

Session 2

European Commission statement on GEO-GEOSS achievements.

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On behalf of the GEO co-chairs, I first would like to express my sincere thanks to State Secretary Oberle and our Swiss hosts for their generosity in holding and organising this Ministerial Summit.

Building upon five very successful Earth Observation Summits in Washington, Tokyo, Brussels, Cape Town and Beijing, this meeting will reach a crucial milestone in the history of GEO and GEOSS; no less than the renewal of GEO through 2025!

I have been personally committed to GEO for quite some time because I strongly believe in the unique voluntary character of our intergovernmental partnership, as well as in the GEOSS data sharing principles that constitute the backbone of our work. If you do not recognise me, maybe it is because I have changed my hat. In 2005, in my former role as European Commissioner for Science and Research, I hosted the Third Earth Observation Summit in Brussels, where we endorsed the GEOSS 10-year implementation plan and established GEO. Later, I had the privilege to participate in the 2007 GEO Ministerial Summit in Cape Town, South Africa. I also had the opportunity to personally promote GEO activities and the implementation of GEOSS at the GEO side event organised by the government of Japan at the Rio+20 Summit on Sustainable Development last year.

Today, as European Commissioner for Environment, I see even more acutely the vital importance of timely, accurate information about our changing environment. The 7th Environment Action Programme of the European Union till 2020 recognises that priority should be given to improving our knowledge and evidence base for a better implementation of environmental policy. The GEOSS vision of a universal system of systems remains thus fully relevant today.

I am very pleased to keep championing GEO together with the other Co-Chairs, and I am honoured to chair today's first session which is dedicated to GEO achievements, benefits and future perspectives.

Today, we can all be proud of the GEOSS achievements since the first GEO Summit in Washington ten years ago. Let me give few examples that come to my mind.

Since the beginning of its history, the GEO family has markedly expanded; demonstrating the wider appeal of its vision. Actually, it has doubled its membership to include 90 governments, the European Commission and 67 participating organisations. This wide membership and the effective governance which has been progressively elaborated have shown to be key assets to increase collaboration and coordination in Earth observation.

GEOSS has also reached the tipping point where users are beginning to reap the real benefits of GEOSS data and information.

It is now more than 65 million GEOSS resources, being individual images, data records, documents and maps, that can be discovered on the web by any user. And the bulk of

these resources are openly accessible at no more than the cost of reproduction or distribution.

The GEOSS global network for data broadcasting via telecommunication satellites, called GEONETCast, has also been demonstrated to be an efficient alternative to provide GEOSS data for sound environmental decision making in critical areas, especially where users do not benefit from satisfactory web connections.

GEO has been very influential in advocating full and open access to Earth observation data worldwide. The Landsat free and open data policy of 2008 has revolutionised the use of decades of Landsat data. Along the same lines, the recent European Commission Regulation on Copernicus, is another step towards the free, full and open dissemination of Copernicus dedicated data and Copernicus service information. I also would like to note the decisive step recently made by France toward providing open access to non-commercial use of 27 years of satellites images from the SPOT family. Other trends of opening data bases are also observed in Asia and other parts of the world. I am certain that these achievements are – and will be – spurring open innovation, new science and applications.

GEO has also triggered new communities of practice and fostered substantial multilateral collaboration to tackle societal challenges related to the environment. A variety of international initiatives, often supported with EU funding, have been started under the GEO banner in order to collect and process essential datasets, identify Earth observation gaps and facilitate the development of associated services.

Many initiatives come to my mind such as the GEO Global Land Cover initiative which brings expertise and coordination of land cover monitoring activities around the globe. Typical deliveries include global or regional land cover benchmark datasets at high spatial resolutions for land use planning and environmental monitoring.

GEOBON is good example of governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations joining force to help implementing the international Convention on Biological Diversity. They collaborate to improve terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity observations globally and make their essential data and forecasts more readily accessible.

The Global Forest Observation Initiative is another example of international collaboration to meet international convention goals, this time those of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Methods involving ground and satellite data are documented and capacities progressively deployed to get a worldwide coverage capability to estimate changes in Carbon stocks and report on forest areas and greenhouse gas emission.

The potential of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems should be considered as well in the context of its benefit for the global economy. I would like to indicate here two avenues: 1st the benefit that can be realised by the business sector from full and open access to Earth Observation Datasets, and 2nd the innovation necessary for implementing such an ambitious approach, that would imply more involvement of the private sector.

Full consideration should be given to the implementation of not only global but also of regional

GEO initiatives. I would see value in developing a strategy to assist countries and regions, also in the developing world, to increase their Earth observation capacity. Regional nodes of GEOSS can be effective to coordinate and catalyse GEOSS activities.

GEO should explore options for a strengthened secretariat necessary to support the implementation of GEOSS. One option could be to extend the current secretariat with a regionally distributed secretariat component focussing on the implementation of regional GEOSS initiatives and primarily funded from in-kind local or regional contributions. It means that the mandate and location of the GEO Secretariat could be revised during the preparatory step for GEO post-2015.

When assessing inter-relations within the current working structure based on nine societal challenges, GEO should seek to better align with the Sustainable Development Goals advocated in the Rio +20 Conference outcome document and link this with the post 2015 development agenda. A horizontal activity in relation to natural resources efficiency could be further explored.

More attention should be paid to in situ data including from citizens' observatories, social networks and socio-economic data, etc.

The GEOSS Information System should also further consider reinforcing access to processing capacities also in the context of treating 'big data', and modelling capabilities, so as to strengthen "decision support" from the global to at least the continental scale, and ideally to the near national scale.

Sustaining the various GEO global and regional initiatives, as well as maintaining and progressively upgrading the GEOSS architecture will require a strengthened mechanism for resource commitments to GEOSS and better and more even commitment from the GEO members.

With reference to the Ministerial Guidance document on the Evolution of GEOSS, the European Commission therefore supports the option of an accelerated and more robust evolution of GEOSS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

GEOSS is a collegial endeavour to jointly muster the capacity to monitor our Earth so that we can jointly nurture our common habitat. I have recalled several GEOSS achievements from a European perspective. To complete the picture, I would like now to invite my three fellow Co-Chairs to give their own highlights on GEO achievements.