

The European Union Databases User Group (EUDUG)

Abstract: The European Union Databases User Group (EUDUG) is a group of information professionals, and others, who have an interest in European Union information resources and matters. Here **Frederico Rocha** (manager of the European Documentation Centre at Cardiff University and chair of EUDUG) and **Hester Swift** (Foreign and International Law Librarian, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library and EUDUG secretary) explain the aims of the group, while illustrating the wide and varied range of speakers and organisations that have played a part in its meetings. They also describe how the group has continued to be relevant in this post-Brexit world, while outlining its plans for the future.

Keywords: European Union; Brexit; European Documentation Centres; legal databases; information resources

INTRODUCTION: THE EU DATABASES USER GROUP

The European Union Databases User Group (EUDUG) is a special interest group for information professionals and others. Its history goes back more than 30 years, but the current name dates from 1999. It has had previous incarnations as the UK Eurobases User Group, which was formalised in 1992, and the CELEX User Group, founded in 1988.¹

EUDUG's primary aim is to provide a support network to users of online information sources covering EU matters. Its members come from sectors including law, academia, government and publishing. The group organises meetings twice a year, at which speakers from the EU, commercial publishing, government and elsewhere demonstrate e-resources and answer questions.

EUDUG MEETINGS AS A REFLECTION OF RECENT HISTORY

The events organised by EUDUG over the years have largely reflected the recent history of the European Union and the UK's involvement in EU affairs. They have also highlighted the liberalisation of the information market and the increasing availability of information resources.

In 2001, the Treasury's John Cooke, business adviser at the Euro Preparations Unit, gave a talk addressing the preparations carried out by the UK as a country remaining outside the Eurozone. The following year Caroline Rees from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office spoke on the subject of EU enlargement, looking ahead to the expansion to 25 member states in 2004.

Unsurprisingly, Brexit became a very salient matter for EUDUG leading up to and in the aftermath of the referendum. In May 2016 Ian Thomson from Cardiff University's European Documentation Centre delivered a

presentation called *Hard Facts and Strong Opinion: A Neutral Guide to Information Sources on Brexit and the EU Referendum*.² Later – as discussions on the future relationship of the UK with the European continent unfolded – EUDUG invited Laurie Anne Agnese of the EFTA Secretariat to speak.

The UK was a founding member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), but left when it joined the EEC. Ms Agnese introduced EUDUG members to EFTA and the EEA and demonstrated resources including EEA-LEX and the EFTA Surveillance Authority Implementation Status Database.³ EEA-LEX can be used to check whether an EU instrument is in force in the European Economic Area (EEA). It also has information about proposed EU legislation that might be incorporated into the EEA Agreement, as well as legislation that is no longer in force. The Surveillance Authority Database covers transposition of EU directives into national law by EEA-EFTA states.

EUDUG's meetings in 2017 and 2018 were largely dedicated to Brexit-related information. Speakers from the House of Commons covered the activities of the Committee on Exiting the European Union and relevant material made available on the UK Parliament's website. Stephen Adams from Magister, a consultancy service, gave a talk relating to European patent information and the effects of Brexit on intellectual property. Matt Bell and Clare Allison of The National Archives spoke about the Brexit Legislation Archive.

Presentations from commercial databases such as Westlaw, Practical Law EU and MLex also focused on the extensive Brexit collections and tools that Thomson Reuters and LexisNexis have developed. Lexis PSL's EU module was demonstrated to EUDUG members in 2021; it focuses on EU law as it continues to apply in the European Union.

The future of the European Documentation Centres (EDCs) following the UK's withdrawal from the European

Union was the focus of a talk by Frederico Rocha, manager of the Cardiff EDC, in 2019. As the EDCs are not funded by the EU, their future largely depends on their host institution's willingness to continue supporting the provision of European information expertise. Future plans for the Cardiff EDC were unveiled and its own information service, European Sources Online (ESO),⁴ was also demonstrated. ESO is not limited to EU matters, but covers European information generally.

More widely, representatives of EU institutions have been frequent speakers throughout EUDUG's history. For example, speakers from the European Commission have presented resources such as EUR-LEX, TED (Tenders Electronic Daily), the Competition Directorate-General's website, N-LEX, the Europe e-Justice Portal (a source of information about the judicial and legal systems of the EU member states) and the Interinstitutional Register of Delegated Acts (a tracker for EU delegated legislation).⁵

EUR-Lex, the EU's main law database, has been the subject of numerous EUDUG talks as its functionalities evolved. In 2004, Pascale Berteloot from the EU's Publications Office demonstrated for the first time in public the new integrated service that originated from the merger of EUR-Lex and CELEX, even before it had been formally launched. In 2015 the Commission's Paulo Seromenho spoke about the European Legislation Identifier (ELI) and transposition of directives (which was known at the time as 'implementation'). Mr Seromenho unveiled long-term plans to make the full text of national implementation measures available via EUR-Lex. This project came to fruition in the form of the National Transposition collection on EUR-Lex, which offers full-text national measures from Member States that have agreed to provide them.

Chris Fretwell from the EU's Court of Justice has appeared three times at EUDUG meetings, sharing his knowledge of case information and Curia, the Court's website.⁶ Among the many gems of information in his most recent talk, in 2014, was the fact that by this time only around half of Court of Justice cases involved an advocate general's opinion (nearly all of them used to).

