
CMake for MeVisLab - Documentation

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Chapter 1. CMake and MeVisLab

1.1. Introduction to CMake

CMake is an open-source, cross-platform family of tools designed to build, test and package software. CMake files are widely supported by many development environments.

MeVisLab makes use of CMake files for building source code since version 3.5. Previous versions used the qmake build file translator by Qt, that translated .pro and .pri files into the platform specific build projects. A converter tool that translates .pro files into CMake files reasonably well is available in MeVisLab.

For the general documentation for CMake visit the CMake reference at cmake.org.

CMake is not delivered with the MeVisLab SDK. It needs to be installed by the user if she or he wants to build their own modules. Several IDEs automatically install a version of CMake.

1.2. Syntax in CMake files

A description of the syntax in CMake can be found in the [CMake Tutorial](#). A glance at the available commands in the [command reference](#) and at [generator expressions](#) might also be helpful.

MeVisLab comes with some useful CMake functions that handle some repeated or error-prone tasks. They are listed later in this document.

In a later chapter there are also some hints what to do when old .pro files shall be manually migrated to CMake files or how to fix some of the things the automatic converter does not get right.

1.3. CMake Files in MeVisLab

CMake based projects generally contain a file `CMakeLists.txt` at root level that describes the steps to build, test, and install a project.

In MeVisLab, there are some special CMake functions that handle scenarios that are specific to MeVisLab and its package structure.

Side note: `CMakeLists.txt` can also include the `CMakeLists.txt` of sub-directories with the command `add_subdirectory()`.

A typical example (`MLModuleWrapperExample/CMakeLists.txt`):

```
cmake_minimum_required(VERSION 3.20)
project(MLModuleWrapperExample)

find_package(MeVisLab COMPONENTS ML MLABase Network HINTS "$ENV{MLAB_ROOT}" REQUIRED)

set(CMAKE_AUTOMOC TRUE)
find_package(Qt6 COMPONENTS Core Gui REQUIRED)

add_library(MLModuleWrapperExample "")
add_library(MeVisLab::MLModuleWrapperExample ALIAS MLModuleWrapperExample)

generate_export_header(MLModuleWrapperExample)

target_sources(MLModuleWrapperExample PRIVATE
    mlModuleWrapperExample.cpp
    mlModuleWrapperExample.h)
```

```

    MModuleWrapperExampleInit.cpp
    MModuleWrapperExampleInit.h
)

target_compile_definitions(MModuleWrapperExample PRIVATE MEVIS_TARGET=MModuleWrapperExample)

target_link_libraries(MModuleWrapperExample
    PUBLIC
    Qt6::Core
    Qt6::Gui
    MeVisLab::ML
    MeVisLab::Network
    MeVisLab::MLABBase
)

mlab_install(MModuleWrapperExample NS MeVisLab)

```

Here is a short explanation of the individual statements:

```
cmake_minimum_required(VERSION 3.20)
```

This tells CMake which CMake version is required at minimum. This is important, because it also activates/deactivates some features in the CMake language, depending on the given version. MeVisLab currently requires 3.20.

```
project(MModuleWrapperExample)
```

This sets the name of this project. However, this is the simplest form. It is recommended to specify at least the `VERSION`.

```
find_package(MeVisLab COMPONENTS ML MLABBase Network HINTS "$ENV{MLAB_ROOT}" REQUIRED)
```

This command tells CMake that the project links against parts of MeVisLab. The actual 'parts' are listed after the `COMPONENTS` option.

The `HINTS` option tells CMake where to find the central MeVisLab cmake file, which resolves the linked libraries and adds the required additional CMake functions. In this case it tells CMake to search relative to the `MLAB_ROOT` environment variable, which should point to the `Packages` directory of your MeVisLab SDK installation directory. (This should automatically be set by the SDK installer.)



Note

[`find_package\(MeVisLab\)`](#) not only finds MeVisLab, it also loads additional functions and configures various CMake settings. It is important to execute this call as early as possible in the project, especially before other `find_package` calls are made or custom CMake settings are applied.

```
set(CMAKE_AUTOMOC TRUE)
```

This is a project that builds against the Qt toolkit. Setting the variable `CMAKE_AUTOMOC` to `TRUE` tells CMake that the Qt moc tool should automatically be applied to all relevant source files.

```
find_package(Qt6 COMPONENTS Core Gui REQUIRED)
```

This tells CMake to look for Qt6 in the third-party libraries, and the necessary components. Note that this should always come after `find_package(MeVisLab)`, as this sets some CMake search paths; otherwise another Qt installed on your system might be found.

