footnotes to footnotes.

14. Words like "sensational" and "trivial" are not insults to a journalist. You read what you read – Elizabethan plays, Russian novels, French comic strips, American thrillers – because something in them appeals to your sense of excitement, humour, romance or irony. Good journalism should give you the sensation of humour, excitement, poignancy or piquancy. Trivial is a favourite insult administered by scholars. But even they became interested in their subject in the first place because they were attracted by something gleaming, flashy and – yes, trivial.

15. Words have meanings. Respect those meanings. Get radical and look them up in the dictionary, find out where they have been. Then use them properly. Don't flaunt authority by flouting your ignorance. Don't whatever you do go down a hard road to hoe, without asking yourself how you would hoe a road. Or for that matter, a roe.

16. Clichés are, in the newspaper classic instruction, to be avoided like the plague. Except when they are the right cliché. You'd be surprised how useful a cliché can be, used judiciously. This is because the thing about journalism is that you don't have to be ever so clever but you do have to be ever so quick.

eat. Just don't choose loopy metaphors, and never, never mix them. Subs on the Guardian used to have a special

Muzzled Piranha Award, a kind of Oscar of incompetence, handed to an industrial relations reporter who warned the world that the Trades Union Congress wildcats were lurking in the undergrowth, ready to dart out like piranhas, unless they were muzzled. George Orwell reports on the case of an MP who claimed that the jackbooted fascist octopus had sung its swansong.

18. Beware of street cred. When Moses ordered his commanders to slay the Midianites he wasn't doing it to show that he was well hard. When he warned Pharaoh to let his people go he wasn't saying "give us room to breathe, man, and Pharaoh's, like, no way feller!" The language of the pub or the café has its own rhythms, its own body language, its own signalling devices. The language of the page has no accent, no helpful signalling tone of irony or comedy or self-mockery. It must be straight, clear and vivid. And to be straight and vivid, it must follow the received grammar.

19. Beware of long and preposterous words. Beware of jargon. If you are a science writer this is doubly important. If you are a science writer, you occasionally have to bandy words that no ordinary human ever uses, like phenotype, mitochondrion, cosmic inflation, Gaussian distribution and isostasy. So you really don't want to be effulgent or felicitous as well. You could just try being bright and happy.

20. English is better than Latin. You don't exterminate, you kill. You don't salivate, you drool. You don't conflagrate, you burn. Moses did not say to Pharaoh: "The consequence of non-release of one particular subject ethnic population could result ultimately in some kind of algal manifestation in the main river basin, with unforeseen outcomes for flora and fauna, not excluding consumer services." He said "the waters which are in the river ... shall be turned to blood, and the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink."

21. Remember that people will always respond to something close to them. Concerned citizens of south London should care more about economic reform in Surinam than about Millwall's fate on Saturday, but mostly they don't. Accept it. On 24 November 1963, the Hull Daily Mail sent me in search of a Hull angle on the assassination of President Kennedy. Once I had found a line that began "Hull citizens were in mourning today as ..." we could get on with reporting what happened in Dallas.

22. Read. Read lots of different things. Read the King James Bible, and Dickens, and poems by Shelley, and Marvel Comics and thrillers by Chester Himes and Dashiell Hammett. Look at the astonishing things you can do with words. Note the way they can conjure up whole worlds in the space of half a page.

23. Beware of all definitives. The last horse trough in Surrey will turn out not even to be the last horse trough in Godalming. There will almost always be someone who turns out to be bigger, faster, older, earlier, richer or more nauseating than the candidate to whom you have just awarded a superlative. Save yourself the bother: "One

of the first ..." will usually save the moment. If not, then at least qualify it: "According to the Guinness Book of Records ..." "The Sunday Times Rich List ..." and so on.

24. There are things that good taste and the law will simply not let you say in print. My current favourites are "Murderer acquitted" and (in a report of an Easter religious play) "Paul Myers, who played Jesus Christ, emerged as the star of the show." Try and work out which one has the taste problem, and which one will cost you approximately half a million per word.

Tim Radford
The Guardian

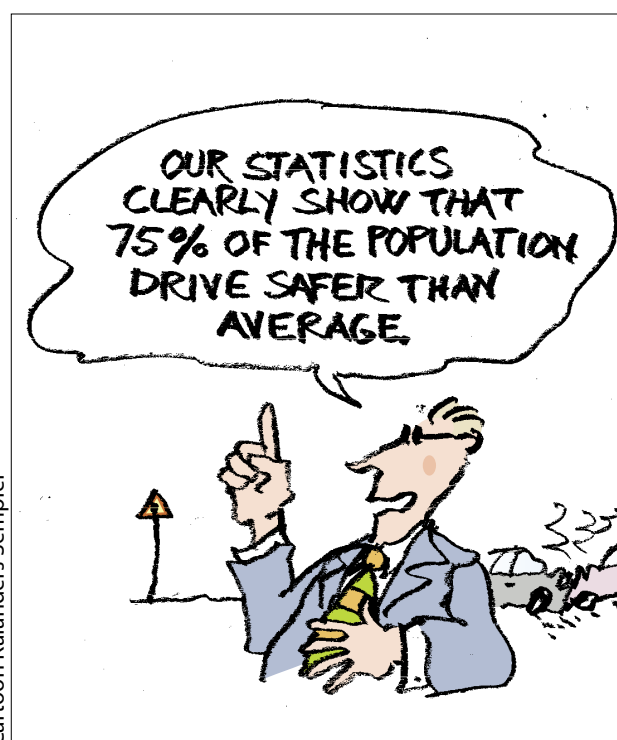
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Japanese disaster is moving in the right direction.

