

# The Federal Lawyer In Cyberia

MICHAEL J. TONSING

## Research Revisited, This Time with a Foreign Flair

In the last issue, I somehow managed to segue from John Wayne's classic films to unusual search engines. (If you didn't notice, don't ask.) I spent the last month watching foreign films instead of John Wayne movies—and that has inspired me too. In this issue, I'd like to point readers of this column toward legal research sites and search engines with a decidedly foreign flair.

### Research in Latin America

One of the best sites for foreign legal research in our hemisphere is a location known as the Political Database of the Americas (PDBA, as it is called), a project of the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown University, in collaboration with the Organization of American States (and with the support of other organizations and entities in the United States and Latin America). Through its Web site ([pdba.georgetown.edu/](http://pdba.georgetown.edu/)), the organization offers centralized and easily accessed information about institutions and political processes, national constitutions, branches of government, elections, political constitutional studies, and other subjects related to strengthening democracy in the Americas.

The site includes more than 1,500 pages of information, and its home page indicates that the PDBA serves more than 600,000 users each month. The information provided on the site, which is sometimes difficult to obtain elsewhere in English, is presented in an objective and independent manner. The site now has an internal search engine that uses familiar technology provided by Google™. That makes the site all the more useful. It represents a very good jumping off point for lawyers whose clients gaze south of our borders.

The PDBA has received contributions from the U.S. government for the 10 years of its existence. Other institutions, such as the Tinker Foundation, provide support as well. The site is highly recommended.

### Research in the European Union

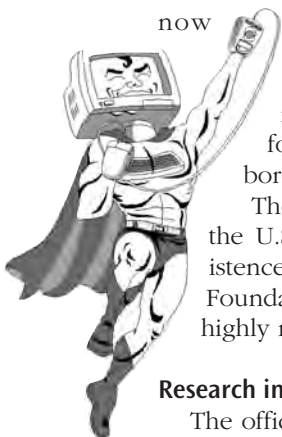
The official site containing nearly all the important legal documents of the European Union (EU) can be found in a database known as the EUR-Lex system, which can be found at [eur-lex.europa.eu/en/](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/). EUR-Lex Europa is an enormously detailed and very interesting site and offers great search opportunities.

Virtually invisible to many of us in the United States (no pun intended), the entity that legislates for the EU, the European Parliament, is made up of 732 representatives of the citizens of the EU member countries who are elected by direct universal suffrage to serve five-year terms. (The number of representatives elected in each member country varies, depending on the size of its population.)

The documentary holdings in the EUR-Lex database consist of more than 300,000 documents. The database is managed by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, which acts in the name of all EU institutions. Multilingual access is available to legal materials of many different types. Access to the site is entirely free of charge, but registering provides benefits. It enables users to set their preferred languages, so that they don't have to designate choices each time they visit the site. Registered users will view documents in their preferred language and can indicate alternatives to be automatically used to view documents that are not available in the language that is their first choice. Registered users can designate up to three languages and can also set the preferred number of documents to be displayed per page. The site is definitely worth the effort.

The linguistic coverage of EUR-Lex is greater for the four official languages of the founding members of the EU: Dutch, French, German, and Italian. For other languages, translations of the legislation in force at the time of the accession of the country in question, and the texts adopted after that date, are generally available in that tongue. However, some texts, particularly the oldest ones, are not yet available in languages that were added during later accessions, including not only English but also Danish, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Finnish, Swedish, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak, Slovenian, and, more recently, Bulgarian and Romanian. Beginning this year, Irish is also one of the 23 official languages of the EU. The EU Constitution and certain intra-EU treaties have also been published in Gaelic, but most other documents have not. I mention this in part because the translations that are available here have an imprimatur. Translations available on many other research sites (whether of EU documents or otherwise) are more unofficial and far more suspect.

As a guide to the perplexed, the EUR-Lex site has an excellent set of frequently asked questions and very helpful answers.



