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- **Novática**, journal from the Spanish CEPIS society ATI
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(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/>>.

## 1995-1997: ECDL Take-off Years

Giulio Occhini

*Past President of the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS), Giulio Occhini (1995-1997) describes the continued development of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and relations with the European Commission (EC) during his term.*

**Keywords:** Barroso, ECDL, EEC, European Commission, Digital Literacy, Information Society.

It came as an absolute and unexpected surprise to me when Jaakko Kivinen, the then CEPIS President, informed me that I had been elected by the Council as his successor.

In the middle of the 90s I worked for a United States computer firm and I did not usually charge the company for the costs of my CEPIS involvement. On the other hand, AICA, the Italian Computer Society which I represented in CEPIS, was in no position to subsidize me, so, I funded my CEPIS missions out of my own pocket.

I therefore decided, on balance, not to attend the Council which elected me, because I thought that most of the time would be dedicated to ballots and, in my opinion, I was only marginally involved. I had actually agreed to my candidature going forward mainly to please my friends at AFCET, the French Computer Society which no longer exists.

The above comments explain why I was elected *in absentia* and why, at the start of my presidency, I tried to classify all the issues handled by CEPIS and to involve my colleagues in the management of such issues. The first meeting I remember was a little messy but the discussion was highly productive in terms of planning and carrying out the future work.

In this respect, I'd like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to Peta Walmisley, CEPIS's Secretary, who was a great help to me throughout all my term.

The key challenge faced by CEPIS at that time was the start-up of the ECDL project, brilliantly lead by Nils Hoeg from Norway and Dudley Dolan from Ireland.

The Syllabus and the Question Test Base (QTB) were in good shape but I quickly realized that what we really needed for the project to take off was an explicit endorsement by European Institutions.

As CEPIS President, I asked for a meeting with the Director General of the European Economic Community (EEC) Industry Directorate General (DG) III, Mr. Stefano Micossi, and he very kindly accepted. So, we met on a sunny Saturday morning in September 1995, at his office in Brussels (Belgium).

There were two messages that I stressed to the many EEC officers attending the meeting:

1) That any European initiative towards the Informa-

### Author

**Giulio Occhini** graduated in Physics from the University of Milan (Italy), and began his career at the National Research Council (CNR) where he was involved in pioneering work on finite element methods to solve fluidodynamics problems. During the 1960s, several reports co-authored by Giulio on this topic were published internationally. During his career at CNR, Giulio had the opportunity to exploit the capabilities of the first digital computers available in Italy at that time, and this was his passport into the Information Technologies (IT) industry. Since then, he has held technical and managerial positions in several areas (Engineering, Product Planning, Application Development and Marketing) and in various companies (Olivetti, General Electric and Honeywell). Giulio also maintains close relationships with the academic world. He served as Professor of Information Systems at the University of Pavia (Italy), and still cooperates with the Business School of Milan (Bocconi University) and the Research Consortium of Milan Polytechnic (MIP). In AICA (the Italian Computer Association), Giulio has served as head of the Milan branch, and National President from 1989-1991 and 2001-2003. He is currently Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for AICA. In CEPIS, Giulio acted as President during the mid 90s, the period during which the ECDL program was finalized and introduced in Europe. Giulio is also member of the ECDL Foundation Board and has authored (and co-authored) many technical papers and several books on Informatics, its applications, and its impact on economy. <g.occhini@aicanet.it>.

tion Society should provide, as a prerequisite for success, an adequate level of digital literacy of European citizens.

2) That ECDL was potentially a reliable programme mainly because it was backed by the most important European Computer Societies gathered together in CEPIS.

The result of the discussion was extremely positive and a few days later I received a formal letter from Mr. Micossi confirming the EEC's interest in the ECDL proposal and assigning his delegate, Mr. Catinat, to the task of coordinating the EEC-CEPIS collaboration for raising funds.

This was exactly what we needed to start the fire.

In the CEPIS archives there is still a picture of the signing of the 1<sup>st</sup> EEC contract, with myself and the two project leaders.

Looking back on those old times, I have to admit that the European Institutions demonstrated, on that occasion, a

remarkable long-term vision which the current President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso<sup>1</sup>, proudly recalled recently when he was awarded the 9 millionth ECDL Skills Card.

I can recall other episodes of my CEPIS term, but in retrospect the ECDL programme start-up was certainly the most relevant, considering the consequences.

In conclusion, to be the CEPIS President in that critical period was for me a really challenging and exciting experience. My wish, in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of its foundation, is that CEPIS soon gets another opportunity to again take a leading role in raising the informatics knowledge of European citizens.

This time, in my opinion, IT professionalism in Europe should be the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> José Manuel Durão Barroso, 11th President of the European Commission. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durao\\_Barroso](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durao_Barroso)>.