

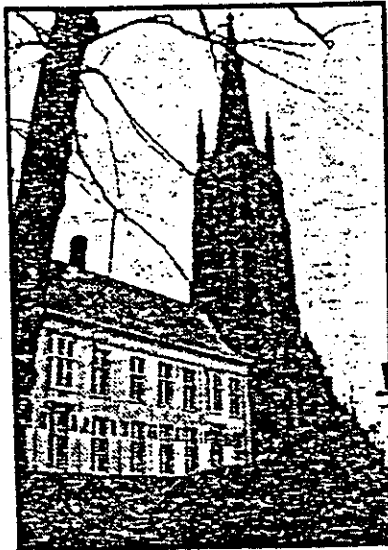
College with a finishing touch

Old Bruges, a jewel of antiquity in the heart of West Flanders has no university. But it does boast an internationally famous postgraduate college for the teaching of European law and politics.

Under the presidencies of a succession of leading European personalities including the ten-year one of Jean Rey the former president of the European Commission, the College of Europe was designed to provide a training ground for potential European administrators, lawyers and diplomats. Graduate entrants to the college's one-year courses are selected by national committees and supported by government bursaries, while the £11m operating budget is jointly funded by the European Community and its member and applicant member states. In addition financial contributions come from some countries such as Austria and Switzerland which are outside the community, but which each year send some of their potential diplomats or international civil servants to complete their studies at Bruges.

Official languages of the college are French and English, contrary to the Flemish language priority of the province. Since the majority of students and teaching staff are drawn from outside Belgium, this language rule which dates back to the college founding in 1949 has been maintained as a necessary requirement in order that teaching can be entirely carried out in a language familiar to the majority of the all-visiting professorate.

Because of this linguistic isolation, the student population of some 140 appear as an apart and per-



Bruges: a jewel of antiquity.

haps privileged group, unable to make full contact with the history and culture of the land in which they study. Rector Jerzy Lukazewski admits that this "privilege" label applies, but denies that it also constitutes elitism.

"The college draws its students from all over Europe, so it offers the chance of studying and working in a plurinational community. We were founded in 1949—the 'Stone Age' of Europe—and in my view integration should not be a melting pot, but rather a means of preserving cultural and national diversities

within that community", he says.

The possibility of preserving cultural and national diversities may not be so important as the prospect of qualifying for a top international job which attracts many of the college's students to apply for enrolment. In practice the college functions as a kind of unofficial top employment agency.

"I still get announcements of vacancies, in spite of all the present difficulties; from international lawyers and bankers needing staff trained in European law and used to working with other nationalities, for example; and our students as part of their course also spend a period of training in European organizations", says Professor Lukazewski.

This may be one reason why the popularity of the college is higher than ever after 30 years in spite of what the European Community's own opinion polls reveal about declining public support for closer integration.

"Each year we receive roughly five or six times as many applicants as we have places available, though the actual balance of applications is unevenly spread across Europe. Germany and the Netherlands are special 'weak spots' in this respect, while by contrast applications from France and from new and applicant member states of the community such as Greece and Portugal have been particularly high", says the professor.

One result of this surplus of applicants is the need for a stiff selection process and, though the initial vetting takes place at national levels, the rector takes most of the final decisions after travelling

around Europe to discuss selection with the national committees concerned.

"I am not responsible for the fact that, like 90 per cent of university students, the majority of applicants to the college are bourgeois. Our criteria for selection—and particularly for recommending bursaries—is that preference should be given to students of modest origin. If two candidates are otherwise equal but, for instance, one is the son of a successful doctor, then I would accept both but let the doctor's son pay his own fees," he says.

With no permanent residential professorial staff at the college, the rector is left with a very free, even autocratic, decision-making power. He agrees that this is an important advantage, particularly when rapid decisions are called for.

"When I was appointed in 1972, we were still feeling the aftermath of the 1968 'earthquake'. My predecessor—Professor Henri Brugmans—believed that the college should be a small family of some 50 students. But my view is that 150 is still small—so I tripled the number of students admitted.

"But last year, with 60 students in the law programme alone, we touched the ceiling and it became clear that, if this was sustained, there would soon be little difference between the college law courses and a corresponding diploma course at a large university. This was not what I wanted. I believe that dialogue is essential—so I acted at once and drastically reduced the law intake to just 36 students this year," says Professor Lukaweski.

It could be argued that teaching about Europe involves more than just law and politics. According to the rector, his attempts so far to try and broaden this academic base have so far met with little suc-

cess. "Two years ago the college offered courses in European social studies but, unfortunately, it failed. Unlike European law, it lacked any coherency, though I also believe that this failure should not prevent us from offering more options than we do at present.

"To offer more options we need more students, and to then maintain the present high staff:student ratio—at present there are about 90 visiting staff for the 140 students—we will need to recruit more professors", he says.

Professor Lukazewski makes clear that this does not imply any change of college policy in terms of keeping to an all-visiting professorate. "My contacts with similar international institutions which do have permanent staff have left me without any wish to experience the terrible problems and academic infighting which this can involve. Also the stagnation. Here in Bruges the temporary graduate assistants take up the role of tutors and provide the element of continuity which is the one advantage that a permanent teaching staff might otherwise give.

"It is also true that we are operating on a very tight schedule. There is no 'free space' in the programme, since all courses are in principle available to every student. This can mean that if one visiting teacher has to cancel, we may have to telephone around the whole of Europe and contact 15 other professors in order to find a replacement at short notice", says Professor Lukazewski.

Nevertheless, the rector remains optimistic for the future of the college. "I am an optimist, because I believe that all the technical problems can be overcome in the end. But the most difficult problems are never technical; they are human", he said.