



**The SEAP saga:
Ten years of organising a young profession**

1. The founding years: 1996 – 1999

With the Treaty of Maastricht that was signed in 1992, and Lord Cockfield's internal market project, that was finalised in 1993, all elements were there to turn the European institutions into decision making bodies with an impact on all EU citizens. The European Commission, with its exclusive right of initiative, was much less hampered by national vetoes, and the European Parliament developed from an advisory into a co-decision institution.

As a consequence the number of, what came to be called 'European Affairs practitioners' (the representatives of specific interests in Brussels), grew rapidly.

In 1995 some members of the European Parliament, that up to that moment was very keen to be advised by such interest representatives, felt that their contacts with lobbyists should be regulated. MEP Glynn Ford prepared a report on relations with lobbyists. The Commission already in 1992 produced a note on its relations with special interest representatives.

This development needed to be addressed by a profession that up to that moment remained highly individualistic. Every European Affairs practitioner felt that he or she had better access to EU policy makers than the competitors, or did not wish to recognise that he/she was really engaged in public affairs. The only collective action that was taken in the early nineties was the development of a 'Code of Conduct' by a loose group of public affairs practitioners, called P.A.P.

The first to take an initiative in order to address the lack of organisation was Hans Out, director of the chemical industry confederation CEFIC. Hans organised on 26 March 1996 an exchange of views at the EP building with the purpose to investigate 'interest in the creation of an open association of lobbyists...to enhance the quality of interfacing with...the EP'. Speakers were Ms. Andersen of the University of Antwerp, Mr. Naets, former Press department Head of the EP, and MEP Janssen van Raay; around 25 representatives of the profession attended.

Hans intended to set up a 'European Parliament Public Affairs Society (EPPAS) that should aim at a better access to the EP. At this meeting the decision was taken to set up a Steering Group in order to further develop his initiative.

The EPPAS steering group met at monthly intervals in the July 1996 – March 1997 period, and was chaired by Hans Out, with Catherine Stewart as vice-president. It consisted of 10 representatives of trade associations, companies and consultancies, who worked together without the wish to engage their organisations. The steering group laid the foundations of SEAP, setting up task forces on a code of conduct, membership, structure and a programme of activities. The objectives of the organisation were soon defined, and should be 'the enhancement of relations between the European institutions and European affairs practitioners', thus broadening the scope to the Commission and the Council, in addition to the EP. It was felt that no specific code of conduct would have to be developed, as the P.A.P. code could serve this purpose. In any case the code should be independent from the Rules for lobbyists that were formulated in July 1996 by the EP on the basis of the Ford report. The membership fee was set at BEF 5000; the monies would be used to fund secretarial activities, of which Mans Louwes took care.

At the September meeting it turned out that French speaking colleagues intended to set up a 'Fédération des Lobbyistes Européens' (FEL, later to be named FELPA) with similar ambitions: a member of this group (Frank van Oss) was invited to attend the

steering group meetings for coordination purposes. In February a first meeting with FELPA was held on a possible merger.

Later that month Hans Out had to leave the steering group, as his organisation did not (yet) see the need to take part in a body representing the European Affairs profession. Vice-president Stewart provisionally took the chair, and at the March meeting of the steering group Rogier Chorus of the ceramics trade association Cérame-Unie, was appointed chairman. At that moment nearly all elements for the foundation of an organisation, that would be named the 'Society of European Affairs Practitioners' (SEAP) were in place, including the draft Statutes of what would at first be an 'association de fait' according to Belgian law. The meeting decided to hold a constituent meeting of SEAP on 22 May 1997; a press briefing would be given the week before.

At the constituent meeting, that was held in the prestigious 'De Warande' mansion, and chaired by Rogier Chorus, 70 European Affairs specialists were informed by the steering group members. They discussed the reason for setting up SEAP, its dual objective of setting integrity standards for the profession and improving contacts with the EU institutions, the code of conduct it intended to use, a programme of activities, and a budget, including membership fees at BEF 5000.