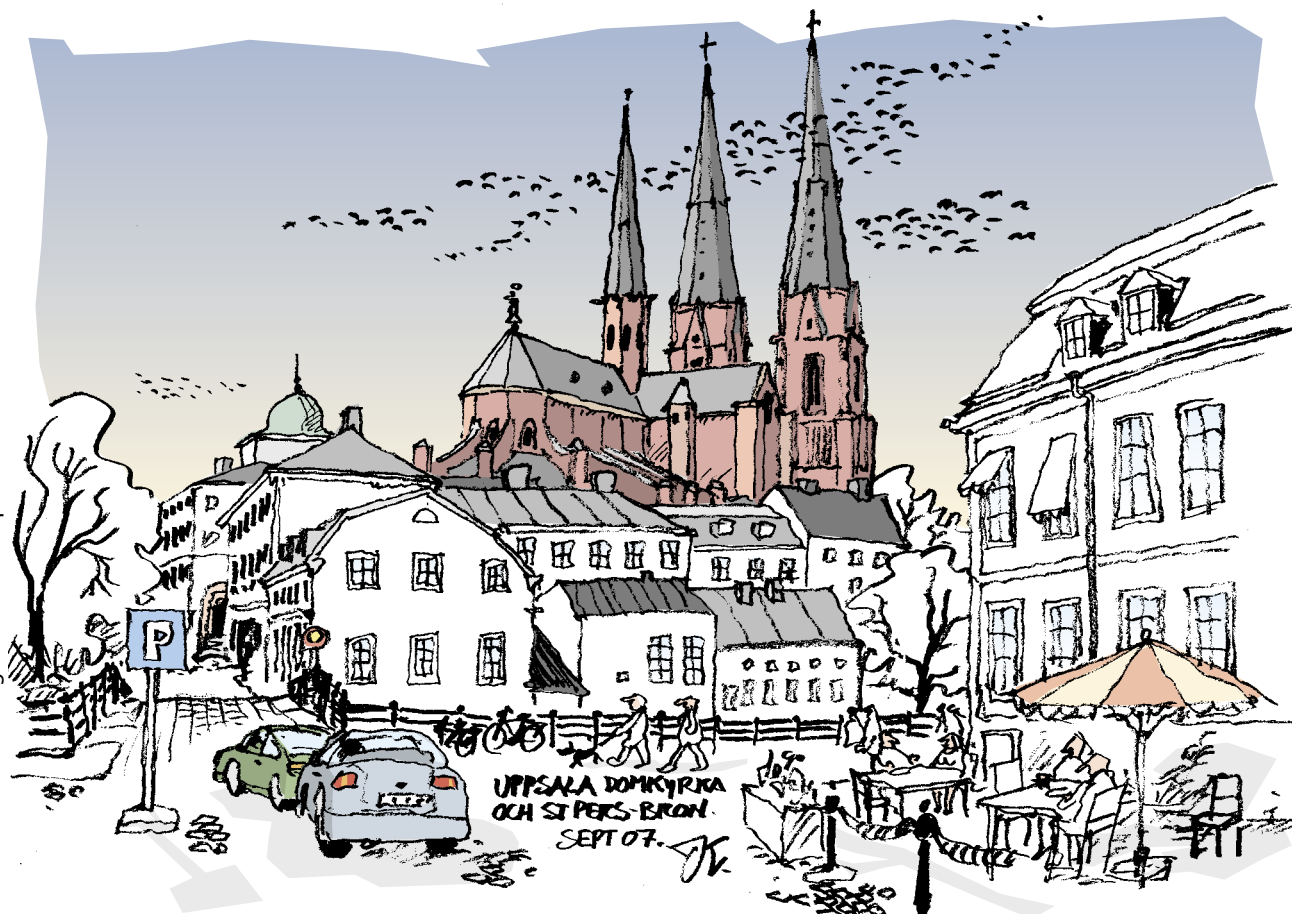
As we set off to continue to raise EUSJA's profile at the World Conference in Doha and prepare our contributions to ESOF next summer in Dublin, I can see that finally EUSJA is becoming recognised as a significant player on the science journalism stage. EUSJA News can act as the programme of events and debate on past and future productions, if you, our readers and cast continue to contribute.



Barbie Drillsma
Eusjanews editor



Cartoon Kalanders Sampler



Highlights of Europe: The cathedral of Uppsala, Sweden.

Eusja trip report

Uppsala is Best

A gang of Eusja science journalists took the opportunity to visit the oldest university in Sweden.

During the May trip to Uppsala I had an exciting opportunity, along with other European science journalists, to attend a diverse series of lectures at several educational facilities in the city.

What pleased me the most was the variety of presented topics, charismatic lecturers who enriched their general presentation on the topics they were researching with highly interesting detailed remarks and the fact that many presentations were illustrated with the real-life examples.

I have a particularly vivid memory of visit at the University Animal Hospital, where we did not only hear about animals with genes making them more vulnerable to diabetes or eczema, but could also meet such animals. Likewise, the lectures at Angstrom Laboratory were followed by a unique opportunity to see Accelerator Mass Spectrometry. Both locations were excellent for photographing.

During the last day we visited the science museum Gustavianum, where among other things, I got to know the recipe for medieval Swedish toothpaste, and Uppsala Cathedral, which hides in its floor some runic stones.

Even after tours and lectures, we still stayed immersed with Uppsala science history – we had an honour to meet “Carl Linnaeus himself”, who told us about his discoveries and the city he lived in.

