

Latin America has its place

In the January/February 1998 *Europhysics News* [EPS Directory] I see dozens and dozens of names which compose all types of relevant committees of the EPS, but none from Latin America (or other non-European countries). In fact, during the many years I have belonged to the Society, I can not remember ever having seen in a single one of these committees any name from, say, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico etc.

I believe that others will share my opinion that this is not fair. The EPS accepts as members many people from these countries, why not seeing once in a while one of these names in a committee. We all agree minorities have rights also.

The EPS is an equal opportunity society. What about a little affirmative action? Like, for example, reserving a small percentage of seats on committees for these countries. The names could be (probably should be) voted by all members of the EPS. Or any other mechanism that would avoid this systematic injustice.

Constantino Tsallis

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Germany in its rightful place

In the editorial of *Europhysics News*, March/April 1998, I was slightly shocked to read: "When talking of the single currency it should be noted that the EMU would not be possible, were it not for Germany."

Such words I would expect from Theo Waigel, the German finance minister, and years ago I read in a Portuguese newspaper about his arrogance in treating Italy *et al* with the nice word: Theocracy. But I am for a secular united Europe, not for Theocracy. And one should obey the Maastricht treaty if one has signed it, independent of the size of the economy. No currency has by the Grace of God (or of the EPS) extra rights. Yesterday's newspaper [17 March] of Cologne reported that only four countries fulfil all three Maastricht criteria: Great Britain (not interested), France, Finland, Luxembourg. Why not let the latter three form the EMU, and then allow the narrow failures, including Germany, to apply successfully for clemency a few hours or days later, so that all, the first-class and the second-class participants, can still start together next year?

What arguments like this editorial and many German statements of the last years may produce is another *Dolchstoßlegende*, that the strong German Mark had

to be sacrificed on the altar of European unity. The numbers now tell us that the truth is different.

Dietrich Stauffer

Köln, Germany

Opposing views

I am a member of the Swedish Physical Society and thus automatically receive *Europhysics News*, and have just read the September/December 1997 issue (I'm afraid I'm a little behind). I would like to make a few comments about two of the articles in this issue—I believe them to be connected. The two I am thinking of are your own editorial and Claude Sébénne's request for More Awards in Europe [Opinion]. As I have interpreted them, the two articles take rather opposing viewpoints. Your editorial says that we should be encouraging young physicists whilst Claude says that we should be giving even more recognition to older physicists. While not wishing to begrudge outstanding physicists recognition and status, I would suggest that at the moment it is more important to encourage younger physicists than older ones. Claude's suggestion would not actually increase the number of physicists getting awards, as he says that nominees for the Europhysics awards would be chosen from those who had already won local awards. Perhaps a better way (and one cheaper for the Society) would be to publish articles about the work done by the local prizewinners in a special "prizewinner" issue of *Europhysics News* (or in the normal issues). This would publicize the "significant breakthroughs" which he mentions, with emphasis perhaps more on the

"The matter raises very serious issues. However innocent our motives, we may all be infringing copyright legislation pretty regularly in our publications. How do we know where to draw the line, or rather where drawing the line is illegal?"

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work than on the physicist. Personally, I think that it would be more effective for European physics if there were awards (or grants) to young physicists to enable them to attend conferences which they would otherwise not be able to do. Perhaps we could steal an idea from Claude here and ask the National Societies to propose candidates from each country.

You mentioned in your editorial that the reason for, at least, undergraduates not attending conferences is that they are not appealing to really young physicists. Thinking back to my days as an undergraduate (25 years ago) I have a few other suggestions.

- Undergraduates need to know about the conferences. We were seldom able to find out that a conference was to take place until it was over. Most undergraduates did not have the contact network necessary to find out about them, and their tutors and lecturers did not encourage them. This may have changed now, especially with the help of Internet.

- Undergraduates do not know that they can attend. If a conference is advertised as for Researchers then at least the more uncertain students will be put off by this.

- Cost. I understand that many conferences have associated costs which undergraduates have little chance of being able to pay.

So, more publicity to students, and reduced or even abolished charges for them. First we must get undergraduates attending conferences before it will be worth making the events more attractive to them. I think that just attending a conference and being at 'the front-line of research' will be a great encouragement to most students.