SEAP was set up as an 'association de fait', and Alain Beaumont, Rogier Chorus (President), Peter Claus (Treasurer), Jo Kowallik, Maarten Labberton, Richard Linning, Rodolphe de Looz Corswarem, Nicholas Phillips, William Seddon-Brown, Catherine Stewart (Vice-President), Lyn Trytsman-Gray, Dieter Vogt and James Wilson were confirmed as its Board members.

The newly founded society's first task was to acquire a sufficient number of members. The press coverage was a moderate success, and only 8 new members joined SEAP as a result of the constituent meeting. The first Board meeting in June opened up membership for NGO representatives, and it agreed that membership should be personal, as not all members wanted to commit their organisations. Meetings with the secretariats of the Commission, EP and Council would be organised.

The first General Assembly of SEAP was held on 29 September 1997: it decided to register the French version of the Statutes with the Belgian Ministry of Justice, and to launch a questionnaire to the members on communication problems with the European institutions, in order to collect discussion matters for the meetings with their secretariats. Before or at the meeting 44 members paid their subscription fees.

In 1998 the General Assembly met again in February, April and October. It appointed Olof Allgärth and Jonathan Kapstein as new Board members; Nick Phillips had to withdraw as a Board member. The results of the questionnaire on communication problems (which came to be called the 'transparency' questionnaire) were communicated to the press, and a membership information pack was developed. Members' profiles would be made in order to facilitate exchange of know-how. The president received a mandate on negotiating a merger with FELPA that had obtained the legal status of an ASBL in the meantime.

In April the SEAP presidency met with Mary Preston of the Commission general secretariat. She provided information on a draft code of behaviour for Commission officials, and a draft web page on lobbyists, in which reference would be made to SEAP and its code of conduct.

In July 30 members attended a meeting with Deputy DG of Information Brunmayr of the Council secretariat. He handed a list of secretaries of the different Councils of Ministers and their working groups, and pointed out that the secretariat would always

be able to refer applicants to the permanent representatives, if it could not provide information on Council conclusions itself. The Council seemed to be more accessible than the transparency enquiry indicated!

The Board paid attention to the creation of a SEAP logo and website, with an inventory of all members' e-addresses.

In early 1999 meetings were held with MEP Lahousse on obtaining passes for access to the EP, and with the European Ombudsman Söderman and his deputy Dyrberg. At the 5th General Assembly in March the ambitious goal was formulated to raise membership to 100 at the end of the year; a budget of BEF 250.000 was approved. In order to cope with the growing secretarial work a successor to Mans Louwes would have to be acquired.

The young organisation had made a solid start, but it had to become more professional, in order to consolidate its position as the representative body of the PA profession.

2. Consolidation and some early successes: 1999 – 2003

The new SEAP secretary, Bettina Meller, started her work in the second half of 1999. She finalised work on the website that included a public and a 'members only' part. The latter contained profiles of part of the members. She also prepared a SEAP handout.

In September the Board approved the SEAP logo, and prepared contacts with the new Prodi Commission and EP. The idea to set up a SEAP Advisory Council was discussed, but not retained for the moment.

The General Assembly was held in October; it concentrated on acquisition (Amcham, Unice, British Chamber BCC) and the completion of the members' profiles database. It also discussed contacts with FELPA, and expressed the ambition to enter the new millennium with one EU organisation of EA practitioners. At the meeting MEP Evans discussed accessibility of the (new) EP.

A meeting was also held with spokesman Kemppinen of the Finnish Presidency.

The new millennium took a promising start with a meeting of the SEAP and FELPA Boards. It agreed to compare objectives, codes, Statutes and finances in order to prepare an early merger. On 7 April 2000 the first General Assembly of SEAP 'new style' (now called the Society of European Affairs *Professionals*) was held. The FELPA registered statutes were to be converted into SEAP statutes; 7 FELPA members (Yves de Lespinay and Frank van Oss, Jean-Marie Chandelle, Anthony Fell, Dominique Renou, Jean-Charles Mirgaux and Jean-Louis Bosteels) joined the SEAP Board, and 20 FELPA members were added to the 43 SEAP members.

