Editorial: On the 20th Anniversary of CEPIS — Niko Schlamberger

Monograph - 20 Years of CEPIS: Informatics in Europe today and tomorrow (published jointly with Novática*)

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* This monograph will be also published in Spanish (full version printed; summary, abstracts, and some articles online) by Novática, journal of the Spanish CEPIS society ATI (Asociación de Técnicos de Informática) at <http://www.ati.es/novatica/>. 
1992-1993: No Task Will Be Avoided merely because it is Impossible!

Maurice S. Elzas

Past President of the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS), Maurice S. Elzas (1992-1993) discusses the exciting Dynamite Delors Commission in which CEPIS participated in European Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) strategy, and gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the friendships and adventures at CEPIS Council meetings.

Keywords: Dynamite Delors, European ICT Strategy, Uniform Informatics Curriculum.

I am really pleased and honoured to be asked by the Executive Committee of CEPIS to write a short contribution to this anniversary edition of UPGRADE. As can be read in Peta Walmisley’s excellent short history of our Council, our origins hail back to a chance meeting of European Informatics Societies Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Brazil at the end of the eighties.

At the initial meeting in London, on invitation by the British Computer Society (BCS), we (the participants) enthusiastically agreed on the way forward: by creating some kind of federation of European informatics professional societies, in order to benefit our membership, create lasting bonds of cooperation, and form a channel of truly professional opinion towards the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament.

Notwithstanding this rationale, the success of this kind of venture more often than not depends on the personal "chemistry" between the participants, and I must say that our "concoction" was apparently the right formula. Soon we all became good friends, looking forward to every next meeting for the opportunity to work together again.

That is not to say that our group always operated without any friction. This was the case in the early days when countries tended to jockey for a better position among peers. In particular, the tension between the "believers" from the continent and the "sceptics" from the British Isles could be clearly felt in general European negotiations as well as in CEPIS. Nevertheless, we were friends for life (not only us, of course, but especially the societies we represented).

Then, as now, our main concern was how CEPIS could be of value to the membership of our societies and the European Union at the same time.

I personally felt it was a great privilege and honour to be elected as the first formal president of CEPIS in Seville (Spain) in 1991.

These were exciting times as Jacques Delors’ (called Dynamite Delors by some) European Commission started producing more and more reports and regulations that influenced the core of our products and profession. We simply could not stand aside and let it all happen.

A number of well-received reports originated from our group and, later on, we set up an Advisory Panel (which I was asked to moderate) to provide CEPIS and Europe with inputs for a successful European ICT strategy. We were extremely happy to enlist the help of luminaries such as Philippe Dreyfus (French founder and board member of Cap-Gemini-Sogetti and "inventor" of the word informatique that later became "our" informatics), Nigel Horn (senior partner of KPMG, United Kingdom), Leo Groosman (former director of Philips Computer Industry, The Netherlands) and Albrecht Blaser (former director of IBM Research Deutschland, Germany). The venture culminated in a European ICT Strategy Workshop in Amsterdam (The Netherlands) in 1994 that provided sound advice to the EC on the way forward.

Looking back: I must admit that our (CEPIS) strategic impact has been less than we expected. But I cannot help be proud of some other CEPIS achievements (mainly realized by my successors) such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and the European Certification of Informatics Professionals (EUCIP).

Our profession has changed mightily since the early nineties: the general acceptance of personal computers (PCs), the World Wide Web, and countless digital gadgets

has created the illusion that most (educated) Europeans see themselves as computer experts, more aware of the daily digital needs than the members of our societies who, alas far too often, are unfairly regarded as "mainly nerds".

If we engage in some soul searching we must, however, admit that parts of our profession have not matured enough yet. While in the early nineties we were forced to consider about 80% of our major business IT projects to have failed in some way, we see today that this figure has been reduced to about 60%. Still far too high, but a sizeable improvement due to increased awareness amongst our professionals. We will never reach 0%, but let us go forward and bring down this figure bit by bit and we will turn into respected craftsmen rather than "nerds".

Might this not give rise, within CEPIS, to the creation of a Uniform Informatics Curriculum for the whole of Europe?

I also believe that a lot of good work can still be done by CEPIS in the area of Intellectual Property Rights, funding possibilities of IT start-ups and ICT research, and, last but not least, Ethical guidelines for the ICT professional.

In the invitation for this contribution, I was asked to provide CEPIS pictures from the past. Unfortunately, like a true IT professional, the only things I can find must be on disc, and at the time of my presidency we did not have digital cameras yet...

Nevertheless I hold vivid memories of CEPIS events in my mind, and it might be an idea to share them with you. I have been in Munich (Germany) several times on CEPIS missions during my presidency, and on each occasion we were invited to a splendid operatic performance. I will never forget the quality and the splendour of Mozart’s Magic Flute or the moving performance of Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess.

I am sure Wolter Koops (the CEO of NGI at that time) will never forget our return trip from the Council Meeting in Munich. We had an appointment immediately after lunch in Amsterdam and left Munich at 8 am. Luckily I had had rally driving experience in my youth!

The picture I have in my mind of our Council meeting in Tampere (Finland), in May 1992 is the one of ourselves: Very Important Persons (VIPs) stark naked in the sauna together. There is nothing like it to enhance tolerance and cooperation!

Finally, dear Niels Hoeg who insisted that we call to him first and let him recommend the route before starting on our trip through Norway. Many roads were still covered with snow and ice in May 1995 and he wanted to make absolutely sure we were safe. That also is how CEPIS also works, at the human level.

I have also been asked to mention what I have done since CEPIS. Well, a lot of consultancy and academic work. I am an emeritus now, but still go to my university office once a week. I also tend to busy myself with charitable causes, for which I had too little time during my professional life.

I endeavour to stay active in ICT (I learned Linux recently, having installed Ubuntu on one of my machines). My main professional achievement of the last couple of years, however, is a control system through which I can control almost everything in our holiday cottage remotely from my laptop. Most hardware and software has been self-made. According to my wife it is the most practical thing I have done in my professional life.

All in all I still tend to live by the motto that hung in the cabin of our sailing boat:

"No task will be avoided merely because it is impossible!"

With my very best wishes for a growing and lasting CEPIS.