

Developing a strong GI voice at the European level through improved co-ordination

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The presentation sets out how through improved co-operation it should be able to process and consolidate the various needs and views of the users, industry, research and other interest groups. Basically it should in the medium term have a consultative role in the decision making process. Provide strategic co-operation among the many organizations involved in GI, and the different communities of interest. e.g. land-based GI, space, marine; act as a recognised voice towards decision-makers in Europe, and help sustain political support for the increased use of GI are some of the key-elements. This has to be built up in a step-by-step approach with full respect of each other's roles and tasks that will take time to establish.

In recent years Europe as in other parts of the world has seen many encouraging developments take place in the field of geographic information (GI) these include:

- ? INSPIRE (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe - the preparation of Community legislation that aims at making available relevant, harmonised and quality geographic information for the purpose of formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Community environmental policy-making and for the citizen);
- ? GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security - aimed to establish a coherent, operational, long-term and user-dedicated system that meets the specific information needs for policy-making and research in the field of environment and security);
- ? GALILEO (the European Satellite Navigation System), and
- ? The *Naples charter* of July 2003 (aimed at developing the European dimension of key transport infrastructure in an enlarged EU);

All are examples of how GI is gaining importance as it is fundamental in supporting and implementing key societal policies at the European level. In Europe a Directive on the Reuse of Public Sector Information is on its way. One of the objectives of the PSI Directive is to fuel the Information Society and Knowledge Economy and in the process will widen and increase the use of GI for the benefit of the citizen, government and commerce throughout Europe. Other initiatives like eGovernment underpin and support these developments. At the same time there are many organisations at the pan European level that have an interest in GI which follow and analyse these developments independently of each other.

They operate in the technical, professional, research and thematic areas or like EUROGI represent the broad national GI-associations in Europe. They often have an

interest in the same developments and develop and put forward their own specific views that are seldom aligned with that of others. As a result this reduces the effectiveness of the message given to decision makers on GI not to mention the waste of scarce human resources due to duplication of effort. They each hold their own conferences with sometimes the same subjects, lobby for their own views to the same various decision makers and in the process give a mixed variety of signals, which basically do not differ. If the various views can be brought together the message on GI would be much improved and would carry greater weight due to the consensus making process involved at arriving at the common view. A number of these organisations already work together on an informal basis within the so-called Pan European Associations Forum (PEAF). They gather once a year at the level of Secretary Generals/Executive Directors and exchange and discuss information. EUROGI acts as a catalyst and chairs these meetings. Some of the PEAFF members have formal, bilateral agreements in the form of Memorandums of Understanding with EUROGI and with other members of the PEAFF. The GINIE (Geographic Information Network in Europe) project proposed to establish a fully functioning Advisory Board on Geographic Information (ABGI), which will discuss and seek consensus on GI matters at the highest political and industrial level. GINIE is funded by the Information Societies (IST) Technologies Programme of the European Union and aims to develop a cohesive Geographic Information Strategy at the European level and support its implementation. A consultation on an ABGI resulted in the view that there is indeed a need for improved co-ordination of pan European organisations that have an interest in GI in order to strengthen the voice for GI at the European level. It is best achieved through an existing organisation rather than forming and proliferating yet another organisation such as the proposed European ABGI, which would dilute and weaken the existing European GI organisations.

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