Bienvenue à Bruxelles/Welkom bij Brussels

ECO welcomes delegates to Brussels for the 36\textsuperscript{th} ATCM and 15\textsuperscript{th} CEP and thanks Belgium for a magnificent venue for the 9 days of work in the capital of their nation and that of the European Union. After several consecutive meetings in the Southern Hemisphere, ECO is delighted to be in the Northern Hemisphere, surrounded by lush vegetation, blossoming flowers, and hopefully some sun, in springtime. The Belgian Antarctic Program has a commendable Antarctic history and sets a shining example for a zero emission Antarctica with its Princess Elisabeth Station.

TIME WARP

May is the time for spring cleaning in the Northern Hemisphere. ECO has been dragging out its old clothes and papers from the very bottom of its attic, throwing out stuff to make room for a new year. In the process, ECO came across some old friends – ECOs from the past. ECO 2013 had this strange feeling that what was written years ago could perfectly have been written for this 2013 meeting. This experience could be called a “time warp” in science fiction novels; the defining of a “classic” in artistic circles; or a “déjà vu” in French.

Here’s an excerpt from 7 years ago, at the time of the CEP Strategic Workshop:


\textbf{Strategic What?}

“Strategic” is the hottest word in town these days... Fashionable though it is, truly strategic planning still needs to be seen in practice. In this context, protecting Antarctica’s wilderness values is a strategic imperative. Our distinguished delegates are in the highly privileged position of asking themselves: What kind of legacy would we like to leave future generations? Or as the outgoing honourable chair of the CEP tasked his workshop participants: What is your vision for Antarctica, in 2021, and beyond? ECO wonders when all the delegations will take the opportunity of discussing those ideas... We have no crystal balls and we are not trained in the art of fortune-telling, but one thing is clear: Antarctica and the rest of world are changing fast because of current global climate change caused by our gas-guzzling lifestyle.
Here’s another excerpt, from 15 years ago, one year after the Protocol came into force.

ECO Volume 197, Number 1. May 24-June 4, 1999.
Lima, Peru. XXIII ATCM

Protected Areas
The second workshop on protected Areas, organised by Peru preceding this ATCM, raised many good points for further discussion. Interessional work by an open ended contact group will take this further... This makes it even more important that discussions do not merely centre on theoretical development, no matter how important these may be. Practical action should not be forgotten! ECO urges the CEP to initiate serious consideration of:

* The designation of a number of areas in order to protect wilderness and aesthetic values. Starting to work on “real-life” cases is the best way to sort out the philosophical or theoretical questions surrounding this...
* The designation of several relatively untouched areas as no-go areas, not only to use as controls with other areas, but to make sure that future generations maintain as many options as possible for their own decision making...
* The designation of areas, including large marine areas, to protect marine biodiversity.

Our final excerpt is from 1991.

ECO Volume LXXX Number 1, Madrid, Spain, April 22-30, 1991, XI Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting

Twenty two years! Children grow up, graduate, find jobs, some even get married and have their own children! And yet, the ATCM seems to be able to defy the forces of gravity and time, and stay young, unwrinkled and undecided.

Having looked to the past, we can now think about the future. Certainly the ATCM wants to be an organisation capable of making progress on issues. The workshop on the multi-year strategic plan provides an opportunity for the ATCM to look at issues that have stagnated and figure out new ways to move them forward. Of course in international organisations, ideas often take time to become ripe for action. But over a decade seems like plenty of time for a group like the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties to figure out how to tackle even the most difficult issues. These are the same Parties, who, after all, were quite bold in signing the Antarctic Treaty at the height of the Cold War.

We know the Parties can do it. These issues haven’t gotten any less serious since they were first discussed. The question is, will Parties buckle down and do some necessary but challenging work? Or will they wait for problems to crop up before taking serious action?

ECO looks forward to a productive ATCM. There are many excellent papers and recommendations for positive steps forward -- including agreeing on a strategic work plan for future meetings.

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