

The Geological Surveys

Land use and sustainable development in Europe

by **Richard Annells**, *former Secretary General, EuroGeoSurveys, Brussels*

When EuroGeoSurveys launched its operations in Brussels in January 1996, few European Union (EU) officials knew what a Geological Survey Organisation (GSO) was. Much work was needed to promote the capabilities and services of GSOs — not just to the Research directorate-general (DG) of the European Commission, but also the DGs for Industry, Environment, Information Society, and Regional Policy, as well as the European Environment Agency, EUROSTAT, and the European Parliament Committees for Research, Environment, Regional Policy and Development.

As declared in strategy papers, such as the BGS's *Foundations for a sustainable future*, the GSOs have much to contribute to European policy-making in the environmental, natural hazard, and natural resources issues which influence land-use planning and sustainable development. With this in view, between 1996 and 1999, EuroGeoSurveys set up eleven networks of GSO experts to define policy areas in which the Surveys could draft specific advice for the EU, and also to identify opportunities to submit EU projects. These networks are forming their own working contacts with the constantly changing groups of officials who manage EU programmes.

EuroGeoSurveys has continued its vigorous advocacy of the geoscientific viewpoint through meetings and presentations to the EU institutions, which now recognise it as a valuable information and advice provider, with members who can apply their expertise reliably and capably

to projects. This is an important achievement in the European arena — currently the biggest centre of lobbying outside Washington DC — where an estimated 10 000 interest groups compete for influence and funds from an annual EU budget of 93 billion Euros (£56 billion in 2000).

Guided by the Secretary General, the EuroGeoSurveys Directors adopt an annually updated forward plan of activities for the surveys to contribute to EU affairs. This plan is based on analysis of the EU's own published forward plan which is drafted annually in consultation with member states. As the EU's plan

tends not to define precise targets or deliverables the Secretary General, Research Assistant, and the networks carry out background work and consultation in order to draft a EuroGeoSurveys agenda which matches the needs of the GSOs and the EU.

To succeed in its mission, EuroGeoSurveys has to make its positions on environmental, resource, and natural hazard issues understood by new, non-geological, users and collaborators — a difficult challenge. Members thus need to reach outside the specialised, sometimes academic, circles where they know they are 'preaching to the converted' and in which they can win citations and research grants more readily. It means using plain, concise language to convince European, national, regional, and local politicians, industrialists, and officials of the value to society of geoscientific knowledge and the benefits and financial savings it can produce.

EuroGeoSurveys has presented projects, written opinions, and information presentations on topics such as geoinformation, pollution due to mining, sea floor geology, sustainable mineral development, sustainable city environments, and land-use planning that have been taken on board by the Environment, Enterprise, Regional Policy and Research Commissioners, Parliament, EUROSTAT and the European Environment Agency.