Olga Walendziak
Poland



Photo Kaianders Sempler

“The first meeting on the trip is with man’s best friend. Take care of him and you’ll take care of yourself. The dog, this time, accompanies the man, to understand genetic mutations underlying their common diseases.”
Alessandra Gilardini, SWIM, Italy



How the Earthquake and Tsunami in Fukushima was reported in Europe

Slovenia

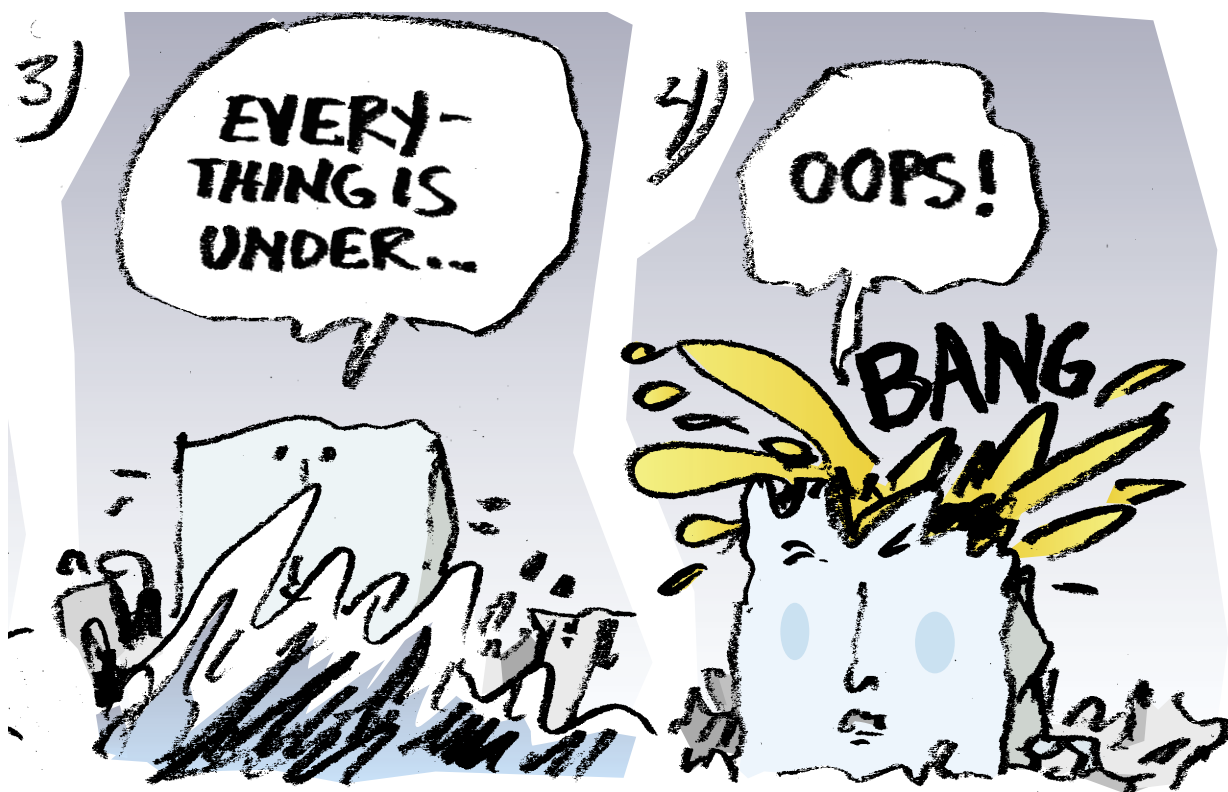
The first media coverage after the earthquake and tsunami in Japan met in Slovenia pretty similar reactions as elsewhere on the globe. Radio broadcast, TV and net media were literary overloaded with information and gadget videos of tremendous natural disaster. First reports were unreliable and incomplete, reporting about a very strong earthquake and tsunami. They followed with estimated numbers of dead and injured people /victims/ which were completely wrong and underestimated due to very weak global press agencies' reports. The key message was: the disaster is huge, but Japanese people are experienced, prepared for that kind of events, and they know how to act.

The media in Slovenia does not have any permanent correspondent in Japan. Thus the principle original sources were Slovenians living, working or studying in Japan. Reliable and regular source of fresh information was the Slovenian embassy in Tokyo as well. By the way, the Ambassador didn't want to hear anything about pooling out from Tokyo, which was at the time often the case with some other countries' embassies. She was convinced such a gesture would be a bad message for our citizens as well for the Japanese.

The Fukushima disaster proved again how the world has really become "a global village" and how "old fashioned" the printed media, even dailies had become. The situation in Japan was changing from one to another minute, so each newspaper published report was already out of date, in fact – yesterday's news.

That's why the printed media in Slovenia focused on co-events and bringing overviews and photographs from Japan emphasising its interest on national earthquake danger regarding problems. Seismic activity under national territory of Slovenia is quite "vivid" and historical record of earthquakes in the region goes to the time of middle ages. The Media also put much effort, i.e. focusing on earthquake safety standards in buildings in its coverage. The reactualisation on latter issues went parallel with quite some articles on seismic situation in Japan and the Pacific in context of tsunami phenomena and so forth.

During the first two days after the earthquake and tsunami the main point of coverage and mentioned "amateur" reporting from Japan was on the general disaster and victims, the following days step by step brought issues with the prevalence of the damaged nuclear power plant Fukushima. But as already mentioned, the information from there was quite poor. Therefore "the hunt" for nuclear experts in Slovenia began immediately by the majority of Slovenian journalists, reporters and media. Everybody



expected complete information about what was going on in Fukushima, about the possible impact on local and global environment and populations. They were asking the experts about the impact and risk to Europe and Slovenia. The topics like differences among reactor types, reactor core cooling systems and similar took place. And last but not least, the question on similarities with the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986 appeared.

