

Malta, 15 September 2006

INSPIRE: challenges and opportunities for the EU

INTRODUCTION

SLIDES 2 - 3

I would like to start off my presentation today by **thanking** you, Mr President of the "Council of European Geodetic Surveyors", not only for the invitation to attend the general assembly on this wonderful location, but also for giving me the **opportunity** to come and talk to you about the challenges of INSPIRE, an important **European project** for the future.

There is still very little mention of **INSPIRE** in the media and the various stakeholders do not discuss it very often. The **debate** is at the moment limited to the governments of the member states, the agencies and the authorities that are directly involved. With my presentation today, I hope to prompt the debate about INSPIRE within your organization, as far as still needed of course.

Of course, at the end of my presentation, I'll be happy to answer any questions you might still have.

SLIDE 4: introduction

When more than two years ago, I first read the European Commission's proposal, I was pleasantly surprised.

As a politician being active for more than 24 years on the local, provincial, regional (i.e. Flemish), federal and now also the European level, my broad experience helped me to realize how incredibly important

INSPIRE is, not only for environmental policy, but also for all related sectors, like urban planning and mobility.

INSPIRE wants to create an **infrastructure for spatial information on environmental data in the European Community for the different authority levels**. It is a very technical proposal and as the negotiations proceeded (in the Parliament, with the various Council presidencies, with the European Commission and with the various stakeholders), more and more complex details surfaced.

SLIDE 5: SITUATION IN THE EU

I would like to talk briefly in more detail about the **current situation** in the EU in the field of spatial information:

- Making good policy decisions (= governance) has become increasingly complex; never before so many sectors were interconnected and linked. Think for example about the many links that exist between environment, transport, economy and agriculture, ...
- There is a lack of coordination across borders and between the various governments
- There is a lack of commonly accepted standards (one common language that is comprehensible to all): as a result, information can now often not be exchanged, systems are not compatible, ...
- Existing data are often fragmented or there is duplicating of information

SLIDE 6: OBJECTIVES

The INSPIRE Directive only establishes the "**general rules**". You can compare it with a road infrastructure that links and connects several locations and important crossroads. The infrastructure needs to make information from different sources accessible and interoperable, i.e. (for instance) making it possible to share this information between different users and applications.

The **goal** of the infrastructure is:

- to improve the availability and quality of the information and make it more accessible
- to have a better environmental policy which leads to more environmental efficiency (the right policy choices)
- to give citizens the chance to make well informed choices (citizens have the right to know which information is available and how they can access it)
- to remove barriers limiting the access to and the use of information (technical administrative barriers, ...)
- to prepare the road towards gradual harmonisation

Other connected aspects are: creation of new jobs (as a result of the creation of services/products with added value), protecting investments (as the duplication of data collection is avoided, making investments more efficient), ...

SLIDE 7: EXAMPLE OF DIFFERENT CODING SYSTEMS

The following slide is a perfect **example** of the current **difficulties** of "reading" data. The example presents the data regarding Administrative Borders in Europe (= borders of member states, regions, cities, ...) of the **National Mapping Agencies**, Eurogeographics in this case (NMA's), and national statistical offices such as **Eurostat** (NSO's). You have probably noticed the difference in the first table: even the name, of the e.g. (for instance) area concerned, is different between the 2 data providers (due to a spelling mistake maybe). The **identifier code** (= an easily recognizable name) differs as well. In the second table the data should, in theory, have the same number of units. If we want to combine these data, we will have to tackle different problems.

We will need additional **conversion tables** in order to be able to "read" the different codes. Then we need to check if these data, of 2 different providers, cover the same geographical zone. If not, we have to find reasons why this is not the case. All this would cost additional money and efforts and would not workable be in practice.

A close **cooperation** between the institutes and the agencies is necessary. This is exactly what INSPIRE intends to do.

SLIDE 8: KEY ELEMENTS

One has not acted in a rush. The European Commission has put a lot of time and effort in its proposal.

The **key elements** are:

- Making environmental data available to the public and to the various authority levels in charge of environmental data.
- For now basing the infrastructure on existing information and infrastructures (no obligations with regard to scale)
- Creating added value by sharing data (often data are too fragmented, not comparable and there are too many barriers between the systems that are used in the various member states - an internet poll showed that removing barriers is the main challenge when exchanging data).