The new Board appointed Rogier Chorus as its president, with Catherine Stewart, Yves de Lespinay and Frank van Oss as vice-presidents, and Peter Claus as treasurer, for the 2000 – 2003 period.

The merger provided a more balanced membership to SEAP, with a better spread over the member states. With Bettina Meller at the secretariat a range of monthly meetings were held, with spokesman Simonneau of the French Presidency, Commissioner Palacio's cabinet member Schinas, MEP (and future EP president) Cox, and MEP Asp. The SEAP statutes were published on 19 October in the Belgian

Moniteur, and efforts were made to obtain a special status for SEAP members with the Commission.

31 of the now 80 members attended in December the 2nd General Assembly; the membership fee was set at € 150, and the 2001 meeting programme was approved. The meeting also discussed the development of a register for complaints on Commission officials' behaviour, but the response was weak.

The 2001 programme brought meetings with Kirsty Hughes of the Diamantopoulou cabinet, Verheugen cabinet member Italiaaner, and Busquin cabinet member Dahmen. Attendance remained at the level of 10 – 20 persons; a joint SEAP – BCC meeting with Commission deputy-spokesman Gooch was better attended. The British Chamber became also a partner for the transparency issue: a common working group chaired by Lyn Trytsman-Gray was set up.

The General Assembly celebrated five years of organised work on European Affairs on 17 May with Commission vice-president Kinnock speaking on the reform of the Commission staff. For this occasion the meeting room of the Belgian federation of enterprise VBO was used, with an attendance of more than 50 SEAP members.

The president sent a letter to Commission secretary-general O'Sullivan, offering the SEAP services for training new Commission officials. This offer was repeated at later occasions, but it did not bring results so far. In a letter to EP Quaestor Balfe complaints were made on the slow procedure in providing access passes (3 - 5 months!)

In the autumn the Commission presented a White Paper on European Governance, to which SEAP reacted with a press release, asking for a regular consultation of civil society organisations like SEAP. A lunch meeting was held with MEP Linkohr on energy policy. The year culminated in an extraordinary event organised by Yves de Lespinay: on 6 December 2001 SEAP offered a tree to the EP president Nicole Fontaine and the Brussels Mayor Thielemans, in the presence of many MEPs and SEAP members, including the present EP president Pöttering. The tree is proudly growing in front of the EP main entrance, as a sign of the fruitful relations between SEAP and the EP, and two big granite plaques at its foot quote in English and French: *"Important issues should be resolved by discussion and decision, with determination, patience and dedication"*.

Indeed, this is what the professional representation of interests is about...

A reception at the Brussels City Hall marks the end of this excellent publicity act.

Sadly, at the very end of the year SEAP members had to attend the funeral of one of their founding members, Board member Dieter Vogt.

Early in 2002 SEAP met with MEP and Quaestor Balfe on the EP access passes issue; it asked for special treatment of SEAP members, as they subscribe to a more extensive code of conduct than the EP Rules. The document on transparency and openness of the EU institutions was finalised in co-operation with the BCC; it focused especially on arcane EU decision making instances, such as the CoRePer, the Council, the conciliation procedure between EP and Council, and the Commission's 'comitology'. Valuable input was received from both SEAP and BCC members, and the final document became the subject of a seminar on 21 May at the EP. Guest speakers were EP vice-president Charlotte Cederschiöld, Commission secretary-general O'Sullivan and Danish Permanent Representative Poul Christoffersen. The BCC and SEAP presidents Crossick and Chorus chaired the meeting that was attended by several MEPs and 60 members of both organisations. The European Voice covered the seminar, and decided to develop a scoreboard on transparency.

The lunch meetings were continued with MEP Bushill-Matthews on the professionalism of lobbyists, with Jackie Davis on transparency, and with MEP

Leinen on the European Convention. After the summer SEAP and the Dutch European Affairs Platform received Prof. Rinus van Schendelen, who presented his new book on EU lobbying, with the somewhat unlucky title "Macchiavelli in Brussels". A few weeks later Tony Long of the World Wildlife Fund, and Harvey Thomas of the US broadcasting federation were received.