As far as Chernobyl is concerned it was interesting to observe how "everybody", including journalists and media, forgot almost everything regarding nuclear and radioactive matter, the top news from 25 years ago. Very few newspapers, daily Delo among them, had the "memory" with accurate data from Chernobyl and the situation in Slovenia after that catastrophe. Therefore, objective articles comparing Chernobyl and Fukushima were very few. Even in some so called serious print media a kind of "yellow" approach appeared sporadically, with lots of speculations about the radioactive threat which could have terrible impact on global levels. One of the above mentioned printed the "breaking news" on the front page about how some Russian scientists supposedly "developed a vaccine against radioactive contamination". Which of course is nonsense! Some national electronic media broadcast interviews with an expert for organic farming who took advantage (live broadcast) and gave "serious advices about how to prepare the right combination of cow shit, egg skin and special sand to protect the vegetables not to „pool radioactive contamination from the soil“!

The present situation has been well used by antinuclear groups. . In Slovenia since 1980, the nuclear power plant Krško (NPK) built on Westinghouse technology and run by domestic experts has operated. Slovenia and neighboring Croatia share each 50% of the plant (it's kind of a legacy

from times of common life in Yugoslavia). Commencing in the second half of the eighties and culminating in the beginning of the nineties saw serious political attempts to close down the NPK, supported mostly by now the ineffective existing Green party and neighboring Austria. The latter has had no nuclear power plants and is semi officially still very concerned about NPK safety. The National public nuclear safety agency has since then made some safety analyses and together with sector experts, helped to implement safety improvements in NPK which had resulted in good operational practice of the power plant. And that's how "the Krško issue" by the end of the millennium disappeared from our national agenda. The Fukushima event has recently reinforced the opposition against NPK. The focus of these attempts is to cut planning additional expansion of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant i.e. the second reactor, the second unit inside existing plant.

Gregor Pucelj is the editor of the weekly supplement ZNANOST (Science) at the national daily DELO and a member of the Slovenia National Association of Science Journalists.

Italy

When the Japanese nuclear accident hit the news worldwide, Italian citizens were expected to vote in a few months for a referendum to repel the Government plans to restart the nuclear energy program. Such a program was stopped after a similar referendum held in 1987 had voted against nuclear plants with a majority of 80% of voters.

As a result, the coverage of the Fukushima tragedy was highly biased by such a politically charged atmosphere: «The day after the accident the daily "la Repubblica"

published an article in which everything was already taken for granted» recalls physicist Giovanni Mazzitelli from the National Institute for Nuclear Physics in Frascati. The headline of the article read: «Earthquakes, failures, human errors: nuclear safety is impossible».

«The scientific community around me (in which are represented both positions pro and against nuclear plants) is very upset by the sloppiness that characterised the coverage and the way the accident was exploited» Mazzitelli says.

Such lack of objectivity appeared to be coupled in many cases with lack of precision, as it was noticed by Italian expatriates in Japan, who reacted by creating a Facebook group (called «Japan truth – what the Italian press is hiding») to point out and correct the mistakes. Group founder Paola Teresa Ghirotti declined to comment for EUSJA news about the experience with the Facebook group, that she left after a few weeks, but that unusual experience was described in an article published on the website of the European Journalism Centre under an explicit headline («Japan earthquake shakes Italian media»): «Those who live in Japan just report what they see and hear while a correspondent reconstructs the facts and often applies Italian filters» Francesco Formiconi, president of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, was quoted as saying. «The journalists overlooked their duty to consider the importance of a truthful information for the [Italian expats] who decided to stay in Japan».

For instance, the media reported dramatically about the Italian orchestra «Maggio fiorentino» that was said to be «trapped in Tokyo» in a «nightmare»: «The emergency is now bigger and bigger» wrote «Il corriere della sera» on March 15th. «They are among the very few Italians who are still in Tokyo, and the fear is about nuclear and radiation».

The use of such emotionally charged language was also typical of most articles that pretended to discuss the science behind the news: «I think that in such cases one should first stick to the facts. Then, when the time for a balance comes, one can discuss about the nuclear issue, the frailty of our technological society and the massacre caused today by natural disasters, in such a crowded world» wrote in his blog Marco Cattaneo, editor in chief of the monthly «Le Scienze», Italian edition of «Scientific American». «When things happen one should listen to the facts, the naked reporting of facts. Then comes the time for the analysis. On the contrary, with every passing day I realize that in Italy, with the information we have, we'll never know the facts. Because we are capable of distorting them in real-time».

After the Fukushima accident, Prime Minister and media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi announced formally that the Government would not restart the nuclear program. But just a few days later, while meeting French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, he openly confessed it was just a trick not to hold the referendum, and that the agreements with the French power company Electricité de France would just be delayed a couple of years.

Fabio Turone, Italy



Interesting links:

About coverage in the Italian press: http://www.ejc.net/magazine/article/japan_earthquake_shakes_italian_media/

General about earthquake coverage: "http://www.journalism.org/numbers_report/japan_coverage_it%E2%80%99s_all_nuclear" http://www.journalism.org/numbers_report/japan_coverage_it%E2%80%99s_all_nuclear

United Kingdom

Many British science journalists, like their counterparts across the world, were severely tested following the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan on 11 March.

Not only did they have to explain every scientific aspect of the natural disaster which killed about 25,000 people, but they were soon faced with the task of providing a running expert commentary on the crisis unfolding at the crippled Fukushima Dai-ichi (No 1) nuclear power station.

However, one of the biggest challenges faced by some was tempering the desire of their colleagues to elevate the crisis into a catastrophe, with many newspapers and broadcasters competing to paint the most apocalyptic picture of the potential consequences.

