

CEPIS – Personal reflections on the formative years

by Peta Walmisley, Secretary 1988-2000

Good afternoon.

Once upon a time (all good stories begin this way!) there was an organisation known as the European Cooperation in Informatics (ECI), but by 1987 it had not proved to be very successful, especially as the members (from France, Germany, Italy and the UK) had agreed only to meet if there was something worth discussing!

Pic 1 - Rio

Representatives of these members, however, were among delegates to an international conference organised by SUSECU - the Brazilian IT User Association - in Rio in 1987. They decided to cooperate in Europe, in anticipation of the Open Market from 1992. As a consequence an informal meeting of societies in CEC countries was set up in November 1988 in London (hosted by BCS) to see if there was potential value in establishing pan-European working links.

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The invitation went to 13 societies, of which 10 attended (and in fact some countries were later represented by other societies.) I acted as Secretary and continued as Secretary until September 2000, when a full-time Chief Executive was appointed and the offices moved to Frankfurt.

Some of these societies were 'professional bodies', in that members or groups of members were qualified by experience or examination, most were 'learned societies' and some were also the national members of IFIP.

Pic 2 - Founders

This first meeting was very successful and it was agreed that the participants would continue to meet on a six monthly basis and that Task Forces to address specific issues would be set up.

At the second meeting, in Amsterdam in May 1989 (hosted by NGI), work plans and task assignments were agreed. It was also decided that similar professional organisations from EFTA should be invited to join the group.

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In September 1989, the enlarged group met in Paris (hosted by AFCET), and the decision was taken to formalise the group as the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies - CEPIS.

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It was also decided to notify the European Commission of the formation and mission of CEPIS.

By the fourth meeting, held in Athens in April 1990 (hosted by the Greek Computer Society), four Task Forces were under way: Professional Development and Qualifications, Technical Cooperation, Computer Misuse, and Social Issues. It was also decided that it was time for a formal exchange of views with the European Commission.

Pic 3 - Gavin

At this time, International Computers Limited (ICL) seconded Gavin Kirkpatrick to work on 'Programme Europe' for the BCS. Gavin was a committed European, who was also passionate about Professional Qualifications and he was not only appointed the first Chairman of the Professional Development and Qualifications Task Force, he also led the work on drafting the constitution – which was initially approved by CEPIS in English, since the Commission, at a meeting in September 1990, advised that business should be conducted in English (with which all members, apart from France, were happy!). It also, however, recommended that CEPIS should be registered in the Netherlands, where it would be able to have commercial subsidiaries, which involved considerable work in translating the constitution from English to Dutch to English!

The fifth meeting, held in Copenhagen in October 1990 (hosted by Dansk Dataforening), considered the provisional draft constitution and reached a basic consensus on all major issues.

Pic 4 - Seville

CEPIS began to operate as a formally constituted body during 1991. At the meeting in April in Seville (hosted by FESI), all the societies, which had been active in earlier Council meetings, adopted the CEPIS constitution and ratified its provisions. (FBVI, although officially a signatory to the constitution, never thereafter participated in CEPIS, until Syl Bogaerts attended the Founders' Luncheon on 6 November 1998.) Membership was extended to include Hungary, and Poland became the first Associate Member. In addition, Professor ir Maurice Elzas was elected the first President of CEPIS.

Pic 5 – Exec93

At the meeting of the Council in Munich in October 1991 (hosted by GI), an Executive team consisting of the President, past Chairman, three Vice Presidents, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer was elected.

Membership was extended to include Cyprus. Poland became a full member in 1993, Sweden in 1994 and Iceland, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovenia in 1998. In 1994 the Eurographics Association became an Affiliate member, but resigned in 1997.

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Meetings continued to be hosted by member societies and by the time I ceased being Secretary, membership had grown to include some 'Eastern bloc' countries, as well as the other Baltic states (Estonia and

Latvia) and Turkey. France proved to be a continuing problem, as there was no strong society in that country.

During the first year of operation CEPIS began to establish good links with the European Commission. The CEPIS paper 'The way forward' was discussed with members of DG XIII and others, and this opened up potential avenues for CEPIS contributions. This continued, with considerable support, as well as funding, for a number of CEPIS initiatives, most notably ECDL and EUCIPS. CEPIS responded to a number of CEC strategy and discussion papers over the years.

Pic 6 - Vienna

A statement of understanding between CEPIS and IFIP (the International Federation for Information Processing) was signed at a joint meeting in Vienna in March 1993 and CEPIS became an Affiliate member of IFIP in 1994.

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By 1994 it had approved a strategy and plan for 1994-97, with the Objectives shown on the slide.

A further strategy was agreed in 1995 for 1996-98, when Council Regulations, to support the Constitution, were also produced; they were revised in 1997 and 1999.

Pic 7 - Piet

In October 1998, Piet van der Kamp, as Web Editor-in-Chief, formed the Web Task Force to supervise and develop an attractive website for CEPIS. Francois-Louis Nicolet initiated the online journal, UPGRADE.

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CEPIS, from its inception, was an association of like-minded individuals, who had the common good of the informatics profession and their national societies at heart. It also became a family, where the meetings were, on the whole, friendly and provided a chance to relax and sample the hospitality of the host society, as well as conducting the formal part. I remember:

- visiting the site of Expo 92 in Seville;

Pic 8 – Marie-France Kalogera

- Marie-France Kalogera learning to drink beer in Munich;
- being left at the Sauna house in the woods in Tampere;
- Walter Grafendorfer organising his choir to sing for the combined meeting with IFIP in Vienna;

Pic 9 - Dancing

- dancing in Budapest and again in Nicosia - on the tables;
- the gold taps in the bathrooms in the hotel in Krakow;

Pic 10 - Singing

- the Executive Committee having a great evening of singing with Jaakko and Hilkke Kivinen at home in Helsinki;
- Jan Willem Kradolfer leaving his jacket in the restaurant with an uncut diamond in the pocket – and presenting it to his wife in the brown paper wrapping - she was not amused!

Pic 11 - Giorgio

- Getting Giorgio Sacerdoti onto a Thames boat in his wheelchair;

Pic 12 – Founders’ lunch

- The Founders’ Lunch in London in 1998;
- having sunshine at 11.30 at night in Talinn;

Pic 13 - Conniston

- the Executive Committee’s trip on a steam launch on Conniston Water;
- Venice in the rain,

as well as touring most of the other cities we visited. It always seemed to me sensible to stay an extra day to see more of the place – we might as well have been in an airport hotel otherwise.

Pic 14 - London

I remember my time as Secretary with pride, as well as maintaining strong friendships with a number of my fellow founders. I am pleased to

see how well CEPIS has progressed in its first 20 years and wish it good fortune for the next 20 years and more.