At the General Assembly in November members were informed on an easier procedure for renewing access passes to the EP. The treasurer Peter Claus had to leave his function due to retirement; Alain Beaumont was appointed as his successor. Dominique Renou, Richard Linning and Olof Allgardh left the Board as a result of changing responsibilities; Fredrik Lofthagen, Martin Säckl and Francis Mary were appointed as their successors. SEAP membership had increased substantially to a number of 110. MEP Cashman addressed the meeting on transparency and efficiency; he had drafted a report on the subject, and he stressed the importance of accessibility of policy makers for all citizens.

SEAP was able to discuss its transparency paper towards the end of the year with Ms. Benitez, the successor to Mary Preston at the Commission general secretariat. This well attended meeting was organised together with the College of Bruges Madariaga Foundation. Board member Jean-Marie Chandelle presented a case on influencing EU policy related to the energy tax, as an example of the not always perfect access to information from the Commission.

The first Board meeting in the new year 2003 decided to strengthen links with both the national organisations of EU affairs in Brussels (BCC, the Dutch EA Platform, the French Cercle des Permanents Français), and the organisations in the member states of PA practitioners. Meetings were organised with the French association des conseils AFCL and the German DeGePol. It was decided, not to establish formal links with these organisations, but to maintain close working contacts.

Another ambition was to acquire members from the new candidate countries. Letters were sent to their official representations in Brussels, with a limited response. The big consultancies in Brussels were also invited by letter to join SEAP, and thoughts were given to the development of a consultancies group inside SEAP.

Lunch meetings were held with the Austrian MEP Rübigen on SME's and member of the EU economic & social committee Hull.

In the second half of the year the Board devoted much time to discussions on a better SEAP structure that would commit more of its members to the common tasks. At the General Assembly in November a structure plan was presented and approved. Main element was the creation of 4 committees: on the code of conduct; on membership; on policy & communication; and on the programme of activities. An informal group of the president and vice-presidents together with the 4 convenors of these committees had to ensure daily management between the Board sessions. Finally the secretariat would receive professional administrative support through the services of AGEPE, an association management company that had been set up by Alain Beaumont. As Bettina Meller would leave the secretariat (after four years of dedicated and very effective work), AGEPE would also provide the new SEAP secretary, in the person of Helen O'Sullivan. Bettina was honoured with a dinner hosted by the president.

The Assembly also appointed the second 'SEAP new style' Board for the 2003 – 2006 period. Its members were Alain Beaumont, Gaël du Bouëtiez, Jean-Louis Bosteels, Jean-Marie Chandelle, Rogier Chorus, Yves de Lespinay, Rodolphe de Looz-Corswarem, Anthony Fell, Maarten Labberton, June O'Keeffe, Fredrik Lofthagen, Martin Säckl, Bill Seddon-Brown, Kajsa Stenstroem, Catherine Stewart, Lyn Trytsman-Gray and James Wilson. As convenors of the new committees June O'Keeffe (for the code committee), Fredrik Lofthagen (for the membership committee), Lyn Trytsman-Gray (for the policy committee) and Martin Säckl (for the

programme committee) were appointed. The Assembly also decided, not to address the Belgian VAT rules for international associations, but to leave this matter to the Federation of international associations in Belgium (FAIB).

Finally the former MEP and representative of the Dutch government in the EU Convention Gijs de Vries addressed the meeting on the draft EU constitution.

The new Board reappointed Rogier Chorus as president, and Catherine Stewart, Lyn Trytsman-Gray and Yves de Lespinay as vice-presidents. In this way the three main membership categories (trade associations, consultancies and individual firms) were represented in the presidency. Alain Beaumont was reappointed as treasurer, with Jean-Louis Bosteels as auditor.

With the new structure SEAP could envisage to cope with the most important tasks that its members would expect it to handle. The committees covered the main issues that had to be addressed. Up to now the organisation had been able to operate in a quiet climate, and the focus of its work had been the (lack of) access to the EU institutions. But stormy weather was ahead, from the side of opponents of business interests, from the EU institutions, and also from competitors. Lobbying ethics, and the code of conduct that expressed them, became the primary issue.

