

International Support for Ionosonde Networks

Comments by Phil Wilkinson

Below is a letter Bruno Zolesi, the Chair of COST 271 (<http://www.cost271.rl.ac.uk/>), sent to the European Union Scientific Framework Program 6 (EU FP6 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/index_en.html) seeking support for the European ionosonde network. Unfortunately, it seems this subject cannot be included in EU FP6. However, it is useful to review Bruno's submission.

Bruno has made a key point in observing that the international ionosonde network will not survive if it does not attract far wider international support. Traditionally, URSI, through its Working Group 1 (INAG), has offered support for the ionosonde community. However, Bruno is saying loudly what we all know; this level of support is no longer sufficient. While local ionosondes, serving specific needs, will persist, it may become progressively more difficult to either obtain data from them, or compare data between them. Without the context of international support our ionosonde network faces severe problems.

Subject: FP6 proposed scientific task
To: COST271@cclrlslsv.RL.AC.UK

Dear colleagues,

As you know cost271 participants sent last year different expressions of interest to EU as the first step to the FP6. One of them was sent by me as the cost 271 chairman on behalf of all COST 271 community having the subject of the action itself; other two EoI were sent by Norbert Jakowski concerning the MOPLE project and by Alain Bourdillon and Paul Cannon on both ionospheric and tropospheric propagation. Then this matter was developed further during the MC meeting in Faro where it was decided to consider two separate lines of action in FP6: one coordinated by Alain Bourdillon joining the cost271 proposal and tropospheric propagation and the second one coordinated by Norbert Jakowki.

Recently during the meeting in Rennes the strategy with respect to FP6 has been discussed. Most of the participants at the meeting agreed to take the chance within the block of activities: "Research Infrastructures", topics "Integrating activities". The proposal entitled "European Platform for Radio Science (EPRS)", will have different steps for the preparation leaded by Alain. One of them is to define the different research tasks.

Therefore I am writing his letter in order to know your opinion and your intention to participate to a possible scientific task: A task that will concern a network of vertical ionospheric stations in Europe.

It is well known that many vertical ionospheric stations have been operating in the past in Europe and that a number of them ceased their activity in the last years for different reasons: economic, personnel ecc. Nevertheless, believe that a network of ionospheric vertical soundings in Europe is still very important not only for geophysical studies but for all radio communication application.

To maintain along the time an ionospheric observatory it is not simply a question of a modern instrumentation or financial support but technical and scientific competence, tradition and in only one word continuity of good measurements, valid and useful for ever.

I am afraid that if no substantial support will be given from an international organization to maintain the ionospheric observatories by vertical sounding many of them will cease their measurements in the near future.

The proposed task within EPRS is to organize the network of ionospheric vertical sounding in Europe, their routine activities taking into account different equipments used, standard procedures of scaling or auto scaling, automatic real time or manual transmission data procedures, deliveries to potential users, ecc. ecc.

Next COST 271 MC meeting in Rome will be a very good opportunity to discuss, agree and finalize this proposal; especially if many of those that are responsible of the management of the ionospheric stations in Europe will participate at the meeting.

Comments and suggestions, to be sent to me before the Rome meeting, will be very useful in the preparation of this proposal for the EPRS and greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Dr Bruno Zolesi
Chairman of the COST271