

Interview



Co-ordinating Geographic Information within Europe

GIM International Interviews BINO Marchesini, Secretary-General of EUROGI

By Jacques Sipkes, Contributing Editor, GIM International

European integration is a fast developing and continuous process. This means that many European issues in a wide variety of disciplines have to be reconciled, both internally and externally. By the end of this decade the population of the EU will have reached 500 million. The expected entry to the EU in 2004 of ten new candidate members states from Central and Eastern Europe emphasises yet more the need for rapid development and co-ordination towards a European-wide perspective. In order to streamline developments in the field of geographic information within Europe, an European Umbrella Organisation for Geographic Information, EUROGI, has been set up. GIM International spoke with EUROGI Secretary General, Mr. Bino Marchesini.

Mr. Bino Marchesini has been Secretary General of EUROGI since May 2002. He trained as a lawyer and worked previously with the Dutch Cadaster, where he played a role in the initial establishment of the Dutch national GI association (RAVI). During his latter years with the Dutch Cadaster he served as Secretary to the Executive Board and headed the bureau that advises the board and Kadaster on decision-making, in and external communication, legal affairs and national politics as they affect the Kadaster.

How did EUROGI come into existence?

The initiative to set up an umbrella organisation for GIS/RS in Europe came from the former Directorate General XIII of the present Information Society of the European Commission, which is the governing body of the European Union. Four prominent members of the European GIS/RS community were invited to form an investigating committee and presented their initial findings at a Forum in Luxemburg in October 1992. To quote the wording of Prof. Peter Burrough, one of the committee members, this was: "a vision of EUROGI as an organisation that would not replace existing organisations but... catalyse effective co-operation between existing national, international and discipline-oriented bodies to bring added value in the areas of Strategy, Co-ordination and Services". The actual founding year of EUROGI became 1994.

Who are the members of EUROGI?

At present there are 22 national and three pan-European members. The pan-European members are the European Association of Remote Sensing Companies (EARSC, www.cs.telespazio.it/ [earsc](http://earsc.org)), EuroGeoGraphics (www.eurogeographics.org) and the Urban Data Management Society (www.udms.net). All of the national GI associations of the fifteen member states of the EU, and non-EU member states such as Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, plus some candidate member states, such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia are represented. It should be realised that the 22 national members are in their turn also umbrella organisations within their own countries, so that this implies a vast network of GI contacts. Collectively, EUROGI represents about six thousand public and private sector organisations all over Europe.

How is the management of EUROGI structured?



Conference hall in Budapest, Hungary.

The members of EUROGI elect the President, which is at present Professor Ian Masser from the United Kingdom, also Chair of GSDI. The members decide EUROGI policy and there is an Executive Committee of eight members. I am the Secretary General and my task is to maintain contact with members, to prepare financial documents, to organise conferences, to co-ordinate the various working groups within EUROGI and in general to inspire the development of GI policy. The EUROGI office is based in Apeldoorn in The Netherlands. We also have an Assistant Secretary General: Ms. Karen Leveger.

What are the objectives of EUROGI?

The current activities of EUROGI are closely linked to one or more of the following strategic objectives:

- Encouraging greater use of GI in Europe through the improved availability of and access to GI; removal of legal and economic constraints to use and the promotion of the use of standards
- Raising awareness of the value of GI and its associated technologies; improving the sharing of knowledge between members themselves and between EUROGI and the European Commission
- Working towards the development in all European countries of strong national GI organisations
- Supporting the definition and implementation of a European GI policy and facilitating development of the European Geographic Information Infrastructure (EGII)
- Representing the European view on the development of the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) and acting as the European regional contact for GSDI

What were the reasons behind the formation of EUROGI as a separate institution in the realisation of these objectives?

One should note that it is not the EUROGI organisation as such that is the most important element here, but the members of EUROGI themselves. This is because it is with the members that the real GI knowledge resides; for instance, of land and property, land use, topography, environment, infrastructure, transport, and many other fields of interest.

One can also assume that the main problems to be tackled are institutional rather than technical in nature. Because of this it was decided that the case for a European GI strategy would be better formulated by an independent body having good contact with all players in the GI field than by any other form of organisation.

Is there any special EUROGI policy aimed at the ten EU candidate members states?

The enlargement of the Union on this scale holds massive implications for decision-making structures at the European level as well as for the management of key elements of its infrastructure, such as geographic information. It may be understood, therefore, that one of the strategic objectives of EUROGI is to promote the growth of strong national GI associations throughout Europe. This has important implications for capacity building in those countries and EUROGI is assisting them to achieve that goal.

Can you elaborate on the position of EUROGI in terms of the global situation?

In an era of increasing globalisation it is essential that European GI strategy does not evolve in isolation. In this respect, Europe must also liaise with its international counterparts.

The Global Spatial Data Infrastructure, GSDI (www.gsdi.org), is helping to build a globally compatible spatial data infrastructure around the world. We link with them where the European part is concerned. Within this framework we hold conferences together, like the recent one held in Budapest, Hungary; the 6th Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Conference September 2002, jointly organised by HUNAGI (the Hungarian national GI organisation), GSDI and EUROGI.

We also work together with the Permanent Committee



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Delegates during the recent EUROGI conference in Hungary.

on GIS Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP - www.gsi.go.jp/PCGIAP/), the Permanent Committee on SDI for the Americas (PC-IDEA - http://www.cpidea.org/co/pdf/gm_japan001.pdf) and with the GI umbrella organisation for Africa which is currently being planned.

What are your links with the Open GIS Consortium?

EUROGI is working jointly with the Open GIS Consortium (Europe) (OGCE), the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) and the University of Sheffield, UK, in the Geographic Information Network in Europe (GINIE) project (www.ec-is.org/ginie). The main purpose of this project is to develop a cohesive Geographic Information Strategy at the European level for policy-making, business, research and society at large. There are several problems here. The overall picture in

Europe is still one of considerable fragmentation, partly because of the multicultural, multi-lingual, and multinational nature of Europe, but also because the main challenges are organisational, institutional and political in nature. It is to address these main challenges that GINIE has been established, bringing together as it does three crucial sets of players: the national and pan-European GI organisations represented by EUROGI, the European Commission represented by its Joint Research Centre, and industry through the European arm of the Open GIS

Consortium. GINIE is also meant as strategic input to the new European Commission initiative developing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe (INSPIRE), within which context environmental data forms an important part.

Further Reading

- EUROGI, WORKPLAN 2002 (final); published by EUROGI, EUROGI GI Strategy
- GINIE, Geographic Information Network in Europe; published by the University of Sheffield, UK

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This interview has also been published in the November 2002 issue of GIM International.

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