



# It was 20 years ago today...

ECG president Wolfgang Göbel reflects on a celebration of the association's 20th anniversary and looks forward to a year of milestone events

“ In late 1996, 25 people from 22 different companies sat around a table in a Cologne hotel and signed a form agreeing to create a group to represent their industry. This was the beginning of the European Car-Transport Group of Interest – or ECG – that would be established officially in early 1997. At that time ‘groups of interest’ was the common terminology in Brussels for what today are called ‘associations’. We later rebranded as ‘The Association of European Vehicle Logistics’ but legally we are still ECG. So, for the many who ask ‘Why ECG?’, now you know.

It is interesting to note that most of the 22 founding companies no longer exist in the same form. I have talked before in this column about the ongoing process of consolidation in our industry; indeed most of the 22 have disappeared as a result of mergers and acquisitions and exist today as part of different organisations, many of whom are members of ECG. Despite this consolidation, I was very pleased to record our 100th member company in the first quarter of 2017, which demonstrates that even if the number of players is reducing overall, those that remain see our association as an essential platform for the sector.

This was demonstrated in fine form on the evening of March 21st at Autoworld in Brussels, where we welcomed some 250 people to celebrate our 20th anniversary. Among them were many old friends, including all four of our previous presidents. Some 60% of the attendees were members and clients who had travelled to be with us.

In particular we were honoured to have the European commissioner for transport, Violeta Bulc, as a keynote speaker, and we welcomed some of the messages that she had for us (see p7). In particular, we support her challenge to us to embrace progress in digitalisation and the changes ahead. We are actually one step ahead of her encouragement to lobby at national level for acceptance of e-CMR by those countries across Europe that have so far failed to sign up to this UN protocol.

Overall those present were very impressed with Bulc's ‘no nonsense’ attitude and heartfelt commitment to Europe, and to seeing the transport industry as a whole maximise the use of technology and work effectively for the benefit of all.

We also heard from Erik Jonnaert, secretary general of ACEA, the European automotive association, speaking on behalf of carmakers and truckmakers. He acknowledged

the interdependency of his members and those of ECG, and highlighted some of the future challenges the industry may face, such as the fallout from a ‘hard’ Brexit.

Finally, we heard from Jørgen Olesen, who was until very recently part of an OEM himself at Mazda. Predictably, for those that know him, Olesen entertained us, not least with his rendition of a Danish birthday song, but he also challenged us to make a difference in the next 20 years as well.

Also present were a number of the original 25 signatories, who received framed copies of the founding document as a reminder of what they created all those years ago.

## Looking forward, not back

So much for the past – as Jørgen Olesen reminded us, it is the future that counts. As it stands, 2017 looks set to be our most active year ever. Along with ECG's established activities, the new working groups covering digitalisation and capacity have generated a number of different cross-industry projects and sub-groups, which are proving very interesting. We have added some external resources to move these forward as quickly as possible and, especially in terms of standardisation, there seems to be a great deal of potential in these projects. I fully expect to be able to deliver positive updates from these activities in future columns.

In terms of our more routine activities, I would like to remind members and partners that we are now running up to the annual Spring Congress and General Assembly, which will take place in Malta on May 18th-19th. The Maltese hold the EU presidency at the moment and we expect some high-level government speakers as well as those from the European Commission. Registrations are open via the ECG website.

Malta will also see our latest students from the ECG Academy graduate. Registrations are open now for Course 11 of the ECG Academy and, as I write, places are almost 30% filled. If you are planning to attend, or to send a colleague, make sure you book your space as soon as you can.

Finally, I can announce that the 2017 ECG Conference will be held, perhaps surprisingly, in Brussels for the first time. After last year's record attendance of more than 270 delegates, this year's event will be held not far from ECG's own offices. Please block the date in your calendar and plan to be in Brussels on October 19th-20th. I look forward to seeing you there. ◦ ”