

/THE LAST WORD

On Deck: The European Union

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John Hodgson is articles editor of Bio/Technology, but that does not stop him from listening to old Wink Martindale and Max Bygraves records.

In October 1993, the European Community ceased to be. Each of its twelve member states, having ratified the Maastricht Treaty, signed up for the next step in the unification of Europe: the official creation of the European Union. This move might be construed largely as an attempt to head off those outside Europe (and within) who were beginning to assume that they were finally understanding the intricacies of European Community institutions, legislation, and politics.

What is the European Union? How is it different from the European Community? And how, if at all, does it relate to other European organizations, or to a wider Europe that encompasses, for instance, the Eastern, formerly communist states? Or to biotechnology, for that matter? What is needed to answer these questions is something that is accessible and significantly more memorable; an aide-memoire that is both accurate and handy; a system that is both encyclopedic and compact. I have come up with the Eurobiotechnology "Deck of Cards." The concept owes much to the work of Wink Martindale and Max Bygraves who, as older readers may recall, popularized the use of a deck of cards as a calendar, bible, and gazetteer. For me, as for them, each card in the pack holds its own special meaning.

The *Ace* reminds me of the single market in Europe, the objective of the European Union. It also reminds me of the greatest of international trade agreements, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade designed to end protectionism and harmonize intellectual property law throughout the world.

The *deuce* (two) reminds me of 1992, the supposed deadline for the harmonization of trade regulations throughout the (then) European Community. In biotechnology, that harmony is still far from complete.

The *three* reminds me of Belgium, which, despite only having a population of around 10 million, feels it can afford three separate authorities to regulate rDNA work—for Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels.

The *four* brings to mind the four arms of the European Union administration: the Council and the Parliament in Strasbourg, France; the Commission in Brussels; and the Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

The *five* recalls the five kinds of measures that the administration can enact: regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions.

The *six* reminds me of the six founding nations of the European Economic Community in 1957, and also of the continuity of action that must result from the six-month term that each nation holds the Presidency of the European Union.

The *seven* reminds me of the seven nations of EFTA. And of the seven founding companies of the Senior Advisory Group for Biotechnology (SAGB), an industry lobby organization: Zeneca, Unilever, Hoechst, Ferruzzi, Rhône-Poulenc, Monsanto Europe, and Hoffmann-La Roche.

The *eight* reminds me of the number of months (approximately and on average) fewer that the European Committee for Proprietary Medicines (CPMP) takes to approve biotechnology drugs than the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But then one of the drugs CPMP approved was Centoxin.

The *nine* brings to mind the nine official languages of the EU into which all adopted legislation must be translated: English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, and Greek.

The *ten* reminds me of DGX, the Directorate-General (Euroministry) responsible for Information, Communication, and Culture.

The *Jack* reminds me of Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, whom many regard as the architect of the EU. The Jack is the eleventh card, and thus recalls DGXI, which formulated the framework of regulation for recombinant DNA products against which so many European companies and national governments are still working.

The *Queen*, as the twelfth card, recalls the twelve stars on the European flag. There are still twelve currencies, twelve healthcare systems, twelve sets of environmental standards. . . in fact, twelve cultures in twelve separate nations.

The *King* also reminds me of national sovereignty, as personified by King Albert of Belgium or King Juan Carlos of Spain. There are 26 red cards in the pack, which remind me of the 26 former communist nations of Eastern Europe, and there are 26 black cards—the 26 "Western" European states.

Each of the suits, too, reminds me of particular aspects of European biotechnology. *Hearts* tell me that most EU nations have national health provisions funded by the taxpayer, systems that make drug and diagnostic marketing a different proposition in Europe than in the U.S. *Spades* recall the political importance of agriculture in Europe, and particularly of the dominance of the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU spending budget. *Clubs* remind me of the multifarious lobby groups that are battling on behalf of biotechnology (and I wonder at their effectiveness with so little coordination). And *diamonds* remind me both of the inventive sparkle of European science, and of the fact that science is only one facet of biotechnology and not always enough to keep a trading bloc at the cutting edge. ///