



The Association of Geological Surveys of the European Union
(EuroGeoSurveys)
in their position as
custodians to their national natural resources
and
guardians of their terrestrial environment
present their contribution

Promoting sustainable industrial development in the EU Minerals Industry, Outlining the contribution and the Role of EuroGeoSurveys

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Introduction

1. The concept of sustainable development resting on the three pillars of economics, environment and social development has become an increasingly important factor in the European mining sector and a major influence on the related policies of the European Commission. This paper refers to the DG Enterprise Issues Paper (30.11.99), the Background Document (25.11.99) and discussions at the Raw Materials Supply Group Meeting of 10 December 1999.

The present situation

2. Although the modern extractive industry (post 1960s) does not embrace the most polluting sectors of industry, it is viewed with a tarnished image by the media and public opinion. However, this image is mostly unjust and warped. Like any other industry, some types of mining activity may affect sectors such as tourism and culture detrimentally if the profitability of these sectors at European level depends on the preservation of high quality scenic and heritage resources. But it is also true that the approval, implementation and development of recent European Communities environmental Directives has increasingly limited the access of industry to essential geological resources, which is disadvantageous because the geographical location of a geological deposit of high economic value is controlled by natural Earth processes and can not be chosen.

3. With regard to the sustainable development of the European mining sector, EuroGeoSurveys feels that the above factors have provoked a disequilibrium in favour of the environment pillar, which has forcibly increased the production costs even for those industries which have taken technological steps to minimise their environmental impact. This fact, associated with the recent slump of the metals market, has further accentuated the disequilibrium in the economics pillar (competitiveness) and has at times also threatened the social development pillar since in many places in Europe the mining sector is the only local employer.

The role of the European Geological Surveys

4. EuroGeoSurveys believes that its member European Geological Survey organisations (GSOs) must play a pivotal role in the three pillars which support sustainable development because the GSOs meet the following criteria:

- Their staff have a high level of scientific competence and are objective and publicly accountable ;
- They possess publicly accessible archived knowledge of geological and mining issues as well as the related environmental problems which in some cases has been accumulated and progressively updated over a century of continuous activity: this makes the GSOs a unique and impartial resource of information and knowledge;
- The archiving, organisation and management of GSO geological information corresponds to a very large dataset which has been progressively digitised and integrated in Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and can now be accessed on the Internet;
- The GSOs have good technical and professional relations with industrial companies in the sector, based on the objective technical support which they provide or which has been derived from the GSOs' competencies;

- The GSOs have good international relations with similar GSOs and universities and mineral sector companies in countries that are in the forefront of mineral production - such as the USA, Canada, Australia, China and Russia;
- The GSOs have good knowledge of mining and environmental legislation and the accompanying conception and application of such legislation.

The contribution of EuroGeoSurveys

5. The EuroGeoSurveys member organisations are therefore well qualified to intervene in various activities related with the mining sector with the objective of sustaining the already mentioned pivotal role and know-how itemised above, while also recognising that this intervention must be aimed in a practical way for the user groups once such groups have been correctly identified:

- Actions related to the exploration, evaluation and economic valuation of European mineral resources;
- Actions related to the correct diagnosis of environmental problems related to abandoned mines and their recuperation;
- Actions related to land use planning from the mining industry perspective;
- Awareness actions and technical support for the extractive industry in order to enable the adoption of "green" mining measures;
- Actions related to promoting mining tourism in a perspective of preservation, publicity and cultural valuation of assets as well as the environmental recuperation of the sites;
- Actions which contribute to achieving equilibrium of the triangle competitiveness, environment, social development at the mining and environmental legislation level.

A way forward

6. EuroGeoSurveys believes that a good practical application of these concepts will result from the development of a European Metals and Minerals Mining Institute, to be established as a virtual research and development institute which will link researchers and institutions from the European Union and Central and Eastern Europe. The creation of this type of dedicated network will help to achieve within the short to medium term a critical mass of experts capable of tackling three projects of the highest social relevance for the European Union and indeed the accession candidate countries:

- (a) The integration of considerations in order to plan for balanced mineral supply for the European Union into the European Community's policy on land-use, as laid down in the European Spatial Development Perspective adopted by the Council of Ministers in February 1999;
- (b) The development of a European Inventory of abandoned mine sites

and an assessment tool for establishing a priority list (controlled by environmental risk considerations) for remediation work, and the creation of an expert advice panel and examples of Best Available Technologies (BAT) for remediation;

(c) The analysis of the environment, health and safety management systems which are currently available for the SMEs at work in the sector, the development of a model and the discussion of this model with SMEs.

For further information

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