3. The great debate on lobbying ethics: 2004 - 2007

The year 2004 started with a highly negative report on lobbying by the Austrian MEP Martin. It turned out that this report had more to do with the pre-election fever of its author, so SEAP did not need to react.

In March a lobbying action on the Ferrero case got some media attention. This case related to an accident in the 1980's due to a toy hidden in chocolate produced by Ferrero. The EP asked its research body STOA to investigate the matter, but the STOA Board (consisting of MEPs) judged its findings to be too weak to be published. Some Board members felt that the lobby by Ferrero consultant Bell Pottinger had been too fierce, and complained to the press.

The SEAP presidency invited Dirk Hudig of Bell Pottinger to explain the case, as the press coverage was negative for the profession. Dirk, who was not a member, was kind enough to explain, and made it clear that nothing had happened, that did not meet standards as set by the SEAP code. The Presidency then checked the matter with EP Quaestor Balfe, who confirmed that this case had been a 'storm in a tea cup'.

Meanwhile lunch meetings were held with the International Federation of Journalists, on codes of conduct; with the Irish Presidency; and with MEP Doorn on reducing the EU administrative burden.

The code committee was preparing a revision of the code, with special attention to sanctions, and the policy & communication committee was developing a SEAP display panel and leaflet. The membership committee revised the application form, inserting a commitment to follow a seminar on the SEAP code.

In September Helen O'Sullivan went on maternity leave; her task was taken care of by Daniela Kolb. A visit was made to the Committee of the Regions.

At the end of October SEAP learned that some big consultancies that had not opted for SEAP membership, intended to set up an organisation of consultancies.

This initiative coincided with the publication of an open letter to Commission President Barroso, requesting compulsory registration and reporting by European lobbyists. Its authors were a group of NGOs operating under the acronym CEO

(Corporate Europe Observatory). In a press release SEAP rejected this proposal, and stated that self-regulation is the best way to promote ethical standards with lobbyists, including NGOs.

Both developments were discussed in November by the General Assembly. It endorsed the SEAP position against compulsory registration, and asked the president to contact the initiator of the consultancies organisation, which would be called EPACA (European Public Affairs Consultancies' Association), in order to avoid double work and confusion at the EU institutions level.

The Assembly also approved the revised code that was made more concise, including sanctions on transgressions, and assorted by a guidance note. It would be sent to all Commissioners, the CoRePer and the EP presidency and quaestors.

An acquisition campaign with a welcome pack and a membership benefit programme was to be launched by the membership committee. Membership should be raised from the present 131 to 150. The SEAP display panels were available for publicity purposes.

Bill Seddon-Brown, one of the founding members, had to leave the Board due to a change of responsibilities.

MEP Harbour made a presentation on effective lobbying of the EP.

The CEO open letter to Barroso did not remain without an echo. Early in the next year, on 3 March 2005, vice-president Kallas of the Commission held a speech at the Nottingham Business School on 'the need for a European transparency initiative'. This time it was not only about transparency of the EU institutions, but also about transparency of lobbyists and NGOs. Kallas claimed that in Brussels 15.000 lobbyists were using between € 60 and 90 million for influencing EU institutions. Registers of lobbyists' organisations would not provide information on the interests represented, and finances involved. Self-imposed codes would have few signatories and lack serious sanctions. He announced a 'European Transparency Initiative (ETI) that would address governance issues on both sides.

As the revised SEAP code was sent three weeks before to Commissioner Kallas and his colleagues, the SEAP Board wondered whether he had seen it at all. After its March meeting a first reaction was published. It recalled the fact that SEAP had been very active on transparency, and welcomed the ETI. The SEAP code that applied to its 150 members, set standards of integrity, and contained an interdiction on financial inducements, so that registration of finances would not serve a purpose. The reaction also stressed that SEAP opts for self-regulation as the best way to set and apply ethical standards. On 21 April Rogier Chorus and Catherine Stewart met Kallas, who admitted that his initiative covered lobbying due to 'recent (i.e. the CEO) criticism on lobbying activities. He would also meet CEO and the newly founded consultants' organisation EPACA. The SEAP delegation explained its code that is binding to all members, with sanctions and mandatory training. It warned against comparisons with the American situation, where lobbyists are allowed to collect money for politicians. While the accounts of most organisations in Brussels are open to the public under Belgian law, some financial information should remain confidential, and there should be a distinction between private and public funding in this respect.