While there was obvious confusion surrounding the exact situation at the power plant during the first few days after the tsunami, some newsrooms sidelined their science specialists in favour of uninformed speculation by general reporters on the ground in Japan, interspersed with and appeals for help from frightened survivors of the tsunami prophecies of doom from anti-nuclear campaigners.

One science journalist told me a few days after the crisis began at the power plant: "I've been taken off this story after saying the risk of disaster was fading rapidly".

The news editor no doubt expected reports that Fukushima could become 'another Chernobyl', an underlying message across much of the UK media coverage. The trouble was that there was actually little comparison between the two events.

The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 resulted from an explosion and fire that burned for ten days, creating a large plume of radioactive material that rose some 30,000 feet into the air. The Fukushima plant was a different design, and while the hydrogen explosions made spectacular television footage, the amount of radiation released so far is ten times less than spewed from Chernobyl.

There is also a widespread assumption, including in newsrooms that Chernobyl resulted in a large number of deaths. The United Nations has noted that 28 staff and emergency workers were killed by exposure to high levels of radiation, and about 6,000 children and teenagers have developed thyroid cancer, of whom 15 had died by 2005 (although this number would have been much lower if the authorities had provided iodine tablets to the exposed population as the Japanese have done around Fukushima).

Meanwhile, there have been just three deaths confirmed at the Fukushima power plant to date, all caused by the earthquake and tsunami rather than radiation.

Nevertheless, many newspapers and news bulletins chose to ignore the advice of their specialist correspondents and instead ran headlines that suggested a severe and widespread threat to human life, with one 'red top' tabloid even warning of a radioactive cloud floating towards the UK.

Another correspondent told me: "This really is an extraordinary story of everyone getting the wrong end of the stick, quite deliberately I fear".

One other consequence of newsrooms' expectations of impending nuclear Armageddon was that some interviewees who offered sober assessments of the risks were treated as if they were 'apologists for the nuclear industry' even when there was no evidence of them having any vested interests.

There was much to admire in the way that the UK media covered the scientific aspects of the tragic events following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. But there are also worrying signs from the coverage of the Fukushima crisis that some newsrooms treat the expert insights of their science specialists as inconvenient truths that can simply be ignored for the sake of a scare story.

Bob Ward is policy and communications director of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at London School of Economics

Russia

My first impulse after the earthquake and the tsunami, which has brought such a great disaster to Japan and destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant, was to contact my Japanese friends. I sent e-mails and tried to call them to be sure they and their families were alive. Sure I was not alone who was worried and tried to contact people in Japan - there were even enough volunteers who were ready to leave for Japan to offer their help. Our association "Intellect" has sent a Letter of Support to the Japanese people, which was published on the WFSJ web page. Later several journalists created a site "Ideas for Japan" exchanging news, photos and proposals on how to help the country which was facing such difficulties after a tragedy.

We in Russia knew well what kind of tragedy it was. Nobody forgot what had happened in Chernobyl exactly 25 years ago, one could still hear the echo of that terrible event. And it was natural that journalists began to compare these two nuclear breakdowns in Chernobyl and Fukushima. And there was also another extra topic for us: we watched the accessibility of the information in Japan and we remembered that the proved information about Chernobyl was closed for Soviet people for long time. By the way, it was one of the reasons which brought the Soviet Union to its crush. Do we have the true information now, do we write today the truth about the catastrophes? However, these questions are not only for my colleagues in Russia, but for each journalist.

I believe it is impossible to hide any information in the internet era. We speak loudly about everything. But do we really analyze the information? I thought over it having read the articles about Chernobyl and Fukushima published in the Russian media. I noticed two different trends. I understood my observation was true having taken a part in science café which was devoted to Chernobyl and the Fukushima events. The Science cafes are run by two well known science journalists, members of "Intellect" Lubov Strelnikova and Sergey Katasonov, they always try to invite the famous scientists and very good experts. The same was this time: there were the experts from the different fields of science, and the discussion showed two opposite views.. The very same one can find in our media today.

A first look: the nuclear energy is very dangerous for nature and humanity; there is no need to continue the development of nuclear industry; no sense to follow that way, there is a need to concentrate on the traditional and new sources of energy. A second view: the nuclear energy is important and the only possible source that mankind will have in the future. The breakdowns in Chernobyl and Fukushima happened because of mistakes. And it was only the speculations of politicians and the media to describe the thousands of victims after Chernobyl. A scientist from the Institute for the safe development of nuclear energy told us about the statistics: not so much deaths and illness that the media has described followed the Chernobyl catastrophes. She said: the danger of nuclear plants is mostly a problem of human's psychology and stress.

These two opposite views dominate the media. Does it mean that there are no scientists and no journalists with different position? Sure they are! But the different position is not "in a fashion". Because it is today's trend. It reminds me of the end of 1980's when scientists who worked for the nuclear energy were guilty in the public mind. I remember that I received a lot of angry letters from readers after my article about the scientist who noticed that the Chernobyl tragedy has happened because of the mistakes of the staff and not the scientists. I was questioned: "How can you justify these horrible persons?" By that time a lot of journalists left their field and became politicians..They have made rather good political careers blaming the science. It was a trend!

I am far away to consider my country is the only one with very thie intricate perception of nuclear energy. I watched the same in different states. It is clear for example that "the trend" caused the initiation of the greens one day. But leave every trend to politicians, let them earn their crust with it. Is this also possible for science journalists?



Viola Egikova
Russia

Report

A GOOD LOOK AT THE BIOVISION CONFERENCE



I didn't know much about Lyon, apart that it's a fairly big city in France, before travelling there for this year's Biovision – The World Life Sciences Forum. I didn't know much about Biovision either and when the call came through from EUSJA for a trip to attend the conference I was sceptical at first. It sounded like one of those new-age conferences where they discuss woolly ideas and imagined futures. But a quick look at the programme and the list of attendees assured me this would be a scientifically

sound conference with many important people in the world of life sciences.

