IN OCTOBER STLE WAS FORTUNATE to participate in the 50th Annual Congress of an organization familiar to many of our members—UEIL or the Independent Union of the European Lubricants Industry. Well, that’s not exactly correct. The organization used the congress to announce that it has changed its name and now is the Union of the European Lubricants Industry. The name change reflects an organization that is growing in importance as a voice of the lubricants industry throughout the European Union.

The meeting was held in Brussels, and in addition to me STLE was represented by Executive Director Ed Salek and Bob Gresham, our director of professional development. ILMA also had a leadership group in attendance. We joined with them and several other European associations in saluting UEIL on its 50th anniversary. More than 250 people attended the congress.

The two-day program included presentations on technical issues that affect everyone in the lubricants business, as well as other presentations that provided insights into the lubricants marketplace in Europe and Asia. Ed, Bob and I had numerous one-to-one conversations that introduced STLE to some people and reinforced our mission as a technical society with many others who were aware of our organization but not familiar with our scope of activities.

During the meeting, STLE hosted a roundtable discussion with several representatives from European lubricant companies. We shared the results of our Global Trends Report, a piece of compelling research that STLE completed this year, working in conjunction with Association Laboratory, a Chicago-based consultancy.

The report explored six trends that show how the world continues to shrink into a global marketplace for lubricants. I would like to take a moment to briefly review them with you, as these trends will impact your business in 2014 and beyond.

1. **Global business and economics.** The barriers to entering the global marketplace are decreasing. More and more, end-users are taking an Amazon.com view of the world. If you want it you can get it—no matter where in the world it’s located.

2. **Government influence.** One thing you can count on wherever you are—your government will increase its scrutiny of your business and increase the cost of regulatory compliance. Also, governments across the globe are desperately in need of revenues—businesses are an attractive target.

3. **Information value chains.** We now live in a 24-hour news world with overwhelming amounts of data and information bombarding us continuously. This trend is both a threat and an opportunity. Today vendors, business partners and even your customers can compete against you. However, information technology can lower your cost of doing business.

4. **Finance and investment.** Business investment will grow slowly due to cautious consumers and concerns about regulatory costs. Economic uncertainty is limiting capital investment and job creation. You also can expect lower levels of discretionary government spending as more monies are allocated to entitlement programs.

5. **Workforces and demographics.** As the workforce continues to gray, older workers will outnumber their younger counterparts. This creates a situation where the number of people required to replace retiring workers is insufficient.

6. **Workplace culture.** Technology is allowing virtual offices and real-time connectivity between people in different locations. Future workers will be attracted to organizations with less-restrictive work environments.

The UEIL meeting was another opportunity for STLE to introduce its value to an international community. But please know that whether your business is in Brussels or Houston, these trends will impact your business, so be prepared. As they say, forewarned is forearmed.

**Six Global Trends**

STLE attended the 50th UEIL meeting and led a discussion on factors certain to affect your business in 2014.