There should be a `find_package()` statement for every required third-party dependency.

```
add_library(MLModuleWrapperExample "")
add_library(MeVisLab::MLModuleWrapperExample ALIAS MLModuleWrapperExample)
```

This tells CMake to add a library target called `MLModuleWrapperExample`.

It is good practice to add the target under a vendor-specific namespace, which is done with the second `add_library`. A different namespace than `MeVisLab` shall be used for own projects to avoid name conflicts. Always link to projects with their namespace name.

```
generate_export_header(MLModuleWrapperExample)
```

It generates and uses a header file that contains platform and compiler specific `EXPORT` macros.

```
target_sources(MLModuleWrapperExample PRIVATE
    mlModuleWrapperExample.cpp
    mlModuleWrapperExample.h
    MLModuleWrapperExampleInit.cpp
    MLModuleWrapperExampleInit.h
)
```

This lists the source files that should be compiled. Note that these files should usually be defined as `PRIVATE`.

```
target_compile_definitions(MLModuleWrapperExample PRIVATE MEVIS_TARGET=MLModuleWrapperExample)
```

Set the `MEVIS_TARGET` compile definition to be used for the compile process.

```
target_link_libraries(MLModuleWrapperExample
    PUBLIC
    Qt6::Core
    Qt6::Gui
    MeVisLab::ML
    MeVisLab::Network
    MeVisLab::MLABBase
)
```

These are the targets this project links against. Some belong to Qt, some belong to MeVisLab itself. Note that since the dependencies are public, they are also made part of the link interface and would be automatically available to projects linking this target.

```
mlab_install(MLModuleWrapperExample NS MeVisLab)
```

Generates MeVisLab specific `install` rules for this project.

One should use

```
mlab_install(MyProject NS MyNamespace)
```

for custom projects, that is, use a different namespace than MeVisLab to avoid name conflicts (it should correspond to the namespace in the second `add_library` statement). And if other projects should be able to link against this project, use these statements instead:

```
mlab_install(MyProject NS MyNamespace EXPORT)  
mlab_install_headers(MyProject)
```

Chapter 2. CMake for MeVisLab

Reference

2.1. Custom commands

2.1.1. find_package(MeVisLab)

```
find_package(MeVisLab COMPONENTS ... HINTS "$ENV{MLAB_ROOT}" REQUIRED)
```

This should be one of the first statements in every `CMakeLists.txt` project (after `cmake_minimum_required()` and `project()`).

This will provide some MeVisLab specific functions and change various CMake settings. It will also set up the target directories for the custom package (by calling [mlab_setup_current_package](#)). Set the CMake variable `MLAB_AUTOMATIC_PACKAGE_SETUP` to `OFF` first if this needs to be used outside of a MeVisLab package

Example:

```
find_package(MeVisLab COMPONENTS ML HINTS "$ENV{MLAB_ROOT}" REQUIRED)
```

2.1.2. mlab_add_executable

```
mlab_add_executable(<target>)
```

It is a special command to create an executable target and put it into the `bin` directory of the MeVisLab package.

Example:

```
mlab_add_executable(MyTarget)
```

2.1.3. mlab_add_test

```
mlab_add_test(<target> [RUN_SERIAL] [GUI] [EXECUTE_TEST <ON/OFF>])
```

Defines that the target is an executable that will be compiled to `CodeTests/bin` (where it is found by the TestCenter too) and executed as a unit test. Sources should be added with the `target_sources()` command.

Execution of the test can be suspended with the option `EXECUTE_TEST OFF`.

The option `RUN_SERIAL` enforces that this test is not run in parallel with other tests.

The option `GUI` makes this test an executable with a graphical user interface (this usually does not make sense for a unit test).

Example:

```
mlab_add_test(MyTarget)
```

2.1.4. mlab_install

```
mlab_install(<target> NS <namespace>] [EXPORT] [OPTIONAL] [CONFIGURATIONS <config1>...])
```

This command installs the target in the correct package specific directory. It also generates `.mldepends` files — if appropriate — that aid the installer generation. It also makes sure that the necessary CMake files are generated in the package's `cmake` directory.