In fact I noticed one of the 'science stars' of Croatian media, Miroslav Radman, a geneticist based in Paris, who gets called regularly to comment on the state of Croatian science. Some of his work and ideas on 'elixir of youth' may sound strange, but is contributing to our understanding of ageing and cell death processes. And, to my knowledge, he has one of the best ideas for how to conduct voluntary euthanasia. "If one day we achieve near immortality" he said on Croatian TV "and if we could identify and quantify the molecules that cause orgasm, we could use them to induce orgasm of death ... to render death desirable and joyous". The session on ageing was the first session I attended at the conference, which was helpfully located just two minutes away from the hotel we were booked into, Temporim – and the one I got a story out of: 'Can we cure ageing? Experts respond': [HYPERLINK "http://www.cosmosmagazine.com/news/4172/can-we-cure-ageing"](http://www.cosmosmagazine.com/news/4172/can-we-cure-ageing) <http://www.cosmosmagazine.com/news/4172/can-we-cure-ageing>.

Temporim wasn't a hotel as such, but a sort of flat/hotel place situated next to a lovely central park in Lyon, alongside a major new development that featured restaurants, cafes and a modern art museum. It was real pleasure eating breakfast at Temporim, watching springtime trees in the park, and occasional electric trolley-bus passing by. The kitchenette equipment also meant we didn't have to splash out on Lyon's famous cuisine for every meal.

The conference had several streams, and it wasn't always easy to choose which one to go to. The sessions on access to new drugs posed more questions than they provided answers. But overall it was a stimulating event, well organised and, from what I heard, quite fun for some journalists. While writing up one of the news articles, I missed out on dinner where one of the EUSJA members apparently got so drunk he got thrown out of the conference early.(He was reprimanded and we apologised to the organisers – ed) At breakfast, I spotted another member, who perhaps had a late night, walking up to a mysterious open-top egg cooker with boiling water and adjustable heat dial – the first I've ever seen – pick up an egg, but instead of boiling it he took it to his plate and had quite a surprise when he cracked it! The only downside to yet another excellent EUSJA study trip was there wasn't really an event organised just for us journalists to meet up and socialise but overall well worth attending.

Mico Tatalovic (UK)

German Nuclear Angst – a defeating or winning force?

Lots of people in Europe and elsewhere are under the impression that we have gone crazy. Almost 10.000 kilometers away in Japan a nuclear power plant explodes. While the Japanese pretend that not much has happened and China even enforces its ambitious nuclear program and adds 27 to the 13 already existing, Germany has decided on a moratorium.

Bad timing for the national coalition of conservatives and liberals, the loudspeaker for big money and business: Right after the meltdown at the Pacific coast, the German southwest was asked to the polls for a state election. The results rocked the government, which lost a huge chunk of its power to the Green Party. After all, democracy in Germany seems to work. As an immediate response Berlin decided on a swift reverse. The oldest plants are shut off already. Meanwhile an increasing number of political, religious and economic leaders have raised their voices in favor of phasing out nuclear power plants altogether and concentrating on renewable energy sources instead. In fact, most of the media is unanimously supporting this view.

A collective harakiri, a voluntary return to the stone age – or the contrary: A wise decision, which once and forever denounces the hazards of nuclear fission no matter whether it powers bombs or via the electricity net household devices? The bosses of the big utility companies run amok against such reasoning claiming that the world needs nuclear power, if it is to stop further climate change. Interestingly, these guys never took much of a stance on this issue before. But they are right, nuclear power could fuel the economic growth of the nations with the depletion of oil supplies coming into to sight.

However, how much more growth will our earth tolerate? And can we really afford a technology, which does not provide the means of storage for its waste? What is worse, the greenhouse effect or lethal radiation creeping out of badly maintained reactors and makeshift storage facilities? So, who got it wrong – the proponents of nuclear power or the opponents.

German environmentalists receive plenty of support these days by an Australian journalist specialized in energy. Bob Johnstone has just published his new book „Switching to Solar“, in which he attributes the Germans the key role of alerting the world to the inexhaustible „solar plant“ in the sky. Imagine, „970 trillion kilowatt-hours of energy falls from the sky every day“, the author states, sufficient to satisfy all energy needs and still continue to grow.

In his book Johnstone explores how Germany made the solar industry boom and how it became its worldwide leader. „The switch to solar came with grassroots activists reacting to crisis“, he explains, above all acid rain and nuclear accidents, especially after 1986, when the Soviet

nuclear power plant Chernobyl got out of control and contaminated large parts of Germany. If cloudy Germany could pull off the solar revolution, „so can we“, concludes Johnstone.

There is another reason why this country is so keen on a sustainable future and wants to pave the way. It's the past. Compared to France, UK or the USA with strong democratic traditions and beliefs, democracy came around only in 1949, in the communist part in 1990. Too long a time, German citizens depended on what their authorities wanted them to think and to do. However, the emperor led them into WWI, and the nazis into WWII which left 60 million people around the world dead, most of them in Europe. That along with all the cruelties Germans suffered and the burden of the holocaust has created a national trauma: „German Angst“ how the Anglosaxons have baptized this psychological condition of anxiety and insecurity.

