

The Euro and Euro Physics

The European Union is expanding Eastwards. In the next few years doors are to be opened allowing aid, free trade rules and obligations on employment, environment and agriculture, among other things, to blow through countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The expansion was launched at the meeting of European heads of governments in Luxembourg last December. At the end of this month (March) negotiations will begin with the first six candidates for expansion (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia; at a later date negotiations will be entered into with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia).

The idea of Eastwards expansion was unthinkable shortly after the EU was founded, evolving, as it did, in the midst of the Cold War. Now would be a good time to reflect on one of the many defiant Cold War editorials by Ernst Brüche, editor of *Physikalische Blätter* for many years. In May 1948, during a time of deepening East-West division, he wrote: "We will continue all effort to procure authentic information from the East. If we can not get it, we will be faced with two alternatives: either to produce our reports, as critically as the scarce documents allow, or to close our ears to the oft-repeated cry from the Eastern Zone, 'Do not forget us.' But we would not choose the latter, even if the wall between us were to grow higher still."

That 'do not forget us' is reminiscent of Winston Churchill's 1940 declaration that Britain would not forget France during its Nazi occupation, which eloquently portrayed the British and French peoples as brothers in arms. Brüche's editorial was a recognition of comradeship and of the common ground that exists between physicists. It presents science as a common endeavour, one that can continue no matter what political obstacles confront it.

Brüche continued to speak out against the limitations of conducting science across a political border for the next 24 years – trying to declare that science can not be defeated by political division (or perhaps Communism).

With the fall of Communist regimes and the reunification of Germany, barriers no longer exist in quite the way they did. Slight barriers still exist, in the need to apply for visas, for instance. Hopefully EU expansion will diminish these further (but note: these barriers remain for physicists travelling to Europe from some other parts of the world).

In tandem with expansion, the EU is also heading towards a single currency. This may happen quickly, taking us by surprise. As early as the beginning of May we will know conversion rates for currencies participating in the European Monetary Union (exchange rates with other currencies will be announced later). Conference fees for next year may soon be given in euros, and perhaps not just for conferences in EMU countries. Assuming monetary union works, a conference organizer in a non-participating country might want to set a fee in euros to preserve its value, or indeed simply make the fees easier for participants by using the euro as a standard.

Come the 5th Framework, grants will be given in euros. Though the European Commission's practice of only paying to banks located within the EU will remain. This means an EPS conference in Israel, for instance, can not receive an EU grant directly, but must use a 'go-between' bank. This is a simple administrative matter for the EPS Secretariat, which has been located now in an EMU country (France) for longer than a year, and has opened a bank account in euros in readiness.

When talking of the single currency it should be noted that the EMU would not be possible, were it not for Germany. This is neither a 'pro-German' nor an 'anti-German' statement; it is simply a recognition of the dynamic reality of modern Europe.

And today, when we can look to a future Europe where research networks (funded in euros by the EC) will expand into the new countries of the EU, it's as if Brüche's cry, shot out in a divided Germany, has been heard. Of course, the drive towards European unity is a way of avoiding future conflict rather than of facilitating the mobility of researchers. But it's not trivial to point out that, with the exception of Cyprus, all countries lined up for entry into the EU have physical societies that are members of EPS. Neither is it silly to feel that daily tasks in the physics lab or lecture hall must transcend borders.

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