SLIDE 9: responsibility of the member states

A crucial element is the responsibility of the **member states**. They need to evaluate the current situation and to make choices which will affect the future. They will have to turn the directive into national legislation. Therefore the member states will need to answer the following questions:

- What is the situation in our country? Where do we want to be in the future?
- How do we need to implement the INSPIRE directive?
- How do we connect existing national networks to the EU Geo-Portal? How do we organize the electronic exchange?

- How do we create meta-data, rules for implementation ...?)
- How can we cooperate in the framework of the comitology procedure?
- Who are our partners? (at the level of the local authorities, cadastral authorities, environmental organisations, geographical institutes, ...)
- How do we arrange the interoperability between member states?
- How do we arrange finances? What about financial compensations?
- How do we report and monitor?
- ...

SLIDE 10: CALENDAR

The European Commission started its work in 2002. The Commission first carried out an internet poll and impact assessment and in July 2004 it presented its proposal for a **Directive**.

I was appointed **rapporteur** in September 2004. As the rapporteur, I am in charge of the INSPIRE report on behalf of the Parliament. A rapporteur needs to study the report and discuss it with different stakeholders (a rapporteur needs to be informed about the implications for the stakeholders). My task is also to consult with the various political groups in the European Parliament. As soon as the rapporteur has been appointed the report follows the normal EU decision-making procedure, in this case the co-decision procedure. I have presented my report to the ENVI-Committee (Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety)

in April 2005. In June 2005 the European Parliament voted the report **(almost unanimously) in first reading.**

SLIDE 11: CALENDAR

At the same time as the ongoing discussions in the Parliament, discussions within the Council take place. The Council presidency (which for this report consists of the Ministers of Environment and the heads of government) represents the member states (for this report we had three different presidencies: Luxemburg, Austria and Finland).

On January 23rd 2006 the Council adopted its **common position**, under the Austrian presidency.

The report went to second reading in February 2006. Parliament reconfirmed its position of first reading with a large majority in June 2006.

It is a shame that we could not reach an agreement with the Council for the vote in second reading. It seems some member states did not want Austria to be successful in this report. As a result, we started the reconciliation procedure this month. I will come back to this point later on.

SLIDE 12: LOBBY

I would like to talk briefly now about lobbying and INSPIRE. I have met with many organisations. Each stakeholder has his or her own story and point of view with regard to INSPIRE. Yet, these meetings enabled me to have an all-round view of what issues are at stake and what the problems are for the people involved. I met with, among others: cities and municipalities, national institutes, European Environment Bureau, Geographic Information System Flanders, mapping agencies ...

On top of that the Commission called on experts in March 2005 to provide further input. The response was very good: Spatial Data Interest Communities, individual experts, ... all of them sent in their contributions. Even though this report might not interest the media a great deal, experts seem to look forward to it and expect a lot from INSPIRE.

At the end, it is up to the rapporteur to write a report on the basis of all this information incorporating all proposals for changes that serve the overall public interest. For this reason Commission and Parliament were not satisfied with the common position of the Council that was too much influenced by national interests.

SLIDE 13: EP's vision

In first reading Parliament took a **clear point of view**. Parliament was hereby in line with the point of view of the Commission.

The European Parliament introduced the following constructive **amendments**:

- Improving the structure (chapter I)
- Clarifying the participation of data providers
- Reinforcing the principle of subsidiarity
- Limiting the barriers between authorities
- Financial compensations between public authorities allowed
- Possibility of click-licences to counteract improper (commercial) use
- Completion of the annexes

SLIDE 14: EP's vision

Council's common position included only a few smaller amendments of the European Parliament. As a result, Parliament re-introduced many amendments from the first reading. Among them, provisions to avoid complicated procedures that would set hurdles to the interoperability or public access.

Also, viewing and discovering services for the wider public, authorities and partners need to be free of charge. It is not acceptable that citizens need to pay twice for the same data (once as a tax payer and once when he or she wants to consult the data).

Early September the reconciliation procedure started (the third reading in the legislative process). Parliament and Council are currently negotiating (the Commission acts as a go-between). This is our last chance to reach an agreement. The first trialogue will take place at the end of September. Now we have to try and find a solution for the remaining problems and come to an agreement at short term. It will be a matter of give and take. But I am hopeful that we will reach a good agreement.

