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To All Members of EuroGeographics

25 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

EuroGeographics Management Board Meeting March 2020

I wanted to write to you all to let you know about our recent EuroGeographics Management Board. The Management Board is very conscious of the global crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic and I would like to take this opportunity, on their behalf, to wish you, your staff and your families well during these unprecedented times.

You will be aware that we have cancelled the Extraordinarily General Assembly; the EuroGeographics Head Office team is putting in place alternative arrangements for this meeting. They are also planning how best to conduct the formal business of approving last year's accounts, as well as alternative plans for other EuroGeographics meetings during this uncertain period.

As a result of this virus, the Management Board cancelled their travel to Brussels and held an online meeting instead on 13th and 14th March 2020. This online facility worked very well and we agreed to use it more often.

I was very pleased to welcome Kenny Crawford, Business Development Director from Registers of Scotland to his first EuroGeographics Management Board meeting. Kenny replaces David Henderson as the representative from Great Britain. Martin Salzmann was confirmed as the new Treasurer of EuroGeographics, and I extended our thanks to him for taking on this role and for his commitment to the Association.

We covered a much-reduced agenda which focused on critical business, but we still reviewed and noted the papers prepared by Head Office. We reviewed the update on membership matters, and noted with disappointment there are still some outstanding membership subscriptions for the current year. We hope that our members will all ensure the prompt payment of invoices already issued by the Head Office as your subscriptions are vital to delivering our membership activities.

We also received a comprehensive report on representation activity carried out by Head Office on our members' behalf, particularly at the UN-GGIM and European Union and its Institutions. The global consultation on the UN-GGIM IGIF is now underway and, in common with the new European Parliament and Commission the European work programme will be of significance to all of our members. In this respect, Open Data, the European Strategy for Data, and emerging plans from Eurostat to harvest our members data directly will be of particular interest.

We received an update on the work underway to deliver the Data Access Strategy, approved at last year's General Assembly in Manchester. In particular, we discussed in some depth the challenges of sustainable funding for this work, including how to sustain our current business model as a result of the new Open Data Directive.

The Management Board agreed that the detailed work by Head Office on the costs of the current production system was highly valuable, and that it must now undertake further work on a proposal for how we can fund our pan-European data integration and access activities in a sustainable way. This

proposal will consider not only the full costs of the current system, but also potential development plans within an open data policy and operating environment, and will be essential to help inform future discussions and decisions with our stakeholders.

Despite the virus, we are pleased to see that planning for continuing our knowledge exchange activity is underway, with physical events being replaced by more online activity, including webinars. We discussed and commented on the draft agenda and plans for the General Assembly in Sarajevo next October, and the Management Board warmly welcomed and accepted the offer by Malta to host the General Assembly in 2021. The Management Board also heard about the proposals and plans for consistent targeted messaging to our stakeholders over the coming year, along with continued proactive use of the website and social media.

The Management Board also discussed the Finances of the Association. The 2019 closing position of the Association was noted as being slightly better than expected as a result of the prompt action taken at the start of 2019 to reduce costs and make savings in Head Office. The Management Board approved the 2019 accounts, and these will now be prepared for approval by the members as required by our Articles of Association, before they are logged with the Belgium Government.

Looking forward, the Management Board noted the importance of membership subscriptions in sustaining the Association's membership activity. Due to the open data initiative and the loss of income from Eurostat, our sales revenue no longer subsidises membership activities. We therefore need to address the issue of sustainability in the longer term.

It is difficult to separate the issue of membership subscriptions from the sustainability of the Data Access Strategy, and it is important that two issues are considered together. The Association currently operates at a loss, and at the moment we can rely on our reserves to sustain membership activities, but we do need to address this deficit in the longer term to warrant the sustainability of our organisation. Therefore, the Management Board is considering carefully a number of steps that will be required to address this deficit. These include further budget cuts and savings, an increase in subscriptions or a mixture of both.

This year, work has begun to recalibrate membership subscriptions in line with the latest national GDP figures as we are required by our Articles of Association. We are also examining alternatives to an increase in subscriptions.

It is essential that whatever we decide, and our membership agrees, that we sustain our costs within expected income, while delivering on our strategy. The Management Board agreed that the long-term sustainability of the Association was a complex issue, with a number of consequential risks that needed to be carefully considered, and that this will be a key topic for the Board over the coming months.

The concluding topic on our critical business agenda was the recruitment process for securing a new Secretary General and Executive Director, following Mick Cory's notification of the Board of his intention to retire. The Management Board discussed the job role, competences and recruitment process, and these are now being finalised. It is hoped that the role will be widely notified through a range of channels, including through social media, and to our membership organisations in the near future, although we are conscious of the impact that the coronavirus pandemic may have on the timing and success of the process, and we continue to assess this carefully.

Our next meeting is planned in July, and may be supplemented by a further online discussion on some of these important topics. We will also make the necessary contingency arrangements in case we are unable to meet in person.

In the meantime, I hope you all stay well. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Head Office if you have any questions.

Colin Bray
President