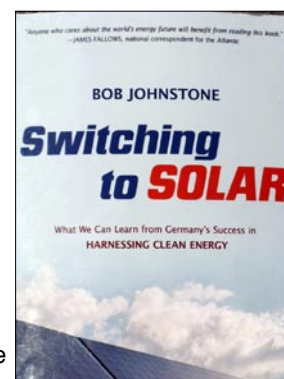
On top of this, Germany became the deployment zone in the cold war and was torn apart between West and East. Two powers ready to blow up the world with the borderline running through Germany. Western Germany had to follow the rules of the US, adopt the dogma of growth and consumption as the essence of freedom and democracy whereas East Germany pursued the communist vision of a paradise on earth, violently enforced by Stalin who was as evil as Hitler, as the research of the past years has shown.

For 21 years now, Germany has been a sovereign state trying to find its thorny way through the political and economic jungles of this world. Enlightenment always helps, so more and more institutions and citizens have been very anxious to look into their Nazi history in order to ease the burden. Helga Matthess, member of the Traumatology Institute Europe, certifies that Germans have learned their history lesson while other countries like Japan or Russia still would not touch their national traumas. And her colleague therapist, Gabriele Heyers, acknowledges that „German Angst“ is a very positive force which creates the courage to perceive risks differently and also to respond in nonconventional ways.

Or in George Bernard Shaw's words: „The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.“ Bob Johnstone finishes the quote with: They are the ones, who are changing the world and how we create our energy. They are creating tens of thousands new jobs, helping to protect our planet from climate change. „There is much we can learn from them.“

Wolfgang Goede, Teli

Recommended Literature: Bob Johnstone: Switching to Solar. What We Can Learn from Germany's Success in Harnessing Clean Energy. Prometheus Book, Amherst NY 2011 ISBN 978-1-61614-223-3



Inspired by the food in Doha? Try these easy recipes says Cherry Dobbins



Baba gannoush

Meze – the Star of Middle Eastern Cuisine

Meze is a very loose term for a spread of numerous small dishes. In Greece, on the borders of the Middle East, you might order a meze to go with your ouzo aperitif. A few small dishes will be served containing, olives, slices of cucumber, cubes of cheese and small pieces of bread. Order a meze in countries further south and east, such as Lebanon, the Gulf States, Cyprus and North Africa, and you will be served a meal comprising of between twenty and forty small dishes.

The first dishes are usually salads and dips served with flat bread, followed by dishes of hot and cold vegetables and cheeses, then fish and finally a variety of meat dishes. A platter of fruit may be served but a cup of coffee and a shared pipe will always conclude a meal.

Perhaps due to the nomadic nature of the Arabic peoples, most hot dishes were cooked over hot coals. Ovens were too cumbersome to transport. When village life became the norm there would be a communal oven, usually at the bakery, that housewives would use if needed.

Hospitality is keynote to Arabic culture. Any stranger appearing at the door must be invited in and entertained with food and drink. As such many small dishes that could be swiftly prepared on the premises became the norm.

Baba Ghannoush

Aubergine dip

Ideally the aubergines are cooked over a barbeque or holding them against a gas flame, turning frequently, until the skins are black and the flesh soft. This gives a splendid smoky flavour. The simple alternative of grilling loses some of the flavour but still makes an excellent dip.

2 large aubergines
3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
1 tsp. salt
4 tbsp. tahini (sesame paste)
4 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. olive oil to garnish
1 black olive to garnish
Bread or vegetable sticks to serve.

Cook the aubergines as described above, turning frequently until the skins are evenly blackened and the flesh soft.

Peel off the skins and remove any charred flesh before chopping and placing in a food processor.

Add the salt, lemon juice and tahini. Mix well and taste so as to adjust the proportions of salt, lemon juice and tahini to personal taste.

Serve in a shallow bowl with the oil drizzled in a circle and the olive in the centre.

Al Kabba Bilborghol

Stuffed potato and cracked wheat balls

6 potatoes, cooked and mashed
1 1/2 cups cracked wheat
Salt and pepper
For the filling:
2 onions, finely chopped
A little oil to fry
1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed
1/4 tsp. allspice
5 tbsp. pine nuts
4 tbsp. raisins
3 tbsp. tahini paste (sesame paste)
To complete:
plain flour
oil for deep frying

Place the cracked wheat in a bowl and just cover with boiling water. Leave to stand for 15 minutes.

Mix together the mashed potato and the cracked wheat and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Fry the onions to a golden brown and then add the remaining ingredients for the filling and mix well.

With wet hands shape a tablespoonful of the potato paste into a ball and then flatten to a disc. Place a good teaspoonful of the filling in the centre and mould the paste around the filling, shaping into an oval.

Roll each ball in the flour and chill for thirty minutes before deep frying to a golden brown.

Serve hot or cold.

Cherry Dobbins

BAD SCIENCE REPORTING

The late news shows a reporter in front of two freight wagons containing ethanol with flames bursting from them. I quote: 'Ethanol seems to be a kind of alcohol that is used in the chemical industry. It is quite poisonous...'. At that point I almost choked on my whiskey, containing 30 something per cent of that poisonous substance. It is indeed quite a dangerous substance, especially when you are coughing and laughing at the same time.

As a science writer you often come across this kind of blatant ignorance among colleagues who have dropped their science subjects in secondary at the first available opportunity. A few weeks before this news item, there was a big fire in a warehouse containing all kinds of different chemicals. The government decided to take samples of air, water and soil to look for traces of nasty stuff like dioxins.

The laboratory did not find elevated levels of dioxins in a very large area downwind of the fire. Except for one spot; a soil sample containing ten times the background concentration. Still not very much, but as soon as it became known, reporters were pointing out the poisonous and carcinogenic effects of dioxins. Without as much as mentioning the concept of dose (never heard of good old Paracelsus probably) and that of exposure. In the end it turned out to be what had crossed every chemist mind, an anomaly, probably caused in the lab.

