

AQEST

ACCESS TO QUALIFIED EXPERTS IN SUBMARINE TELECOMMUNICATION



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THANK YOU!

After one year of activity, AQEST has celebrated its first birthday on the banks of the Seine in Paris, in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower!

More than 150 guests attended the event, which brought together past and present international key players in the Submarine Cable community. The weather, the quality of the guests, the venue and the friendly atmosphere made this a memorable event for all of us!

We would like to thank everyone who joined us for their support and enthusiasm, which turned this occasion into such a success.

We would also like to thank all those who couldn't make it for their encouragement and good wishes.

And thank you, all of you, for showing so much interest in our company and in our work!

We hope to see you all next year for AQEST's second birthday celebration!



An unexpectedly good first year!

From Europe to Middle East, from Africa to America, from the Pacific to Asia, last year AQEST was successfully took part in a great many worldwide projects.



Many of you were eagerly looking forward to this new fresh source of expertise in the Submarine Cable Business!



LETTER TO A FRIEND

"In cha'Allah"

My dear friend,

For a good part of my professional life, between 1960 and 1980, I spent a lot of time dealing with the South Mediterranean countries in the Maghreb (west) and the Mashreq (east). I have lost count of the number of trips I made to Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo, Beirut and Damascus! A lot of old friends' names and faces sprang back to mind as I watched the news of the "Arab Spring" on TV! And I keep saying to myself: "At last!"

I like to think that such a development was made possible by the Internet and by social networks, i.e. thanks to our cables! There is clearly a relationship between these "revolutions" and the emergence of Internet access and of mobile phones in these countries. The technology is shaping a whole new world! I predict that all the cables we are currently laying around Africa will also bring about significant changes. I am not sure what form these will take, but they will surprise the world.

If ASN is today a significant submarine system provider, it is, for a good part, thanks to the Mediterranean countries and people. When I joined this activity as a young engineer in 1961, my first job in Calais was to work on the production of the Perpignan-Oran cable. The Marseille-Algiers cable had been installed in 1957, just after a short experimental cable in Tunisia (Kelibia-Bou Ficha). These were ASN first "repeated" cables, providing 60 circuits! These circuits were used by the government, but also by the people fighting for their independence! These cables were "domestic cables", since Algeria only became independent in 1962 (while Tunisia and Morocco had been independent since 1956)!

The very first Marseilles-Algiers cable was a telegraph cables laid in 1871! When the war broke out in 1939, there were 10 Marseilles-Maghreb cables in service! The cable ship "Arago" spent the war in Oran and Algiers protecting these cables, which played an important role: the names of "Mers le-Kébir" in Algeria, "Tobruk" in Libya, and "El Alamein" in Egypt are well known! The battle of El Alamein, in the desert, was a turning point in the war. Churchill was to say later "We had no victory before El Alamein, no defeat after it".

During my time in Calais, we manufactured the France-Morocco (1967), Marseilles-Tel Aviv (1968), Marseilles-Bizerte (1969), Marseilles-Beirut (1970), Beirut-Alexandria (1972), Marseilles-Algiers 2 (1972), Penmarc'h-Casablanca (1973), Perpignan-Bizerte (1975) systems.

One of my first job when I was appointed head of Submarcom in 1977 was to go there and negotiate Marseilles-Tripoli (Libya), and Syria-Greece systems. Quite an experience for a young 40-year-old!

One of my many surprise was to realise how often these very capable and highly-educated people were saying "In cha Allah" during our discussions. I learn that it was part of their culture never to say "I'll definitely do that tomorrow" without adding "God willing". This is actually not that different from our "Thanks God", or from the French "Si Dieu le veut". More disturbing was to discover that the allegorical speech that Christ used in the Gospels was in fact the way everyone tends to speak in the Middle East. This was explained to me by my Damascus local agent, who was a non-Muslim Arab. One day, he took me to a monastery in the Syrian mountains. He was born in Anatolia, like St Paul, who was converted on the the road to Damascus. The Submarcom representative in Cairo was a highly-cultured old gentleman from the orthodox Coptic community. Every time I went to Cairo, he would take me to the old Arento (PTT) building, where he would kiss every secretary while saying "Allah is great!". I tell you, never go there believing that things are simple!

More recently, these countries have seized the opportunity to get connected to the numerous Europe-Asia cables, and in some cases to develop their own plans, such as TE North (Telecom Egypt).

It should be noted that so far, there is very little traffic among these countries. One keep hearing about the "Arab world", but the relations between these various countries are very limited. The border between Morocco and Algeria is almost sealed due to the Western Saharan conflict. Trade between Tunisia and Algeria is conducted indirectly via Marseilles. This is even truer of Lybia and of its neighbours.

So let's hope, my friend, that the current "upheaval" will lead to better solutions with further developments, and that submarine cables will play an ever greater role in the near future. Why not envisage the construction of a long and thick festoon, a Maghreb-Mashreq highway, from Morocco to Alexandria, Lebanon and Syria? And let's dream that Israel and Palestine could have their own landing point in it! Inch' Allah!

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