David Griffin

Jarfalla, Sweden

The author of More Awards in Europe Please [Opinion, page 167 September/December 1997] claims that the present number of awards is very far from enough and tentatively suggests to establish a new institution within the European Physical Society, 'a prize and award' committee. The formal structure of this body is discussed in much detail, but the more important question regarding the criteria of how to select the awardees remains vague. The only clear statement is that the circle of candidates is confined to recent winners of national awards, prizes or medals, and the right to nominate the candidates is allotted to national society members of the EPS.

I am pleased that Claude Sébenne has initiative, and that he is willing to invite responses to his ideas. But the main idea of his proposal, in my opinion, is too restrictive. It would inevitably shift the central role in evaluation of physical achievements from European bodies to National Society Members of the EPS, thus washing away the criterion of European recognition. The proposed procedure of nomination of candidates as formulated in the article seems also to be discriminative with respect to the authors from those national physical societies which are not members of the EPS. Scientists should have the right to be nominated for the European prizes and awarded by their merits independently of the fact of whether or not they keep relations with any National Society Member of the EPS.

I am strongly convinced that European physical awards must remain strictly independent of the policy of different national societies. The European Physical Society should further sustain an unified evaluation of scientific progress, at an international level.

Jozef T. Devreese
Antwerpen, Belgium

Sébenne replies...

Many thanks for paying attention to my request for more EPS awards.

As you noticed, I mostly focussed on practical and inexpensive ways to reach trustworthy choices at the European scale. The fact is that after more than 27 years of existence the EPS has been unable to find a solution of its own: I am convinced that a large majority of EPS members favours the idea but proper procedures have to be decided and put into effect.

It is true that I have omitted to give criteria. This is simply because it all depends on the profiles which are looked for. Profile proposals have to be made at the EPS highest levels and approved by the Council. Then the ad-hoc EPS body would manage the system. Here are some ideas of profiles among many others: the PhD thesis of the year (the 25 to 29 years old range; there could be several laureates); the emerging young professional physicist (the 30 to 40 years old range); the theoretical physics prize; the book of the year.

The discussion is open: let us see if something happens.

Claude Sébenne
Paris, France

"Szilárd's humorous view of cosmology turned grimmer one afternoon at Rockefeller University in the 1950s, during a discussion with information theorist Norbert Wiener about the origins of life. To the question, 'given many planets like Earth, would man emerge on one of them?' Szilárd answered: 'No!' Why not? Because, Szilárd said, 'God wouldn't make the same mistake twice!'"

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Waste not, want not

Allow me to pose (or propose) a few problems to the wider scientific community, they are both related to economizing resources.

• References

Different scientific journals use different rules for bibliographic citations. On the other hand, an author may often use materials relating to one of his/her papers for the next one on a related subject. Text editors, or more powerful packages such as (La)TeX can ease and simplify this task, and the whole writing process in general; unfortunately, upon switching from one journal to another, references may have to be retyped, whether by authors, secretaries or perhaps printers. It would be highly desirable to find a general agreement about the format of references in scientific journals, or at least to reduce their number, and to produce computer programs for carrying out the conversion automatically. Ideally, it would be up to authors to write them in some consistent way, and (thinking of LaTeX) the format conversion should be controlled by some option in the document definition.

As far as I am concerned the chore of retyping references is a good reason for not even trying to publish in certain journals.

• Conferences

The sheer cost of attending (travel, registration and accommodation) ranges from about US\$ 1000 (or Ecu, or even more); on the other hand, the purchase of abstracts and proceedings may just require US\$ 100 to 200 (or Ecu). In a few cases, I have contacted the organizing committee and negotiated purchase of abstracts and later proceedings (and sometimes even submission of a poster) without physically attending; this seemed to be a special concession, but I think it should become a regular procedure, explicitly mentioned in the circulars announcing the conference. I think this is even more needed for workshops and schools.

(In some cases, it also turned out that only a few percents of all the communications were of some direct or indirect interest to me). It would also be desirable to reduce the frequency of scientific conferences (say halve it).

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