How the ECC was born

The European Control Conference (ECC) 2011, jointly held with the IEEE CDC 2011 in Orlando (US), marks the 20th anniversary of the ECC series. Each ECC is held under the auspices of the European Union Control Association (EUCA). Considering that EUCA does not have an archive in a permanent secretariat, this is an appropriate occasion to concisely summarize the evolution of ECC's over two decades.

At the end of the 1980s several issues motivated a number of people from the control community to seek the organization of a regular international conference in Europe. Among these reasons were: (1) The relatively large number of persons in the countries of the European Economic Community doing research and teaching in Control was significant, (2) the distances to travel in Europe are relatively small, (3) to offer the possibility to graduate students to attend a wide-topic international conference with a limited Budget, and (4) to contribute to the establishment of connections between the various European research groups with the prospect of building joint research projects.

The idea received a very good response from researchers and professors in Control from the various countries of the EEC as well as from the CNRS (the French National Center for Scientific Research was the main sponsor of the 1st European Control Conference).

The informal international group of people who initiated this action decided to create an association whose main objective was to run these conferences (the association was officially created in 1991). To avoid the "fuzziness" of the European frontiers, it was agreed that the members of the Administrative Council of the Association should belong to countries that are part of the European Economic Community (European Union after 1993).

The first ECC was scheduled in Grenoble July 2-5,1991. Jan Willems, Alberto Isidori and Michel Gevers took on the challenge of organizing the subsequent European Control Conferences in Groningen (1993), Rome (1995), Brussels (1997). This was already announced in early 1990.

While the response from European researchers was enthusiastic, the response of the established organizations in the field was not. IEEE-CSS which scheduled its CDC outside the USA in Brighton (UK) for December 1991, viewed the first ECC as a direct competitor. Ioan Landau, received several official letters, as well as friendly pressure from a number of US colleagues, suggesting the postponement of the first ECC. My response was invariably "no", and saying that 6 months between the two events, taking into account the size and the vitality of the European control community, would make these events "decoupled" like ACC and CDC in the US.

IFAC refused to sponsor the event. However, the attitude of these two organizations has changed rapidly. The CDC in Brighton was a success and thanks to M. Gevers, who was a member of the IEEE CSS Board an agreement between IEEE-CSS and EUCA was signed at the end of 1991. On the IFAC side, after the Tallinn World Congress, Brian Anderson took over the Presidency with a totally different outlook to the control world and an agreement between IFAC and EUCA was signed at end of 1991. One can say, based on the evidence of the past, that ECC has been recognized as a major conference in Control. The joint ECC-CDC 2005 in Sevilla and the CDC-ECC 2011 in Florida are illustrations of this recognition.

The success of European Control Conferences depends on one hand on the selection of a good plan and on the other hand on the efforts of the selected team to effectively organize the event. For the first ECC

held in Grenoble the two main "working hands" were Dorothée Normand-Cyrot (in charge of the scientific program and the fund raising) and Jean-Michel Dion (in charge of the local organization).

A few numbers position the event: 670 participants from 35 countries (5 continents) including 200 PhD students (522 participants came from European Economic Community). More details can be found on the website of EUCA (http://www.esi2.us.es/~euca/OldECCs/ecc91/ecc91.html).

Ioan Landau, Founder of EUCA