

Croatia resumes EU entry efforts

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
Epoch Times Staff

Croatia will resume talks to enter the European Union after neighbour Slovenia withdrew the 10-month long veto on the ex-Yugoslavian republic.

The two countries were involved in a border conflict, which dates back to 1991, when they parted from the territory of former Yugoslavia. The dispute circled around the Piran Bay, situated in the Adriatic Sea. Croatia, known for its beautiful resorts, wanted its border to be recognized as extending to the middle of the bay. But Slovenia rejected the request, as it owns a shorter part of the coast and feared that the move would constrain its ships' access to the open sea.

Earlier this month, the prime ministers of Croatia and Slovenia agreed to have private talks on the border dispute and that it should not interfere with Croatia's wish to enter the EU.

In a statement quoted by the BBC, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt noted that this was a critical day for Croatia's ambition to join the community. Currently Sweden presides over the EU. He also confirmed that Croatia has



NEXT STEP: Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor (L) and Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor arrive for a joint press conference after their meeting in Ljubljana on Sept. 11. Croatia's bid to enter the EU depended on the lifting of a veto by Slovenia. HRVOJE POLAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

achieved agreement on five policy chapters and is opening another six.

If the negotiations between the EU and Croatia come to a successful end, the country will become

the 28th full-right member of the European family, possibly by 2011.

Until then, the country has to cope with serious challenges such as corruption, administrative and judicial systems efficiency, and

relations with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

SEVEN COUNTRIES IN THE QUEUE

Currently there are seven countries applying to form the next wave of enlargement of the EU: Croatia, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, and Iceland.

Currently Turkey is in an uncomfortable position because of its failure to resolve a conflict with Greece over Cyprus.

Albania is expected to finish entry negotiations by 2015 at the earliest. The same holds for Bosnia-Herzegovina, a former part of Yugoslavian federation.

Macedonia has objective hindrances to access the EU because of a dispute over its name with Greece—there is a Greek territory called Macedonia, and Greece opposes a country with the same name. In 2008, resolving the name dispute was set as a precondition for entry into the EU.

Sweden and Malta announced that the application of Iceland will be prioritized, although the latest poll in the country showed the majority of the population is against EU membership.

Money for class presence in French schools

By AURELIEN GIRARD
Epoch Times Staff

PARIS—French High Commissioner for Active Solidarity Martin Hirsch has created controversy in both left-wing and right-wing political parties in France by starting the pilot phase of a project aimed at favouring the hard work of secondary school students by offering monetary rewards.

"Money for good students," wrote newspaper *Le Parisien* on Oct. 2, sparking debates in the press.

On Oct. 5, the "fight" against class absence began when three professional schools in the eastern suburbs of Paris introduced a financial bonus system aimed at funding "educational projects" prepared by students. If students behave well and work hard, they could get a bonus between 2,000 and 10,000 euros (CA\$3,120-\$15,600) to finance school trips or driving license exams.

"This experiment is both a collective one and one nurturing responsibility," Mr. Blanquer, the regional head of education was quoted as saying by *Le Parisien*. "We want to develop the sense of responsibility of these teenagers, by explaining how the projects they like are linked to how they engage in their studies."

In one school, a benchmark has been set at less than 5 percent absence (versus 12 percent on average) and an average score of 11/20 (equivalent to C+) for 75 percent of the students, explains *Le Figaro*.

Facing controversy over the experimentation, Education Minister Luc Chatel tried to lighten the debate, saying, "We are trying many experimental approaches,

"This experiment is both a collective one and one nurturing responsibility"

-Mr. Blanquer, regional head of education

and this is only one of them."

Even among government members, there is no unity on the subject. Valerie Pecresse, Minister of Research and Higher Education, said she was concerned the move could create harmful deviations.

"Assiduousness is the first duty of a student. Should we pay for this?" the minister was reported as saying by *Le Monde* newspaper.

Parent unions such as left-wing FCPE are indignant about what they call a "new concept of society where everything including students can be labeled as 'for sale.'" Other right-wing unions such as the PEEP doubt the experiment will be a success.

Hirsch is likely to have a hard time defending the project. Faced with criticism, the high commissioner said he was aware the move was a "cultural shock," but asked detractors to wait for the results of the experiment and accept it if it proves successful.

Plane delayed by bird on board

SEOUL (Reuters)—A South Korean passenger jet was grounded just before taking off so that crew members could catch a sparrow that was flying around in the cabin, airline officials said on Wednesday.

"The bird got in through an open airplane door and was spotted during boarding," said Cho Hyung-chul, a spokesman for Korean Air Line. The passengers on the flight were asked to leave the plane as the airline tried to

prevent the bird from taking the domestic flight.

"The bird was captured and set free," Cho said.

The flight's 123 passengers were put on board a different plane and sent on their journey, which was delayed for nearly three hours, the airline said.

Birds are a growing problem for the global airline industry, with an increasing number of planes getting damaged after hitting flocks of birds.



A flock of sparrows fly in the sky above Spain. REUTERS/MIGUEL VIDAL MV/PH/THI

Ministerial Meeting in Brussels to Tackle Milk Crisis in Europe

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
Epoch Times Staff

Agriculture and farming ministers gathered on Monday in Brussels for a special meeting to discuss the current milk crisis in Europe.

Dairy producers hope that the ministers will review the position paper submitted by the European Milk Board (EMB), which calls for flexible control of milk volumes and will take measures for changing EU's milk policy.

