



Matjaz Gril , Slovenian delegate to CLGE and interviewer

Interview with the confirmed CLGE President (weathered?), Jean-Yves Pirlot.

At the general assembly in Hannover October 2012, Jean-Yves Pirlot was chosen once again to lead CLGE, the European geodetic surveyors' organisation. This will be his second term. Prior to taking over this most senior position, he was Secretary General of CLGE for two terms, which means that he is very knowledgeable about the European surveying situation. At 50 years old, he is the same age as the organisation! He is full of energy and has many ideas about how to increase the visibility of the geodetic surveying profession. Those of us who are following his trail are aware that he has regenerated the work of this European organisation, which is steadily gaining influence and visibility within the Euro-administration circles in Brussels. This man, who finds immense pleasure in his work, is also an interesting person to talk to. His CV informs us that he held the rank of colonel in the Belgian army, that he is employed as a deputy director general of the Belgian Mapping Agency (Institut Géographique National), and that he is also president of the Belgian surveyors' organisation in his "free" time. In short: enough material for an interesting discussion.

Matjaz Grilč



Jean-Yves Pirlot opening the INTERGEO in Hanover (©DVW – INTERGEO 2012)

Can you give us a short summary of CLGE, what kind of organisation it is, what are their strategic goals and who is united in this European organisation?

The Comité de Liaison des Géomètres Européens (CLGE) or Council of European Geodetic Surveyors is a non-profit organisation based in Brussels, in the House of the European Surveyor and GeoInformation. It is the leading association of Surveyors in Europe. Our members are national liaison groups, i.e. groups of associations or associations which represent the profession as a whole in their country.

In 2010 we defined strategic goals which could be summed up as the following: Pro-activity, Visibility, Renewal and Member Satisfaction.

This means that we want to be pro-active, not reactive, and influence the European law-making process, instead of waiting and finding out later that new directives have been adopted, which will govern our profession without us having made any input. We want to raise our profile to appear on the radar of the European and national policy makers, but we also want to be recognized for what we are doing by the general public. We need, therefore, a clear professional image. We want to renew our profession and present it in a way that will make it attractive to our associations, and finally, as is the case in many other organizations, we want to make sure that our members are satisfied by our policies.

How many countries and persons are represented in CLGE, and what are the conditions for membership?

We are present in 36 European countries, amongst them the 27, and in a near future 28, EU member states. The basic requirement is that our members represent the majority, if not all of the surveyors, in their country. Therefore, we ask members with several surveying associations in the same country to build a national liaison group. The number of individual surveyors CLGE represents is about 100.000.

How do you see CLGE in relation to other organizations in the surveying profession? (FIG, Euro Geographics, EGOS, ...)

Only one or two European citizens in 10.000 are surveyors. We have to realize that we are a very small profession. This means that it is essential to have a clear message if we want to gain visibility amongst the general public and the authorities. It also means that we have to work hand in hand with other GI and sister associations.

Of course we have a preferential cooperation with some of them. FIG for instance is our worldwide counterpart. Fifty years ago, CLGE was born in the cradle of FIG. For many years the relationship wasn't very close, but during the last decade, we've decided to re-establish our ties. We are cooperating more and more. Common projects could be launched soon. For instance I would like to create a worldwide Surveyors' Day, with the aim to raise awareness about our not so well known profession. Young Surveyors are another essential part of our policy. It makes no sense to create an FIG Young Surveyors Network as well as a CLGE Young Surveyors Network. We only need one common structure for Young Surveyors, in which European youngsters are aware of their role in CLGE and FIG.

Eurogeographics is another natural partner, since a lot of surveyors are working either directly or indirectly for their members, the European National Mapping and Cadastral Agencies. We are very happy about our relationship with them; we share the House of the European Surveyor and GeoInformation for our respective headquarters in Brussels. We have cooperated on several projects in the past and I expect that we will probably do so again in the near future.

EGoS, our "little sister" is, of course, very close too, since several important members are in both organizations. We have created a common task force to compare our organizations and to find out their similarities and differences, allowing us to avoid projects being 'forgotten' or doubling up on work. Our final goal must be to find the best way to cooperate or integrate both organizations.

As an expert in the field of the surveying profession in the member states of EU, do you believe that the time has come to start thinking of the »European surveyor«?

As I said before, I am wholly convinced that we are lacking visibility. When you know that 80% of national regulations are prepared in Brussels, you understand that you need to be recognized by the European bodies i.e. the Council, the Commission and the Parliament. We are suffering from the 'Baker Syndrome', as I referred to this problem during the 3rd CLGE Conference of the European Surveyor in Hanover. We all know in a general way what bakers do, but most bakers cannot describe what happens in the surveying profession, despite there being more or less the same number of bakers as surveyors. And, of course, we believe that we are as significant for society as they are.

It is essential, therefore, for us to become better known. A precondition is that we should get to know ourselves better too and, therefore, we've started an important project called: 'Dynamic Professional Knowledge Base'. This database will enable us to compare the profession in our 36 member states, to learn from each other and finally, to show the outside world what we stand for.

