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European Commission

GEO Ministerial Summit 2010
"Observe, Share, Inform"

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Introduction

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,,

I would sincerely like to thank Minister Wan once again as well as our Chinese hosts for the excellent organisation of this GEO Ministerial Summit here in Beijing. It has been a great success.

As you are aware, the European Commission has been a supporter of the GEO initiative since the beginning. We wish to continue to contribute to GEO in the future so that the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) can be implemented. We believe that the GEO initiative is essential for the implementation of a number of European Union policies including environment, development, innovation, research and finally, space policy. .

GEOSS and European space policy.

Allow me to begin with space policy. This is one of my responsibilities as Vice-President of the European Commission.

European states already have several decades experience in the space domain through their national space agencies and through intergovernmental agencies such as E.S.A. and Eumetsat. The recent Treaty of Lisbon recognises the space domain as an area of European Union competence and pays particular attention to space applications such as satellite navigation and earth observation.

I would particularly like to underline the importance for Europe of the earth observation programme GMES where we are working closely with the European Space Agency in order to develop the infrastructure necessary for its implementation. This space infrastructure will soon begin its deployment, allowing mapping of the continents, effective ocean surface monitoring as well as the characterisation of the components of our atmosphere.

In this domain, investment and the know-how necessary to ensure global satellite cover of our planet are beyond the individual resources of a single country. In this context, the GEO initiative brings together 85 countries and is a unique platform for collaboration. It allows us to pool our resources.

One of the objectives of GMES is to have a policy of open access to GMES data in accordance with the GEO data-sharing principles.

Europe also has other successful examples of pooling of space resources in the earth observation domain..

Here, I would like to mention the contribution of ESA in the observation of the earth's physical parameters through its scientific missions and for the supply of Essential Climate Variables from its archives which should permit improved understanding of climatic phenomena in the years to come. We should not forget the contribution of EUMETSAT which looks after the ocean and atmospheric observation system for meteorology and climate.

All of these examples demonstrate an important European contribution to the implementation of the GEOSS in the future.

GEOSS and the European research policy.

I would now like to turn to the European Union research policy and the potential of this policy for GEO. The European Commission initially perceived GEO as a fantastic platform for international collaboration in the domain of research and in particular, in the area of environmental research.

Consequently, GEO was included in the Seventh Framework Programme for Research which has resulted in an important number of research projects contributing to the development of the GEOSS being funded. These projects contribute both to providing fundamental elements for the implementation of the GEOSS and to supporting the European scientific community with the integration of fundamental European elements into world systems.

Participation in European research projects is not limited to European teams but is open to the rest of the world. This is of particular benefit within the context of the GEO initiative. As we are in China, I would like to particularly mention the projects CEOP-AEGIS and YEOS in the areas of hydrometeorology and operational oceanography where European and Asian partners work together with significant participation by Chinese institutes and research centres.

The Community Framework Programme for Research has proven to be an excellent tool for international research cooperation allowing European researchers as well as those from third countries to become familiar with GEO and to become involved with the development of the GEOSS.

GEOSS and the European innovation policy.

GEO also has a role to play in European innovation policy.

On the initiative of my colleague, Commissioner Mrs. Geoghegan-Quinn, the European Commission presented its 'Innovation Union' initiative on 6 October this year. This is a strategic approach to the European economy supported at the highest political level.

Innovation is being promoted by the Commission as the key to durable growth and a greener economy. The 'Innovation Union' will concentrate European efforts (and its cooperation with third countries) on challenges such as climate change, food and energy security, health and the ageing population.

I believe therefore that the 'Innovation Union' policy presents an opportunity for players in the earth observation sector. Many promising cutting-edge technologies are involved in the sector including those of space, information, communication, new earth measurement and observation systems as well as nanotechnologies.

These challenges are **naturally** included in the GEO initiative.

GEOSS and European development policy

At this point in my speech, I would like to draw your attention to the importance which the European Union attaches to its development policy. and the necessity of making tools such as GEOSS available to developing countries. At the Ministerial Summit in Cape Town in 2007 Commissioner **Janez Potočnik** **declared:** "*The two domains of greatest importance for the future of GEOSS are 'data-sharing' and 'capacity building', in particular in relation to developing countries*". I have already mentioned data-sharing but I would also like to assure you that the Commission is actively engaged in the development of earth observation capacities in a number of developing countries.

Thanks to the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, activities in this area are assured.

I would like to mention the DevCoCast and AEGOS projects which allow a wide variety of users in developing countries to access data crucial to the management of their environment and natural resources.

The GMES services could also support African information needs with a view to stimulating a similar programme in Africa managed by our African colleagues.

GEOSS and European Environment policy

Finally I would like to conclude my examination of European policies related to GEO with the environment policy.

GEOSS can make a significant contribution to the improvement in our understanding and our capacity to react. It is directly applicable to the global challenges such as desertification and food security, biodiversity loss and climate change where clear and precise information are vital in order to find appropriate solutions.

As for every complete earth observation system, GEOSS must be based on a balanced collection of spatial and in-situ information. The European Environment Agency (EEA) plays a strategic coordinating role for Europe as regards the GMES initiative.

The twentieth anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit is approaching and our common goal is to achieve sustainable development in the spirit of the Rio Declaration. This is at the centre of the environment policy of the European Union. In this context GEOSS can contribute to the provision of the information necessary for a rational use of limited resources.

The GEO initiative is consistent with the approach of the European Union to growth. It combines important innovation potential with the development of green growth which is based on the reduction in carbon emissions and the use of renewable energy.

In this context, the principle of free data sharing and the establishment of norms and standards allowing easier access and exchange are of paramount importance. The European Commission already actively supports this development through its INSPIRE Directive.

Concluding remarks

Ladies and gentlemen I am certain that the adoption here of the Data Sharing Action Plan by the 85 countries is the beginning of a new era of international cooperation in earth observation.

This Plan should facilitate access to earth observation data in the coming years by those which do not yet have access to this information and permit improved management of their environment and natural resources.

This plan should also allow access to global information of fundamental importance to the understanding of climate systems and to the protection of biodiversity.

I am also delighted that the Beijing Declaration has been adopted. This will allow the structured development of GEO over the coming years.

I think that the positive outcome of our meeting here on the site of the 2008 Olympic Games allows us to leave reassured about the future of GEO which by 2015 may hope to win a gold medal for the implementation of GEOSS.