The meeting is expected to discuss the proposals from Germany and France for placing restrictions on the liberalization of the milk market—possible measures include cutting quotas and raising export subsidies for milk, butter, powdered milk, and cheeses. The proposal is endorsed by 19 out of 27 EU members.

Recently, milk producers across the old continent have been faced



CHANGING NEEDS: Dairy farmers from several European countries but mainly from Germany, France, and Belgium, protest against falling milk prices in front of EU headquarters in Brussels on Oct. 5. HERWIG VERGULT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

with a huge decrease in the demand for fresh milk as supply quantities surge. This has led to a fall of milk prices and losses for farmers. They have staged a 4-week wave of protests by dumping milk in the streets and obstructed regular deliveries to supermarkets.

"The strike is suspended until

October 5," warned European Milk Board head Romuald Schaber, quoted by AFP.

"But it will be back on in a flash if no reasonable decisions are taken," he added.

However, this time, ministers are only going to have discussions, while an official decision is expected to come in two weeks.

Milk product prices have fallen in Europe since 2007, mostly due to the step-by-step removal of quotas which is planned to last until 2014-2015. At the same time, dairy product producers have been getting progressively lower levels of aid from Brussels.

\$50 Million to clean up DDT off Southern California coast

By JACK PHILLIPS
Epoch Times Staff

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will clean up the massive

amounts of DDT and PCBs off the coast of Southern California, at the Palos Verdes Shelf, at a projected cost of \$US50 million (\$CA53 million). The site stretches from Redondo Canyon to Point Fermin, totaling about nine miles.

DDT as well as other PCBs have accumulated in large quantities

at the bottom of the ocean floor off the coast of Southern California over time. It is estimated that the Palos Verdes Shelf contains about 110 tons of DDT and 10 tons of PCBs, said the EPA's regional Superfund director, Keith Takata.

The site is too deep to directly affect humans, but fish in the area contain elevated levels of DDT and PCBs and are not safe for consumption.

DDT is a pesticide that was commonly used as a deterrent against insects before being banned in 1972 because it is carcinogenic and can cause a plethora of ailments, including reproductive problems.

The EPA says that consumption of contaminated fish may increase the risk of getting cancer and of liver and central nervous system damage.

In 2000, a pilot program was initiated by the EPA to place sediment over 1 percent of the affected area to see if there were any potential risks in the area from capping it.

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Iranian women's rights activists win courage award

LONDON (Reuters)—A group of women who are risking imprisonment to collect one million signatures on a petition demanding greater women's rights in Iran were presented on Tuesday with the Anna Politkovskaya award for courage.

The annual prize, presented in memory of the campaigning Russian journalist who was murdered three years ago in Moscow, is awarded by Reach All Women (RAW) in War, a human rights group which focuses on stopping violence against women in conflict situations.

"We gave them the award because they are an extremely brave and courageous group of women and they are really changing the

society in Iran, which is extremely difficult," RAW in War founder Mariana Katzarova told Reuters.

"They live a life of courage in the face of grave danger, just as Anna did," added Katzarova, a Bulgarian who created the award after spending 15 years working in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya.

The One Million Signatures campaign, launched in 2006, aims to petition the Iranian parliament asking for the revision and reform of current laws which discriminate against women in Iran.

RAW in War says some campaign members have been imprisoned for acting against national security in Iran and disrupting public order, while others have been given suspended prison

sentences.

Activists say women in Iran, while able to vote, drive cars, and hold most jobs, are subject to discrimination that makes them second-class citizens in divorce, inheritance, child custody, legal matters, and other areas of life.

ELECTION ISSUE

Leila Alikarami, an Iranian lawyer and human rights activist who has defended many cases involving campaign members, was accepting the award in London on Tuesday on behalf of the group.

"Iranian women have demanded equality for more than 100 years," she said. "This prize will support those Iranians who are striving for equality of rights between men

and women."

Women's rights became an issue during campaigning in Iran's presidential election earlier this year. Two pro-reform candidates said they would seek to enhance the role of women in the Islamic state, but were beaten by incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a contest they denounced as rigged. Natalia Estemirova, the award's first recipient and a close friend of Politkovskaya, was abducted in Chechnya and killed in July this year.

On the eve of the third anniversary of Politkovskaya's murder, her family on Tuesday voiced doubts about the guilt of two men facing a retrial and about the Kremlin's will to catch the main suspects.

Bold New York clown sky walks

Epoch Times Staff

NEW YORK—Bello Nock, a professional clown, successfully completed a daring walk along a 30-meter-high steel cable between two buildings at the Lincoln Center Plaza on Tuesday.

With the help of a 40-pound balance bar, Nock walked the length of the 68-meter-long slanted wire in less than half an hour.

Nock, a New Yorker, was named 'America's Best Clown' by Time Magazine in 2001. He is known for his gravity-defying and daring stunts.

"I love doing what no one else does, and I do it in a funny way," Nock said.

A crowd of spectators watched nervously as Nock performed the challenging wire walk. Among them were Mary Blackwood and Angela Jorjevics from Australia.

"I think it's a terrible gamble, there is not even a safety net," said Jorjevics. "I'm speechless, I've never seen anything like that before," said Blackwood. "At the end his foot started to wobble, and he was going from left to right."

Nock said the last steps were tough. The way the cable was attached meant the end angle of the cable was 30 percent, rather than the overall 20 percent angle further back.