

Archaeological report: Brussels, 8 May 2095

Digital archaeologists find occasional gems in the vast European information repository. Taken from the mountain of uncatalogued ephemera, this text is written in a style suggesting composition in the early 21st century, possibly even on paper.

Diary fragment 1:

Dear Diary,

Day 1 of our boating holiday on the Sûre in Luxembourg! Up at the crack of dawn to get to the departure point. Ten minutes to learn the ropes and then off we set in our canoes!

There was not a breath of wind as we drifted downstream, sometimes passing an angler staring intently at his float, or a group of children paddling. When I commented that the signs on the two sides of the river looked like they were written in different languages, Dad grinned: "They're two different countries – Germany on our left and Luxembourg on our right! We're navigating pretty much along the border!"

Analytical note 1:

In this period, geographical information was provided in the form of metal panels or 'signs' mounted on poles. Numerous examples can now be found in museums.

Diary fragment 2:

I couldn't get over that – I mean, if we want to go abroad we have to get on a plane or a ferry, but here you can cross to another country without even having to show a passport. The joy of Schengen!

Analytical note 2:

Schengen was an early, and highly significant, stage in the dismantling of European border barriers. European union was long and complex, encountering frequent obstacles. Indeed many predicted that it would not survive the Covid pandemic.

Diary fragment 3:

After last night's hotel (really scraping the bottom of the barrel!), I was prepared for the worst tonight, but I have my own room with its own bathroom and everything! In the lounge, I scraped together enough German to introduce myself to an Austrian group I met, and soon we were chatting away nineteen to the dozen.

Dinner was hearty – fine by me as I had worked up a ravenous appetite. But soon I felt my eyelids drooping and excused myself. So here I am, writing by the light of my bedside lamp, looking forward to new adventures on the waterways of Europe tomorrow.

Analytical note 3:

For the unknown writer of this text, Schengen represented a way for holiday-makers to enjoy Europe's rivers. Looking back on this tumultuous century, it is now clear that working in union was vital for European nations to face the challenges that lay ahead.