

Why girls are gluttons for Latin grammar

Italy

Tom Kington Arpino

After spending four hours struggling with a tough translation from Cicero, a 19-year-old Serbian was first out of the packed exam room.

"It wasn't that difficult," Lucija Danilov, a student from Belgrade, said. "But then again, Cicero's my favourite author — I love his style, his complexity and his politics."

Ms Danilov was one of 167 teenagers picked from the cream of Europe's Latin students to grapple yesterday with the grammar of ancient Rome's greatest orator in hilltop Arpino, Cicero's home town, south of Rome.

The contest, which has been running since 1980, looks increasingly

like a resistance movement as governments around Europe slash the number of hours devoted to teaching Latin in schools.

The event, the Certamen Ciceronianum Arpinas, is now looking for sponsors after the Italian government cut its funding of the event.

"In France they slashed Latin and Greek from three hours to one a week for 12 to 15-year-olds last year — we are petitioning and putting our hopes in the new president to change things," Daniel Muller, a Latin teacher who accompanied two students from Paris to compete in Arpino, said.

Laszlo Jankovics, a teacher from Budapest, said: "I tell parents their kids will become successful scientists if they do Latin, but they're not

interested any more." Signs of a fightback came in Romania last month when the government reversed a decision to drop Latin in schools after a campaign by lovers of the language.

In Italy, an online Latin magazine containing a crossword and the cartoon *Insuperabilis Snupius*, or *Snoopy*, has thousands of subscribers, and the Pope's Latin Twitter feed has more than 786,000 followers.

Students from 14 countries descended on Arpino for the Cicero challenge this year. Four Serbs were first to finish the exam, followed by four Spaniards. The winners will be announced tomorrow.

"Germany is always in the top ten and Hungary and Belgium are strong," Renato Rea, president of the

competition, said. In 37 years only seven British students have competed, the last in 2013.

"Britain doesn't have high schools that specialise in languages and the humanities and it shows," Elisabeth Smeyers, a teacher from Belgium, said. "With Brexit, the Brits could now do with a bit more Latin to remind them what European unity means."

About 60 per cent of the competitors are girls, and yesterday only two of the first 11 students to finish were boys.

"Boys go for science, girls increasingly go for Latin," Ms Smeyers said.

Teachers admitted that their students were often accused of being nerds and bookworms, but Mr Rea said that they would have their revenge when they grew up. "Latin is about

logic, reason and creativity, and our students go on to be magistrates, scientists and ambassadors," he said.

The four Serbian students who emerged from the exam room looked to be an exception to the geek rule. Ms Danilov, a keen fencer, had bruises on her arms from recent bouts and she named *Fight Club* as her favourite film.

She was followed by Nikola Stoikov, 18, the son of a factory worker, who lit a cigarette and explained that his ambition was to draw comic books when not playing bass in his punk band in Novi Sad.

"Being great at Latin doesn't make me a nerd," he shrugged. "I just love the grammar."



Must fly A herd of impala in Kruger National Park. Most impala are born around midday, when their predators are resting. Half are killed in the first weeks of life

Princesses face jail in slavery trial

Belgium

Andrew Rettman Brussels

Eight Emirati princesses should spend 18 months in jail and pay more than £1.5 million in compensation for treating servants in a hotel in Brussels like slaves, prosecutors said yesterday.

Sheikha Hamda Al Nehayan, a relative of the emir of Abu Dhabi, and her seven daughters are accused of abusing 23 women of Asian and north African descent during their eight-month stay at the Hotel Steigenberger, previously the Hotel Conrad, in 2008.

The "Conrad princesses" were said to have forced the women to work for 20 hours a day for less than £170 a month, to sleep on the floor outside their rooms and to have abused them verbally.

One of the servants managed to escape and raise the alarm, prompting a police raid. The case then went through the appeals courts for almost ten years before coming to trial this week.

The final verdict is due on June 23. It is unlikely that the UAE would extradite them to serve their sentences if they are found guilty. The princesses' lawyers have said a private firm that contracted the servants was liable for the abuse and that the allegations were exaggerated.

Captain Coward finally accepts 16-year jail term

Tom Kington

Francesco Schettino, the former cruise ship captain sentenced to 16 years for wrecking the Costa Concordia, manslaughter and abandoning ship, was finally jailed yesterday after his lengthy appeals process ran out.

Dubbed Captain Coward and regarded as a national embarrassment for fleeing the capsizing ship in 2012 while 32 passengers and crew drowned, Schettino handed himself over to police after Italy's supreme court upheld his 2015 conviction yesterday evening.

"I trust in the justice system, the verdict must be respected. I'm handing myself in right now," he told his lawyer Saverio Senese by telephone after the verdict, adding that he was standing outside Rebibbia jail in Rome.

Schettino, 56, steered too close to rocks on the Italian island of Giglio while showing off to a Moldovan



Costa Concordia's sinking killed 32

dancer with whom he was having an affair and then jumped on to a lifeboat. He claimed that he slipped and fell into the boat. During his two appeals, his lawyers tried to blame his Indonesian helmsman for the crash and claimed that the ship's emergency generator slowed the evacuation. In their summing up at the supreme court, prosecutors accused him of "unprecedented negligence". Michelina Suriano, a lawyer representing the victims, said: "Finally Schettino begins to pay for his wrongdoing."

Island-hoppers can now hail an Uber

Croatia

Ben Clatworthy

First it was London's black cab drivers in the firing line. Now Uber is targeting water taxis and ferry companies.

The taxi-hailing business will begin a boat service in Croatia next month, with users able to request a launch in the same way they would a car on its app.

The Adriatic archipelago in Croatia consists of more than 1,500 islands, of which 48 are inhabited. Infrequent ferries or expensive water taxis, which must be pre-booked, are all that connect the islands.

The Uberboat service will have an on-demand fleet of boats that will be quicker than ferries and undercut the fares charged by private water taxi companies.

Initially the service will have 30 speedboats with the number expected to rise sharply, eventually forming a 100km network between Dubrovnik and Split and covering holiday islands

such as Hvar, Korcula and Brac. According to local media, an Uberboat ride between Split airport and Hvar will cost about €40 per passenger. Private water taxi companies typically charge about €400 per boat. These are capable of transporting up to six people, at the equivalent cost of €66 a head.

"The Uberboat service will benefit tourists the most," said a spokesman for Uber in Croatia. "There is the knowledge that they won't get scammed as they know the price when ordering, and there is no need to negotiate in a foreign language. This will be the easiest, fastest and most adventurous way to travel around Croatia's islands."

Croatia has benefited from a boom in tourism since it joined the European Union in 2013. In the past decade tourist numbers have risen by 55 per cent, with 15.5 million visitors last year.

"We will see what happens but it will only work if they follow the law," said Josko Petric, director of the Dalmatia Express private water taxi company.

"In Croatia the rules of the sea are

very different to the roads. To be an Uber driver on land all you need is a car; to operate on the water you need a special licence. It will only work if they take us on as partners."

It is understood that existing water taxi companies will be able to sign up to use the Uber platform. Uber only launched its taxi service in Croatia last year but has already signed up 1,500 drivers and predicts a further 10,000 will join in the next three years.

In Norway, where water taxis are regularly used to cross fjords, self-driving boats — which work in the same way as autonomous cars — are being tested. This may negate the need for water taxi companies altogether.

Paul Bradbury, owner of the Total Croatia News website, is positive about Uber's sea expansion. "The problem we have is that the islands are really hard to get to and the wait for a ferry can be lengthy," he said. "Croatian island tourism is crying out for something like this, a service that bridges the gap between ferries and private speedboats."