

## EURASLIC ECET GROUP: PEOPLE, OBJECTIVES, PROJECTS

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper describes support given by IAMSLIC and EURASLIC to aquatic sciences libraries of Central and Eastern Europe; the draft of a Scoping Study of the Black Sea Regional Library Co-operation Project (creation of a system integrating the electronic catalogues and databases of the Black Sea marine libraries into an efficient information exchange system accessible through Internet), and the current state of affairs in a marine library of Georgia participating in the project.

Libraries and Information Centres of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are the objects of special concern of the European Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres (EURASLIC). Knowing about the lack of finances that hamper proper library work in this region, EURASLIC grants the opportunity for associated membership, makes allocations to provide participation of the librarians in conferences held by the Association, organizes individual training and upgrading courses and coordinates periodicals and book distribution grants. Since 2002, EURASLIC has been giving an annual grant (\$1500 in 2002) to purchase computers and software.

In 1996, on the initiative of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), Ian Pettman (United Kingdom) made an analysis of information supply on aquatic sciences in the Eastern European countries. Comments and advice formulated in the report aimed to facilitate close collaboration between CEE and Western European aquatic sciences libraries and information centres, and to ensure mutual access and exchange of documents and information. The report underlined the need to hold a discussion forum

elaborating specific measures targeted to improve the situation concerning CEE aquatic libraries and information centres. Regrettably, this initiative has not yet been given due consideration.

In 2001 on the initiative of Ian Pettman, at the joint IAMSLIC/EURASLIC Conference in Brest, a debate was held – the first action of such sort, with the participation of representatives of aquatic sciences libraries from seven European states going through a transitional economic period (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Poland, Russia and Ukraine) and Peter Pissierssens, the representative of IOC. The parties concerned discussed the possibilities of involving all aquatic libraries and information centres in the region in collaboration with EURASLIC.

At the meeting the decision was taken about establishing a Provisional Inter-session discussion Group of the **European Countries in Economic Transition (ECET)** incorporated into EURASLIC to ensure discussion of problems of mutual concern, with special emphasis being put on advancement of the cooperation between libraries and information centres within a joint project framework. Participants of the discussion proposed several possible joint projects related to digitization of catalogues, creation of a cooperative interlibrary system of document exchange provided with Ariel software, and scanning of unique documents.

One of the most positive ideas concerns the co-operation of the aquatic libraries from the Black Sea countries in order to produce a range of information services utilising the Internet.

The Black Sea is an important ecosystem in its own right and is also an important contributor to the environment of the Mediterranean Sea. The Black Sea is bounded by six nations – Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Turkey. In all these countries funds allocated to support the libraries and information centres are scarce. However, these countries have a network of Aquatic Research Institutions that are focused on the environmental problems of the Black Sea. The aquatic sciences libraries in each of these countries are rich in literature resources on the Black Sea, but the resources are not well known or easily traced and made available. Some idea of the size of this information gap can be illustrated by comparing the printed bibliographies covering the period 1917–1988 printed in the Russian language which list 19,000 references compared to the English language bibliographies available for 1974–1994 which list 4,100 references.

In recent years, the former socialist countries have considerably enlivened and widened international contacts. A large number of scientists have been engaged in implementing international research projects on the Black Sea (e.g. Black Sea Environmental Program, Global Oceanography Observation System) supported by international organizations.

In the developed countries of Western Europe the libraries and information centres have created electronic catalogues and provided access via Internet. Many of the libraries have

been compiling digitized full text corpuses, publications from their book and document stocks. In the Eastern European countries such re-organization can be performed only through implementation of joint projects supported by international organizations.

It is this state of affairs that gave rise to the idea of launching a project on creating an online cooperative bibliographic information system for literature on the Black Sea. The proposed system will unite the electronic catalogues and databases of the Black Sea marine libraries into an efficient information exchange system accessible through the Internet.