As science writers we can laugh about these errors. Or slap the Dutch national press agency on the wrist when publishing an item on a Colombian researcher who had developed a vaccine against 500 infectious diseases; without any fact checking. I am afraid, however, that the situation is a bit more serious. Scientific and technical illiteracy is not only rife among reporters who don't have a clue about the nature of ethanol, but also among the general public. For one thing that leads to unnecessary panic.

A recent example is the worldwide panic about the possible effects of low dose radiation in Japan. In China it led for instance to massive sales of table salt containing iodine. A reporter from Dutch television did not dare to go out on the street to interview people – not even to buy food as a matter of fact – because she was panic-stricken by the possibility of exposure to radiation. She did not have a clue about dose-effect relations; she was just very afraid and showed it.

The bad thing about this kind of panic-TV is that it makes matters worse for the victims. One of the lessons of nuclear accident in Chernobyl is, that it has been mainly a psychological disaster for the people that were exposed to elevated radiation levels. About a hundred people lost

their life due to very high levels of exposure. There was, and is, a measurable increase in the amount thyroid cancer (5000 cases to date), that could have been prevented by distributing iodine tablets by the way. A few thousand people have a slightly increased risk of developing other cancers.

The main effect of the disaster (and it was a disaster, no discussion about that) was that tens of thousands of people were stigmatized as Chernobyl victims. This meant they could not get work anymore; could not find a partner and were in many ways socially excluded. As a consequence many thousands of them became 'victims', people that lost direction in their own life. Consequently many thousands became alcoholics and at least a few hundred of them committed suicide.

In my view this is not so funny anymore. I think that when you are reporting on a science- or technology-related subject you should at least know a little bit of what you are talking about. I mean, who in his right mind would send a reporter to a parliamentary debate who does not have a clue who the prime minister is or what the respective roles of Cabinet and Parliament are. He or she doesn't have to have a science degree but a little bit of knowledge – just to know when to keep your mouth shut – would be helpful.

Joost van Kasteren (Chairman of Vereniging van Wetenschapsjournalisten in Nederland)

The World Federation has a new board

After much suspense and two ties, the WFSJ has a new board. The board, which will be ratified at the World Conference of Science Journalists 2011 in Doha this coming June, will be formed of new incoming board members Kathryn O'Hara (Canada), Lucy Calderon (Guatemala), Pallava Bagla (India), and continuing board members Christophe Mvondo (Cameroon), Nadia El-Awady (Egypt), and Natasha Mitchell (Australia). The WFSJ president will be elected once bidding for the World Conference of Science Journalists 2013 is done. According to the WFSJ constitution, the WFSJ president must come from the country in which the next World Conference is held. Bidding for the WCSJ2013 will be held in Doha next June.

During the first round of voting, Kathryn O'Hara and Lucy Calderon won the highest votes from among WFSJ member association voting delegates. Pallava Bagla and Istvan Pallugyai (Hungary) tied for third place.

The WFSJ president, Nadia El-Awady, waived her right to break the tie and instead called for a second round of voting among WFSJ member association voting delegates.

Again, Bagla and Pallugyai tied with 14 votes each.

El-Awady again waived her right to break the tie. Instead, WFSJ board members voted in a secret ballot – sent to the WFSJ secretariat in Canada. Pallava Bagla won with a narrow margin.

"We are very pleased to have held open and fair democratic elections in an inclusive process that involved electronic voting," El-Awady remarked. "WFSJ elections were previously held at the World Conference of Science Journalists, which not every member association was always able to attend."

The electoral process was heralded by returning officer and WFSJ past president, Pallab Ghosh, and an international nominations committee. Ten candidates were chosen to run for elections.

"We were delighted by the high level of participation of WFSJ member associations in the elections," commented Ghosh. "And a tie twice over between Pallava Bagla and Istvan Pallugyai goes to show the very strong level of support they both have among our constituency."

Eusja Ga 2011

At the Eusja general assembly in Budapest in March only one member of the board was changed. But a lion – the treasurer.

Elmar Veerman from the Netherlands has now taken over the Eusja finances from Vesa Niinikangas.



Elmar Veerman, new Eusja treasurer.

The other Eusja board members are Hajo Neubert, Germany, president; Barbara Drillsma, UK, vice president and Viola Egikova, Russia, honorary secretary.

Also, Mogens Bisgaard of Denmark has taken over as keeper of the Eusja website and has made it sparkling new. Go to www.eusja.org and admire.



Mogens Bisgaard, slow Danish cook and master of the Eusja website.

As auditors were elected Menelaos Sotiriou of Greece and former treasurer Kaianders Sempler, Sweden.

FINNS GET WCSJ 2013?

The Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists, FASEJ, will probably get the 2013 World Conference of Science Journalists.

So far there are no other candidates. Unless something unexpected happens, the 2013 conference will take place in Helsinki.

But the Finns will be active already at the 2011 conference in Doha. FASEJ will have a plenary session about how journalists frame their stories. Its title is "One gas pipeline – seven versions of reality" and it is about how different countries have reported on the Nordstream project, the gas pipeline from Viborg in western Russia to Greifswald in eastern Germany on the bottom of the Baltic sea.

– It's a joint effort with our EUSJA colleagues, says Vesa Niinikangas. Moderator is Barbara Drillsma-Milgrom (UK). Speakers are science journalists Marzenna Nowakowska (Poland), Helena Raunio (Finland), Kaianders Sempler (Sweden) and professor Janne Hukkinen (Finland).



Vesa Niinikangas, next WFSJ president?



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The **leprello**, the Eusja information leaflet, folds twice.
It can be ordered from Eusja secretariat.



Eusja 2011

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