

## *Extended Panel*

# **Future of the European Scientific Societies in Informatics**

(Panel held March 17, 2011 in Brussels – Summary)

**Panel members:** Vasile Baltac (*CEPIS*), Brain Bigalke (*EAI*), Jacques Bus (*Digitrust*), Christine Choppy (*Informatics Europe*), Michel Cosnard (*ERCIM*), Inge Ceuppens (*EC*), Fiona Fanning (*CEPIS*), Fabrizio Gagliardi (*ACM Europe Council*), Jan Karel Lenstra (*ERCIM*), Bertrand Meyer (*Informatics Europe*), Burkhard Monien (*EATCS*), Mark van den Brand (*EAPLS*), Peter van Roy (*EAPLS*).

Moderator: Jan van Leeuwen (*Informatics Europe*).

Background material: <http://www.cs.uu.nl/groups/AD/societies.html>

## **1 Extended Panel**

The extended panel continued a discussion that began during a panel session at ECSS 2010 in Prague. Following the conclusions reached there, it was agreed to have a follow-up discussion to explore the possibilities of cooperation further. The extended panel was devoted to the question *whether, and if so, how a strong but low-overhead platform organization for cooperation among the ICT societies in Europe should be created.*

The goal of the discussion was to reach as definite a conclusion as possible among the participants of the panel, and decide on any further action, if possible.

## **2 Background for the discussion**

There is a widespread realization that the Informatics/ICT community (in the EU) needs to join forces to better represent its interests as national and EU programs develop towards new, research and innovation-oriented agendas and new criteria develop for the ICST research community as a whole.

The discussion of the future role of the scientific and professional organizations began at ICT 2008 in Lyon. In varying contexts the discussion continued, focusing on the question whether and how the challenge of greater collaboration should be met. In the meantime the EC also commissioned a further study on the role and impact of the ICT societies (Project SMART 2009/0061).

A panel held at the *European Computer Science Summit* (ECSS 2010) in October 2010 in Prague came to the following conclusions:

- A: it is undesirable and not productive to aim for a new overall society in the ICT field, or to merge the existing societies in one such organization in which their independence and individuality would be lost,
- B: it is desirable to aim for an effective but lightweight (i.e. strong but low-overhead) platform for closer contact and exchange of viewpoints between the ICT societies on common issues in the development of Informatics/ICT in the ‘Innovation Union’.

In January 2011 similar conclusions were reached during a workshop of the SMART project. Also, several desired features of a possible virtual organization began to emerge here, based on the feedback of a survey and the discussions held there.

### 3 Introduction

Aiming to move from vision to action, the panel at ECSS 2010 agreed that the next step should be a discussion on the actual form, mission and possible realization of the ‘lightweight platform’ for cooperative activity between the ICT societies.

The ‘extended’ panel was thus devoted to the following questions:

- I. Should a ‘lightweight’, i.e. strong but low-overhead platform for closer contact and cooperative activity between ICT societies in Europe be formed, and
- II. If so, how should it be organized?

For the purpose of the panel a *discussion paper* had been composed showing what a ‘platform organization’ might be like. The paper identified a series of questions that need to be considered if a cooperation is desired in some form. Subsequently, with every question the paper sketched some *possible* answers that may be considered.

### 4 Discussion

The moderator welcomed the panellists and introduced the issues to be discussed: questions I and II above. He described the discussion paper as a blueprint of what a platform could be like, an issue to be considered in the discussion of question II.

#### Question I

The discussion about question I was devoted again to the *why* of a platform. This discussion was crucial for identifying the concrete reasons for establishing a platform, from the perspective of the individual associations.

The discussion focussed on: why is a platform needed, what problems does it solve, what are the goals, is there a common ‘platform problem’ that motivates it, what should the platform bring out, what role should it play, and not in the least, what prestige will it have (and: how to make sure it has prestige).