Can you evaluate the impact of the current economic crisis on the surveying profession? Is the current situation typical for all member states, or does it affect some countries and regions in different ways?

It is not easy for us to make such an analysis since we are lacking hard figures. Of course we are aware of general trends. Everybody knows that some Southern European Countries are badly hit; they are in our newspapers every day. In these countries, the situation is very difficult for surveyors too. Even if we can see that our profession as a whole suffers from the crisis, we also recognize that some countries, especially in Western Europe are threatened by another problem: a lack of young people choosing the profession. This decrease in the number of professionals means that in some parts of Europe, Surveyors are less troubled by falling work opportunities, since they are not numerous enough to handle all the work they get.

Can you put down three main problems that the European surveying community is facing at the moment?

Our strategic goals are tailored to the challenges and problems we are facing at the European and National level: our Council, as well as our national counterparts, should be more involved in the law-making process related to our profession. We should have a clear and homogeneous visibility in Europe and we should be able to regulate the influx of young Surveyors.

What plans does CLGE have for improving the current situation?

Too many people are focused on the crisis. We strongly believe that it isn't a good idea to get caught in this negative spiral. On the contrary, when times are hard, we have to invest in bold actions with the aim to improve the visibility of our community. We have to prepare ourselves for better times, improve our skills, train hard, know more, optimize our procedures, educate our staff, rethink our behaviour ... CLGE has the ambition to help its members to achieve these goals.

What is your evaluation of understanding and cooperation between members of CLGE and how do you evaluate the role of social networks in the field of mutual communication?

Surveyors are used to highly technical and precise work. They have to get better acquainted with softer skills: with the need for networking, with the advantage of patient negotiations and painstaking preparations for future successes, ... CLGE offers an ideal platform for leaders of the European and national surveying associations. With our new way of engaging, based on smaller working groups, and in spite of the language barrier that has hampered a lot of interaction in the past, I dare say that the cooperation within CLGE has improved a lot over the last few years. CLGE is now a genuine networking platform. We have the feeling that delegates attend the General Assemblies, because they real-



The full CLGE Executive board elected in October 2012 (from left to right: Vice President Pedro Ortiz (ES), Secretary General Michelle Camilleri (MT), President Jean-Yves Pirlot (BE), Vice President Leiv Bjarte Mjas (NO), Treasurer Dieter Seitz (DE), Vice President Danko Markovinović (HR).

ly do get added value out of it. The funny thing is that the most valuable output of CLGE is what our members are ready to invest in it. The interaction of many ideas – sometimes conflicting ideas – is really enriching us all.

CLGE has understood the power of social media and derived networks too. We've invested in these new approaches and have even appointed a special board member (and now Vice President) to take care of these aspects. We are convinced that such networks are the future. They help us to reduce our ecological footprint but, and there is a "but", nothing replaces the face to face contacts that we develop during our meetings. I see the social networks as an ideal tool to support our interaction, but not as a surrogate for traditional 'one-to-one' engagement.

What is CLGE planning for the near future? Maybe some new projects, meetings etc.?

We are fighting the baker syndrome: we raise our profile whenever we can. We apply our strategy as mentioned before: do not underinvest in your marketing when times are hard: do the opposite.

On the 22nd March 2013, we will celebrate the Second Day of the European Surveyor. The main ceremony is planned in Budapest. The European Commission supports us and will install the European Space Expo in the Hungarian capital city during that week exactly. Such initiatives provide us with the opportunity to improve the recognition of our profession. During this week, namely from 16th to 24th March, the whole of Europe will celebrate the Surveyor of the Year 2013. After Mercator in 2012, the CLGE General Assembly has decided to honour Galileo Galilee in 2013! I hope that a lot of member associations will make a success out of these festivities. In Budapest we will put a great deal of focus on the CLGE Students' Contest [read Geoinformatics 2012 8 and 2013 1].

Our cooperation with the European GNSS Agency will allow us to take part in the Space Expo in several other cities. We were looking for possibilities to demonstrate our profession to the general public and youngsters: here it is!

Moreover, we will pursue our efforts to build the Dynamic Professional Knowledge Base with the aim to improve the fluidity of professional access [read Geoinformatics 2012 7].

Whenever possible, CLGE will wave the flag; appealing to the public to entrust us with specific tasks. A recent example in that field is our www.euREAL.eu initiative (European Real Estate Area Label). We've launched a new code for the measurement of buildings. This code is now part of the INSPIRE Directive, annex III for buildings. As well as showing that it is in Europe's interest to get this normalization, it also shows that whenever these sorts of measurements have to be exact, one should only entrust a surveyor with the job. We are convinced that CLGE is creating new opportunities for its members. The members, of course, have to seize them: rather today than tomorrow.

You can ask questions to Mr. Pirlot by e-mail at jean-yves.pirlot@clge.eu, and you can follow him on twitter @CLGEPresident, as well as at the Council @_CLGE.
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