The European Parliament (EP) hosted EUDUG events for many years at its former UK office in Queen Anne's Gate, London. We benefited from two talks by the Librarian at the UK office, Avis Furness, during this period. The first, in 2000, was about the UK office's information service and the EP's Brussels library; the second, five years later, covered the EP's legislation tracking service, OEIL (also known as the *Legislative Observatory*).⁷

In 2017, Alec Vuijsteke from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), spoke about tracking the EU's policy and legislative cycle. He demonstrated the *Legislative Train Schedule*, an online monitoring service that uses railway terminology.⁸ In 2019 EUDUG heard a presentation from Daniel Ractliffe of the EP's UK Liaison Office about the role of the EP and the provision of EU information in the UK. In summer 2022 Calin-

Mihai Racoti gave a talk about IPEX, the online information exchange between the European Parliament and the parliaments of the EU member states.

The Council of the European Union sent a speaker to EUDUG's January 2008 meeting – Jakob Thomsen, the head of the Transparency Service – who gave a presentation about the Council's information and communications services. Although we do not have a record of other appearances by Council staff, the Council stages of legislative procedure featured in *The EU Law-making Process and the Role of Trilogues*, a talk by Malcolm Harbour CBE, Senior Adviser at the European Policy Centre and former MEP, in 2015.

As previously highlighted, the commercial database sector has been widely represented at EUDUG meetings throughout the years. Numerous Sweet & Maxwell/Thomson Reuters and LexisNexis services have been demonstrated, including Westlaw UK, Lawtel EU, Practical Law EU, Lexis PSL's EU module, and MLex, the regulatory risk news service.⁹ EUDUG members have also had the opportunity to follow the development of Justis Celex into JustisOne's EU collection and then into vLex EU via successive EUDUG talks.

Less well-known services have also been featured at EUDUG meetings, such as Eurocases, an APIS Europe product focusing on national case law relating to EU law. In March 2000 there was a talk from ELLIS Publications about its CD-ROM and online products and at the opposite end of the timescale, in November 2022, we had a demonstration of the Caselex competition law and merger control database.¹⁰

LOOKING AHEAD

Despite recent political developments concerning the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union, the need for European information in the UK remains self-evident. In this context, librarians and information specialists are best placed to help inform future debates and forge a new relationship between the two sides.

EUDUG wishes to remain a facilitator of exchanges, a reflection of wider trends and a contributor to informing society and its different sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced virtual meetings, a development which has helped the Group reach out beyond UK borders.

Frederico Rocha took over as Chair of the EUDUG Committee in 2022 and is assisted by six other members. The Committee have started looking into ways of balancing the opportunities provided by online events with the effectiveness of face-to-face meetings. The decision to re-introduce a membership fee from 2023 has also encouraged the Committee to work on further consolidating the activities of the Group. In this context, the EUDUG website is likely to play a significant role going forward; it already provides summaries of many past meetings, information about forthcoming events and committee details.¹¹

Future plans also include a renewed attempt to expand the Group's remit by introducing information

resources which do not focus on the European Union and yet are relevant to the understanding of the European reality. EUDUG has already had a taste of this, in 2018, when a speaker from the WTO Secretariat gave an overview of Documents Online, a database of WTO documentation, and in 2022, when Stefano Palermi from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) demonstrated the HUDOC case database.

Finally, the EUDUG Committee is also reflecting on how it can contribute to the wider discussion of knowledge dissemination in an ever-changing world of information. The value of non-traditional sources of information in providing a comprehensive response to needs is likely to be among the topics of discussion at future EUDUG meetings.

Footnotes

¹ UK Eurobases User Group News (Autumn 1992) 1; Norman Nunn-Price, *The Celex Database: a Guide to European Community Law* (Context, 1992) 48.

² Summaries of EUDUG talks from November 2014 onwards can be found on the EUDUG website, at: <<https://eudatabaseusergroup.wordpress.com/previous-meetings/>>.

³ EEA-Lex <www.efta.int/eea-lex>; the EFTA Surveillance Authority Database was at <www.eftasurv.int/internal-market-affairs/implementation-status/>, but has been taken down temporarily.

⁴ ESO <www.europeansources.info/>.

⁵ EUR-Lex <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>>; TED <<https://ted.europa.eu/>>; DG Competition <https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/index_en>; European e-Justice Portal <<https://e-justice.europa.eu/home?action=home>>; Interinstitutional Register, <<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/regdel/>>.

⁶ Curia <<https://curia.europa.eu/>>.

⁷ Legislative Observatory <<https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/home/home.do>>.

⁸ Legislative Train Schedule <www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/schedule>.

⁹ Jessica Brown, *Westlaw and Lawtel EU* (January 2008); Maylis Campbell, *Practical Law* (July 2015); Joanna Morris and Charlotte Brady, *Brexit Sources on Practical Law and Westlaw UK* (November 2018); same speakers, *Update on Brexit-related Content and Tools on Westlaw and Practical Law* (May 2021); Katherine Llewellyn, Lexis PSL, *Lexis PSL: EU Module*, and Lewis Crofts, Mlex Market Insight, *Competition and Brexit: Using MLex to Stay Informed* (both November 2021).

¹⁰ A short report of the March 2000 meeting was published on the original EUDUG website, which is still accessible, via the Wayback Machine <https://web.archive.org/web/20010423001243fw_/http://www.eudug.org/meetings.htm> accessed 8 January 2023.

¹¹ EUDUG website <<https://eudatabaseusergroup.wordpress.com/>>.

Biographies

Frederico Rocha has been the Manager of the Cardiff EDC since November 2017. He joined the team as a permanent member of staff in 2013, following a six-month internship. He is currently the chair of EUDUG.

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