SLIDE 15: ENTRY INTO FORCE

The decision-making process is taking place right now. Various "drafting teams" are creating the "implementing rules" for network services, monitoring, user rights, meta-data, ...

Once the legislative procedure has been rounded off, the directive will come into force. A transitional phase has been foreseen in 2007 - 2008. During this period the Directive is turned into national legislation, the comitology-committee is created, decisions of the committee are made, ...

INSPIRE should be implemented in 2009-2013.

SLIDE 16: EXAMPLES

I would like to clarify a few issues for you as professionals. You are working every day with spatial information and data.

Perhaps a general remark: you know the European Union is currently freeing up the services market. This way, it will become easier for service providers to offer their services in other member states. INSPIRE will lead to a gradual harmonisation, for example same standards, units, ... This will make it easier to operate outside of one's own member state, as the EU will have a harmonised framework for spatial information.

The annexes of the legislative document list the thematic categories of spatial data that are part of INSPIRE. For example: geographic names (names of regions, places, ...) / transport networks / cadastral parcels /

addresses / geographic location of buildings / ... These are no doubt elements you frequently use in your daily work.

And now more specifically. There are already a lot of ongoing mini-INSPIRE projects: GIS Flanders, EEA, European Soil Bureau, Eurogeosurveys, ...

What are the possibilities INSPIRE will offer in the future? I have tried to make a comprehensive list of examples.

- managing and improving the **quality of water** in Europe. This asks for the standardisation and exchange of spatial data with regard to river basins, waterways, hydrografical data structure, soil use, protected areas, soil water tables, etc. A European reference as offered by INSPIRE is hereby essential.
- protection of citizens for **floods**. The same needs for information with regard to topografical data, vulnerable areas, population, risk areas, extreme weather conditions, etc. Exchange of data across borders as proposed by INSPIRE is therefore essential. Rivers do not bother with the administrative boundaries of member states.
- managing and monitoring **protected areas**, fauna & flora. The same needs are there with regard to demarcation of the Natura 2000-network, satellite recording, use of land, etc. For example: member states would like to know which large roads run across sites, and which cities and municipalities are located there. We have to be able to compare information and to have consolidated and useful data.

Moreover all data need to be of a good quality. There are good local data, but they are not readable/usable at a large scale: different hights, different standards, ...

- the avian flu and all kind of other **epidemics**: we need data of companies, but also from wild fauna and migratory birds across the borders. Apparently not all of the areas where wild ducks and pheasants live, were known. The availability and accessibility of the data appeared to be a huge problem (also on EU level).
- monitoring and predicting **forest fires**: if you have data on soil types, vegetation, humidity degrees of the soil, statistics on wind speed and wind direction, etc., a forest fire will be much easier to control.
- **fishery**: with data on the migration of schools of fish, the temperature of the water, the pollution of the water, ... a balance can be struck between the needs of the fishery sector and the protection of the existence of certain kinds of fish

SLIDE 17: elements regarding cost-benefit

Perhaps shortly something about the cost issues. The impact assessment of the Commission showed that the **benefits** are much larger than the costs:

- **cost:** between €3.6 en 5.4 mln/year/ 1% total expenditures for spatial information
 - o coordination between government authorities
 - o implementation network services
 - o documentation spatial data (metadata)
 - o drawing up implementing rules
- **benefits:** €27 - 42 mln/year/MS
 - o more efficient implementation of environmental policy
 - o less duplication
 - o creating a market for new products (with added value)
 - o social advantages: access to environmental information and participation in environmental policy

Fees can still be charged for downloading or other use of data. Maps can be sold as it is the case right now. The goal of the directive is not to create financial problems for data providers. It only wants to establish **free viewing and discovering services**.

Also, instruments can be introduced to avoid commercial abuse (technical possibilities such as click-licenses)

INSPIRE can also be an impulse for **developing** new data and market / innovation, with other derivative products and therefore new revenues.

SLIDE 18: Concluding remarks

INSPIRE

means a big step forward for a sustainable European environmental policy

is ambitious

needs not only the member states to succeed but also other partners on the field like your organisation

Thank you again for your attention, and I am here for your questions.