

# EARSC @ GEO Plenary XIII

I have spent most of last week in St Petersburg at the GEO plenary; it was a very useful meeting. The plenary was well attended (considered to be the best attended that has not been a Ministerial) and a new format with 3 discussion panel sessions rather than sets of statements from the principles made it far more interesting than previous ones I have sat in on!

I was invited to participate to a panel on the Commercial sector engagement with GEO. It was chaired by Steve Ramage, the new external relations manager in the GEO secretariat. It was Steve's first week after his appointment so it was very much a baptism of fire!

The other panelists were Olga Gershenzon (RBC signals), Jeanne Foust (ESRI), Rob Postma (Airbus), Xu Liping (Beijing space view technology), Sanjay Kumar (Geospatial Media) who each provided very balanced and complementary views. Comments afterwards really welcomes the discussion that took place and appreciated the new plenary format. The modalities of private sector engagement were discussed and how this could provide benefits for all parties. A group is being set up under the GEO and private sector participation will be the next step forward.

It was the first time that the private sector had been invited to speak in front of the GEO delegates and represents a good step forward in the move to promote engagement. A dialogue is essential and this need was recognised as the main conclusion of the panel. As a global organisation this is not so easy to organise but as a representative body and a Participating Organisation to GEO, EARSC can play a strong role.

On a personal basis, it was the second time I had visited St Petersburg; the first time was 40 years ago when it was called Leningrad! There were a few more cars, more shops and more lit buildings but in general the city did not seem to have changed very much – reflecting its status as a UNESCO site. We had heavy snow for most of the time there but I did manage to get into the centre for one evening for a quick view and a beer! Coming from UK and Belgium where the slightest snowfall will stop all traffic, it was very impressive the way the traffic just kept on moving. We were all worried on Thursday to get to the airport for our flight, but the taxi-driver found ways around the jams and we got there in good time for a flight that also departed on time.