In March a letter was sent to the Slovakian authorities that had introduced a bill on lobbying activities. The letter stressed the advantages of self-regulation.

The ETI was also mentioned in a mailing campaign on membership, which stressed the need to organise, in order to develop sufficient leverage in future discussions with Kallas. He had referred to the low degree of organised lobbyists. The campaign also included a long list of membership benefits, SEAP events, and workshops on the code. The first workshop was held in March. With June O'Keeffe on maternity leave, Gail Orton, who replaced her as convenor to the code committee, had done a great job in preparing the code workshops, which were held every month in order to allow

all members to attend. The European Training Institute took care of the organisation, against payment of a fee per participant.

Meanwhile the EPACA chairman John Houston officially informed the president of the formation of EPACA. He wished to establish a productive working relation with SEAP. 26 consultancies, of which a few were SEAP members, joined EPACA. From this moment the 2 presidents met at regular intervals.

In May the Board commemorated former treasurer Peter Claus, who passed away only two years after his retirement. Helen O'Sullivan returned at the secretariat. Another letter was sent to the EP Quaestors on complicated procedures for obtaining access passes.

Later that year the Board agreed to discuss with EPACA on the development of a common code, in order to prevent unilateral action from the Commission.

Lunch meetings were held with the new Ombudsman, with the Austrian permanent representative, and with Mark Gray of the Wallström cabinet.

In December the General Assembly approved an amendment of the code, which distinguished between the collection of information, when declaring name and interest represented is not needed, and lobbying, when both are required. The Statutes were updated in order to meet new requirements of the Belgian law on ASBLs; they would be approved at an extraordinary Assembly meeting on 12 January 2006. Daniel Guéguen was appointed as Board member.

The EP passes question once again was raised at this meeting: a new procedure excluded lobbyists that did not reside in Brussels, and asked for a declaration of good behaviour. A SEAP position would once more be presented to the EP Quaestors. The Assembly finally approved a budget for a telemarketing campaign, to be conducted by Adrian Scally, in order to increase membership.

Immediately after the meeting Commissioner Kallas met 120 SEAP members and their guests at 'De Warande'. The SEAP president presented the SEAP position on the ETI, stressing the importance of the SEAP code as a backbone to the organisation. It should not be confronted with an imposed code.

Kallas pointed out that the ETI was about much more (data on end recipients of EU funding; integrity of decision makers) than lobbyists. He announced that the Commission intends to publish a green paper at the start of 2006, with a questionnaire on each of the issues addressed. Lobbying is legal, but it should become more transparent. He stated that the Commission favours voluntary registration, and a common code of conduct, but it would not exclude recourse to mandatory regulation if the transparency objectives could not be reached otherwise.

The next year took a bad start for the profession with news on the Abramoff scandal in the USA. The CEO immediately exploited this incident for its plea to regulate lobbying by law, while SEAP argued in a press release that exactly the extensive US legislation on lobbying disclosure had not been able to avoid this scandal.

Gail Orton developed a position on the new EP passes procedure, and the co-operation contract with the European Training Institute on the code workshops was ended, as SEAP wanted to organise these meetings itself.

In February a highly interesting lunch meeting was held with Peter Hustinx, the European data protection supervisor. He explained that his office was independent from both Commission and EP, and that data protection would put limits to the transparency concept. With the help of Mr. Hustinx SEAP later that year was able, to get rid of a request in the EP passes procedure for information on home addresses of applicants.

In May the Commission finally published its green paper on ETI, which proposed a voluntary registration system for interest groups; a common code, or at least common minimum requirements, to be developed by the profession itself; a monitoring and sanction system in case of incorrect registration; and an 'external

watchdog' who should monitor compliance with the code. In a press release SEAP stressed that voluntary registration should cover all EA professionals in an equitable way, and that the Commission, together with the other EU institutions, should take the lead in establishing minimum requirements for codes used by the profession. Monitoring and sanctioning should be left to the professional organisations, but an external watchdog could usefully provide objectivity.