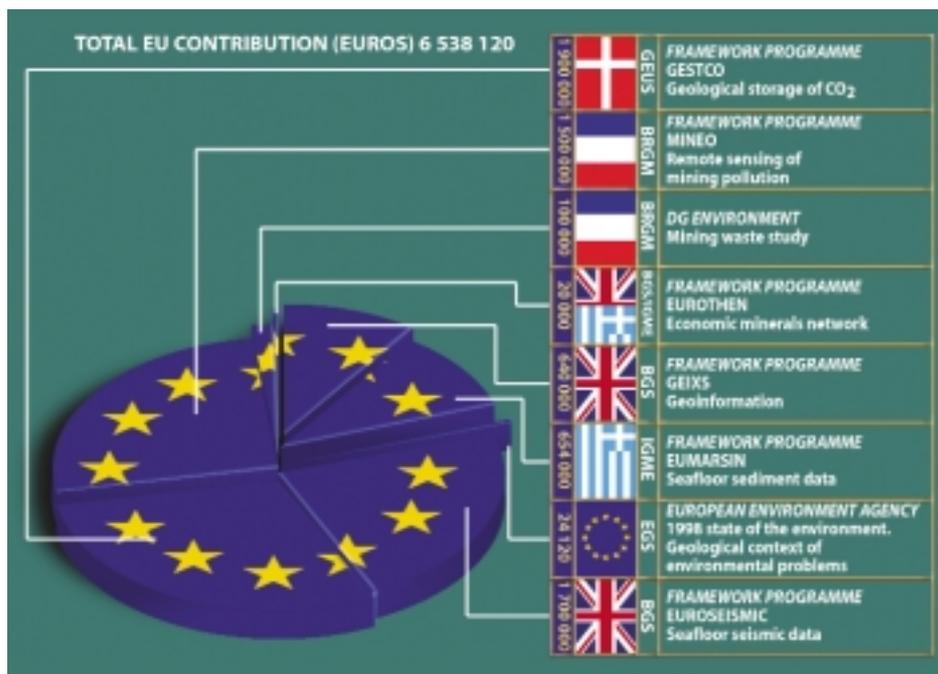


EuroGeoSurveys provides a window directly on to the European Commission.

Further success of this type will gain increased political support but GSO efforts must be persistent and simply stated if they are to stay relevant, because the EU agenda moves on quickly and political memory spans are short. Presentations to the offices (cabinets) of individual Commissioners or Directors General should be booked several weeks ahead, last less than five minutes, and fit on to two sheets of A4. These efforts need to be backed up to national governments by individual GSO Directors.

The eighteen EuroGeoSurveys member GSOs are ahead of mainstream EU policy thinking in emphasising the importance of applying geoscience to critical long-term issues. These have included the physical infrastructure of cities, the use of 'ancient' geoinformation evidence to balance the interpretation of climate variability, the influence of the geochemical environment on health, the practical use of renewable energy resources such as natural Earth heat, and the importance of geoinformation banks to the countries of the developing world. These opportunities to fill gaps in public understanding are only some of the obvious new challenges for EuroGeoSurveys.

While the GSOs continue to be successful research performers in the EU Research and Development Framework Programmes (*see chart*), other, more applied, EU programmes offer many new opportunities for the GSOs to shape future policy and earn EU funds. The European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) are a prime opportunity area for EuroGeoSurveys members because they are the means by which the EU will implement the environmental and land use parts of sweeping new rural and urban policies over the next decade. For example, the 6th Environment Action Programme and the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). The ERDF is a good means for EuroGeoSurveys members to earn funds through 'home' regional and local governments and thus to improve their chances of being nominated by national governments as the preferred national lead on environmental issues in key European agencies. Some European GSOs have already achieved such nominations: for example, the Geological Survey of Finland will play a leading role in the new European Topic Centre



Major corporate EuroGeoSurveys projects (1997–2001).

for Terrestrial Environment being set up by the European Environment Agency for the period 2001 to 2005.

The GSOs of the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary, and Poland will join EuroGeoSurveys within the next year, bringing huge environmental data-sets into the geoinformation networks and increasing the ability to apply expertise to transcontinental problems. Although the European Commission realises the urgent need for a consistent approach to environmental legislation across greater Europe it still lacks the standardised environmental databases on which such legislation needs to be founded. It is therefore likely that future EuroGeoSurveys networks will be multidisciplinary, 'horizontal' groups focused on issues such as the ESDP, the 6th Environmental Action Plan and the Sustainable Development Directive, as well as the Framework Programme and European Research Area issues.

Cooperation by members to date on 'corporate' EuroGeoSurveys projects has achieved promising revenues for a new organisation. Estimates for 2000 showed that member Survey efforts together contributed to EuroGeoSurveys activities an extra sum almost equal to the total annual subscription of 324 000

Euros, making the real annual budget about 650 000 Euros, or 3.25 million Euros over the five years from 1996 to 2001. Thus the 6.54 million Euros earned from the EU represent a gain of about 2.3:1 over investment. The rate of success for targeted corporate EuroGeoSurveys bids during the same period was one in two, a good result if compared to the European Commission's current estimate of one in twelve for Framework Programme bids. Further details can be found on the Web at www.eurogeosurveys.org.

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Dick Annells joined the Overseas Division of the Institute of Geological Sciences (now renamed BGS) in 1972 and worked in geological mapping and mineral exploration in Iran, Bolivia, Colombia, Egypt, Oman, and Laos. After directing the UK Research Councils European office in Brussels (1993–95) he was seconded to Brussels by the BGS as Secretary General of EuroGeoSurveys from 1996 to April 2001.