A group representing the aquatic sciences libraries of Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine applied to IAMSLIC for a grant to cover traveling expenses for the proposed Scoping Study meeting. Means allocated by IAMSLIC allowed the group to begin preparations for the Scoping Study which comprises such topics as users needs/audiences; scope and objectives; intended participants for various stages/services; standards to be used; detailed activities and ways to achieve them; the necessary staging of activities and staged costs, etc.

The Scoping Study meeting was held at the Institute of Biology of the Southern Seas (Sevastopol, Ukraine) from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> August 2002. Representatives from Ukraine, Bulgaria, Georgia and Russia attended the meeting. Good progress was made in discussing the details of the Scoping Study. All participants were very active and concerned with the project. Step by step the group have scanned all phases of the draft.

Some brief details of the project:

Stage 1 – Establish a market presence and funding sources.

Stages 2-4 may be represented as a three-level system, inasmuch as the success of creating the united electronic catalogues and databases system depends on the availability of efficient equipment – computers, software, and modern means of communication.

Therefore, the objectives of Stage 2 are automation of working places intended for direct document processing, creation and updating of the library's own electronic catalogues; performing other technical operations related to information supply; choosing software; and working out regulations and instructions for proper interaction between the libraries participating in the project.

Stage 3 aims to provide the technological aspects: (i) electronic catalogues storage; (ii) submitting the library's own web-technology resources to Internet; (iii) ensuring support to standard z39.50 to provide access to the distributed co-operative resources.

Stage 4 deals with telecommunication means which will provide information exchange between the servers of the libraries and the access to Internet global network for a user

interested in the library's electronic catalogues, bibliographic databases and full text documents on the Black Sea.

Stage 5: Long-term maintenance.

It should be noted that the library-participants differ in technical and practical preparedness: in Ukraine, Bulgaria and Russia the aquatic libraries have some equipment and experience; in Georgia the situation looks more grave.

The library of the Georgian Marine Ecology and Fisheries Research Institute is the only specific library in the fields of marine biology, ichthyology and eco-toxicology in the country. Since 1991 all the existing links broke and the library became isolated. The situation was worsened by the continuous economic difficulties in the country, and under-financing of the institute from the government. During 1991-2000 the library added very little to its book collections.

In previous years, a large number of documents were produced on biodiversity- and conservation-related subjects in the Black Sea region. Many of these contain valuable information that can be used for further developing activities in the Black Sea region. The problem however is that these documents are difficult to obtain; there is no institution as yet from which such documents can be retrieved. Furthermore, there is no overview of what has been done by whom and where, in terms of biodiversity and conservation in the Black Sea region. Without such an overview new efforts may lead to duplication, which will be a waste of the available scarce resources. In addition there is no database on institutions, NGOs and projects which can be found to determine who is doing actually what and where. All such information is essential for performing the necessary coordination tasks.

In 2001 the library applied for associate membership of the European Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centres (EURASLIC). This fact has significantly enlivened the library performance: the participation in the Biannual conference, ILL, and receiving of free duplicates. In addition, the library was awarded a EURASLIC equipment grant, which will be used for purchase of a PC and scanner. It should be mentioned that so far the Library did not have any electronic equipment, and the existing cataloguing system is the traditional hardcopy card/tag-folders style. The equipment will be used to create the technical base for changing and improving the Library's performance and capabilities to fulfill its role as a resource centre for aquatic information provision for scientists and university students, as well as ensuring preparedness for involvement in any future national, regional or international initiatives. The resources of the library are used not only by the institute scientists, but by the Batumi State University (Biology, Water Bio-resources Department) and Tbilisi State University (Hydrobiology and Water Eco-toxicology Department)

Therefore, the time has come when, on the one hand, IAMSLIC and EURASLIC have been providing the support and undertaking actions aimed to improve the situation about

the aquatic sciences libraries and information centres of CEE, and on the other hand, the interested libraries and information centres have attained the level allowing them to use the offered support and assistance.