## International Sites Worth a Note

An international legal research site that is gradually eroding and becoming dated, but that can still be helpful in a pinch, can be found at [www.gksoft.com/govt/en/](http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/). (It has not been updated since 2001.) This bare-bones site has no internal search engine, but it provides a fairly comprehensive list of governments that provide information in Cyberia. Think of it as another jumping off point. The no-name site's database includes specific hyperlinks for institutions of the legislative branch (parliaments); institutions of the executive branch (ministries, agencies, administrations, offices, institutes, councils, committees, and others); institutions of the adjudicative branch; official governmental representations in foreign countries (embassies, consulates, and the like); and a range of other government-related institutions.

Even more dated is a plain vanilla site, Resources for Foreign and International Legal Research, which was compiled by Jane Thompson and the reference librarians at the University of Colorado Law Library. Unfortunately, the site's hyperlinks were last updated in November 1998. Despite this drawback, there is much that is still helpful; and, of course, the site is law-specific.

More current and more thorough is the Embassy Network ([www.emb.com](http://www.emb.com)), which styles itself as "a worldwide directory of embassies and other diplomatic missions online." On the home page, the site lays claim to much more, stating, "If you are looking for country facts, travel, visa, trade, culture, events and news, you've come to the right place." Backing that up is a cursor-boggling list of well over 250 hyperlinks for nations large and small from around the world. The sources listed on the Embassy Network are not law-specific, but once you've entered a country's site, access to the law of that particular nation is often readily available. Especially helpful for Cyberians inside the Capital Beltway is a complete list—giving street addresses, phone numbers, and (in most cases) e-mail addresses—of all foreign diplomatic missions located in Washington, D.C.

As one might expect, the American Society of International Law (ASIL) maintains a Web presence and has dozens of useful links at [www.asil.org/spgbd.htm](http://www.asil.org/spgbd.htm). Not to be missed is the organization's electronic resource guide, dubbed "the ERG," which has been published online by ASIL since 1997. Take a look at [www.eisil.org](http://www.eisil.org).

Last, but not least in this category, FindLaw™ ([www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com)) maintains a comprehensive library of international legal publications available on the Internet free of charge.

## Academic Sites

As one might further expect, many law schools that have strength in the area of international law maintain valuable sites filled with sage professorial

advice and an abundance of linked resources. Cornell Law School's Legal Information Institute, for example, has a great perspective and many useful links at [www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/International\\_law](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/International_law). Emory University's law school weighs in with a very helpful graphical index that is law-specific and country-specific at [www.law.emory.edu/cms/site/index.php?id=2556](http://www.law.emory.edu/cms/site/index.php?id=2556). Emory's site is one of the easiest to use that I have seen on the subject. Washburn University's School of Law maintains an excellent—and very detailed—foreign and international law resource at [www.washlaw.edu/forint/forintmain.html](http://www.washlaw.edu/forint/forintmain.html). A guide prepared by the staff at the Georgetown University Law Center is available online at [www.ll.georgetown.edu/intl/guides/foreign](http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/intl/guides/foreign). As one would expect from this institution, its site is solid. Columbia University's law school has a very useful article entitled "A Selective List of Guides to Foreign Legal Research," which lists very helpful links; it is available at [www.law.columbia.edu/library/Research\\_Guides/foreign\\_law/foreignguide](http://www.law.columbia.edu/library/Research_Guides/foreign_law/foreignguide). By visiting even a few of these Cyberian sites, researchers will develop a multitude of additional resources on their own.

## Conclusion

Bon appetit! I guess I have to stop watching so many movies. See you again next month in Cyberia.

**TFL**

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*Michael J. Tonsing practices law in San Francisco. He is a member of the FBA editorial board and serves on the Executive Committee of the Law Practice Management and Technology Section of the State Bar of California. He also mentors less experienced litigators by serving as a "second chair" to their trials. See [www.YourSecondChair.com](http://www.YourSecondChair.com). He can be reached at [mtonsing@lawyer.com](mailto:mtonsing@lawyer.com).*