Key issues and needs that were reviewed included the following, among many other issues that were identified:

- have ‘one’ voice for ICST,
- join on synchronized, strategic directions for the field,
- create unity rather than emphasizing diversity and fragmentation,
- improve the image and lack of recognition of ICST,
- develop professional standards,

- promote ICST as key factor for innovating all processes in society,
- make ICST more visible to other disciplines and to each other,
- counterbalance the influence of e.g. industry which is very well organized
- influence research funding and policies for the field,
- function as a community that cooperates and interacts across subarea boundaries,
- establish an innovation-oriented model of ICST research,
- make Europe more prominent in ICST research, and
- represent the (European) excellence of the field.

The conclusion was unanimous that an (open) platform is desired and should be created, ‘to do together what needs to be done together’.

## **Question II**

The discussion about question II focused mostly on the *how* of a platform organization: how can a platform like desired be realized, how can it be sustained, who is responsible for what, and not in the least, what is needed in practice.

It was generally felt that the organizational matters had to be thought through carefully. The discussion paper outlined many organizational issues but what would the realization of the platform entail? The panel also considered the relevant question of how the platform could achieve ‘recognition and prestige’.

The panel felt that the recognition of the platform would require a very visible core set of leaders, possible with longer-term presidencies than sketched in the discussion paper and no fast rotations. Even though very little may be needed to run the platform, ‘some infrastructure’ was considered necessary to run the platform. This might also entail some budget.

Where the ECSS 2010 panel believed a (virtual, low-overhead) umbrella organization of qualifying societies would be adequate, the discussion now focussed on the operational form a platform might have. In the discussion two models for the platform organization appeared:

- a.* an open organization ‘owned’ by the member associations but independent of any association in particular (along the lines of the discussion paper), or
- b.* an open organization run by one of the participating associations, i.e. using an existing infrastructure.

The first model is the natural model of an umbrella organization as outlined in the discussion paper, run on the basis of ‘co-responsibility’. The second model would use the existing infrastructure of one organization, as opposed to creating something new. The panel considered how the different models could be seen as ‘independent’ and ‘representative’, and what each model would require.

The panellists felt that at this point there was insufficient information to determine which model should be favored. Some were more in favor of one model, some in favor of the

other, whereas other panellists were indifferent and felt that only the virtual organization was important, not where it was implemented, ‘as long as it was implemented somewhere’.

The panel concluded that the issue of choosing an appropriate business model for the platform needed to be studied further: it is non-trivial from several perspectives, the models have different political bearings, and at the same time the model question relates directly to the important issue of the sustainability of the platform - it does not come for free and does not run by itself.

## 5 Conclusion

The extended panel clearly brought the platform organization a step closer, but it also made clear that there are a series of practical issues to be resolved before a platform organization can be brought to life.

The moderator concluded that the panel was unanimous in its opinion on question I (‘should a platform organization be created’): the panellists all agreed that a platform should be formed, in the interest of the organizations present and the ICST field in general.

As to question II (‘how should the platform be organized’) the panel discussed how the platform could take shape and how it could be effectively realized in practice. The panel identified several possible scenarios for how this could be done and resolved to have this matter studied further, in its aim to establish a sustainable platform organization.

## 6 Resolve

The panel decided to remain active and to form a Task Group to address the following two questions:

- $\alpha$ . Develop a blueprint for an ‘open’ platform organization for closer contact and cooperation between the Informatics/ICT societies in Europe,
- $\beta$ . Develop an implementation plan for the platform, including one or more scenarios for how the platform should operate and be sustained.

The Task Group consists of the following members: V. Baltac (*Cepis*), B. Bigalke (*EAI*), Chr. Choppy (*Informatics Europe*), K. Jeffery (*ERCIM*), P. van Roy (*EAPLS*), M. Shapiro (*ACM Europe*, p. 21-03-11), and J. van Leeuwen (*Informatics Europe/EATCS*, moderator).

The Task Group is expected to report to the forum of the extended panel within 2 months.

## 7 Close

The moderator thanked the panellists for the open-minded and intensive discussions and CEPIS for its excellent hosting of the panel at its Brussels office.

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