The SEAP Board regretted a public statement by EPACA in favour of compulsory registration.

In July SEAP replied in detail to the questionnaire contained in the green paper, asking for a clear definition of lobbying or, better, the representation of interests. Distinction should be made between representatives of public and private interests, and NGOs should fall in the latter category. As SEAP membership covers all categories of private interest representatives its code should not be replaced by a consolidated code, which would be imposed on the profession. SEAP would wish to be consulted on the formulation of minimum requirements for codes. The 'watchdog' should be independent from Commission, EP or Council: the European ombudsman might be the right choice.

In September SEAP sent a letter to EP Quaestor Nicholson on the passes issue. The code committee benchmarked the SEAP code with codes of EPACA and IPRA, the international public relations association. Proposals were made on the simplification of the fee structure.

In November the General Assembly approved an amendment removing the exception for 'normal business hospitality' from the interdiction of giving financial inducements. It appointed the new Board, with Alain Beaumont, Jean-Louis Bosteels, Rogier Chorus, Yves de Lespinay, Susanna di Felicianonio, Gaël du Bouëtiez, Anthony Fell, Diane Iannucci, Erik Jonnaert, Maarten Labberton, Fredrik Lofthagen, June O'Keeffe, Martin Ohridski, Gail Orton, Martin Säckl, Philip Sheppard, Kajsa Stenström, Catherine Stewart and Lyn Trytsman-Gray.

The Assembly also updated the SEAP position on EP passes, that immediately after the meeting was discussed with EP Quaestrix Astrid Lülling. She promised to investigate whether SEAP members could be exempted from the need to provide a declaration of good behaviour, and to speed up procedures.

In December the Board appointed Lyn Trytsman-Gray as SEAP president for the 2006 – 2009 period; Catherine Stewart would continue as its vice-president. Each Board member was supposed to participate in one of the committees or to take up other SEAP tasks.

At the first Board meeting in 2007 the terms of reference of the committees were updated, and its members appointed.

The code committee developed a complaints procedure for non-members, and core principles (or 'minimum requirements') for a common code of conduct with EPACA and IPRA. The telemarketing action started its second phase: membership passed the 200 level, but a substantial part of the members had arrears in the payment of fees. The membership committee developed a convincing paper on 'ten reasons to join SEAP'; the goal of 250 members at the end of the year was formulated.

The General Assembly was held in April, in order to meet Belgian legal requirements. It discussed once more on the ETI with Commissioner Kallas, who was pleased with the 'core principles' document, but the Commission would not abandon its work on the development of a common code. He also explained the financial disclosure rules for each of the public affairs categories, including NGOs, that had been published by the Commission in its conclusions on the green paper questionnaire results.

The 10th anniversary of SEAP was finally fixed for 11 October 2007; Lucyna Gutman-Grauer was appointed Board member, with a special responsibility for training.

In July a lunch meeting was held with Kraft USA public affairs officer Jim Portnoy, on US disclosure requirements. The meeting agreed that each of the member categories inside SEAP would have to formulate guidance rules on disclosure, as a service to its members, and in order to avoid discrepancies.

And so, at the eve of its 10th anniversary celebration, SEAP continues to play a very active and important role for the European affairs profession vis-à-vis the three main EU institutions. It has become a recognised partner of the Commission and the European Parliament, but this recognition did not yet lead to special treatment for its members. With a membership that is moving towards 250, SEAP no longer is a small organisation, but with ten or fifteen thousand lobbyists in Brussels the field is open for further acquisition. It is vital in this respect that SEAP can avoid the imposition by outsiders of a code that would risk to replace, or make redundant, its own code.

In any case SEAP will remain the best place to meet colleagues with parallel interests, and the cross fertilisation inside SEAP is valued by all members. Lunch meetings and other networking events will prove to be the binding element of an organisation that now proudly enters a new decade.

Mechelen, 7th October 2007
Rogier Chorus