With `EXPORT` one specifies that other libraries can link against this library. One would usually also call [mlab_install_headers](#) in this case.

If `OPTIONAL` is specified, cmake will ignore if files to install are missing, e.g., because the project failed to build.

If the environment or CMake variable `MLAB_AUTOMATIC_POSTBUILD_COPY` is true, then this function will also make sure that the resulting libraries and CMake files are directly copied to the `lib` and `cmake` directories of the source package after building. This way the `install` step can be avoided, which improves on the build-and-debug cycle. However, the CMake installation phase is not executed and therefore no corresponding settings are applied.

If you also want to install `.pdb` files for debugging (`.debug` files on Unix), you can set the global CMake variable `MLAB_INSTALL_PDBS`, this variable is checked by `mlab_install`.

Example:

```
mlab_install(MyLibrary NS MyNamespace EXPORT)
```

2.1.5. mlab_install_directory

```
mlab_install_directory(<sub_directory> [<install_arg1>...])
```

If a directory isn't covered by [mlab_install_package](#) (or there is the need to do it all manually), then it can be installed separately with this command. The corresponding target directory is determined automatically.

If one wants to set separate arguments for the generated `install` statement (like `EXCLUDE`) one can give it as additional arguments. `USE_SOURCE_PERMISSIONS` is set in any case, though.

Example:

```
mlab_install_directory(Sources)
```

2.1.6. mlab_install_file

```
mlab_install_file(<filename> [<install_arg1>...])
```

Same as `mlab_install_directory` for a single file.

Example:

```
mlab_install_file(Description.txt)
```

2.1.7. mlab_install_headers

```
mlab_install_headers(<target>)
```

Installs the necessary header files for an exported target (with [mlab_install\(..., EXPORT\)](#)). This function will detect dedicated include directories like `include/Include` and set the exported include directory for the installed library accordingly.

Note that this function uses a very simple heuristic by just copying certain file extensions (`*.h` and `*.hpp`) from certain directories (`"."`, `include`, `Include` and `src`). CMake properties on targets, files or directories are not taken into account. Also almost no corresponding files from the [BINARY_DIR](#) directory are copied either, except for a header generated by [generate_export_header](#) that uses the standard naming conventions.

Example:

```
mlab_install_headers(MyLibrary)
```


2.1.8. mlab_install_package

```
mlab_install_package([GLOB_PROJECTS] [WITH_TESTCASES])
```

This command goes into the `CMakeLists.txt` alongside your `Package.def` file. It generates [install](#) statements for all the source directories that are typically needed for a package (like `Modules`, `Documentation/Publish`, etc.), so that one can install the source package into a separate directory, without polluting the source directory with the compiled libraries as it is common practice when using CMake.

The `GLOB_PROJECTS` option tells this command to automatically install all `Modules` sub-directories that it finds in the `Projects` directory of the current package.

With `WITH_TESTCASES`, also the `TestCases` directory is installed. Together with `GLOB_PROJECTS`, this also finds `TestCases` sub-directories in the `Projects` directory.

Example:

```
mlab_install_package(GLOB_PROJECTS)
```

2.1.9. mlab_setup_current_package

```
mlab_setup_current_package([<source_dir>])
```

Sets the output directories for the current (or given) directory. It is recommended to use this command in the `CMakeLists.txt` file alongside the `Package.def` file. It also sets the variables `MEVISLAB_PACKAGE_ROOT` (pointing to the directory of the `Package.def`), `MEVISLAB_PACKAGE_GROUP` (the package group name as found in the `Package.def`), and `MEVISLAB_PACKAGE_NAME` (the package name as found in the `Package.def`).

If the files `<package_group>_Settings.cmake` and/or `<package_group>_<package_name>_Settings.cmake` are found anywhere in the CMake module search path, then they will be also included at this point. (Note: The `cmake` directory of any package is automatically added to the CMake module search path.) This allows to set package specific compiler settings in a central place.

If `mlab_setup_current_package()` has already been called successfully in a directory above the current `CMakeLists.txt`, this function will do nothing (it looks for `MEVISLAB_PACKAGE_ROOT`).

Chapter 3. Migrating from .pro files to CMake files

3.1. Things one should know

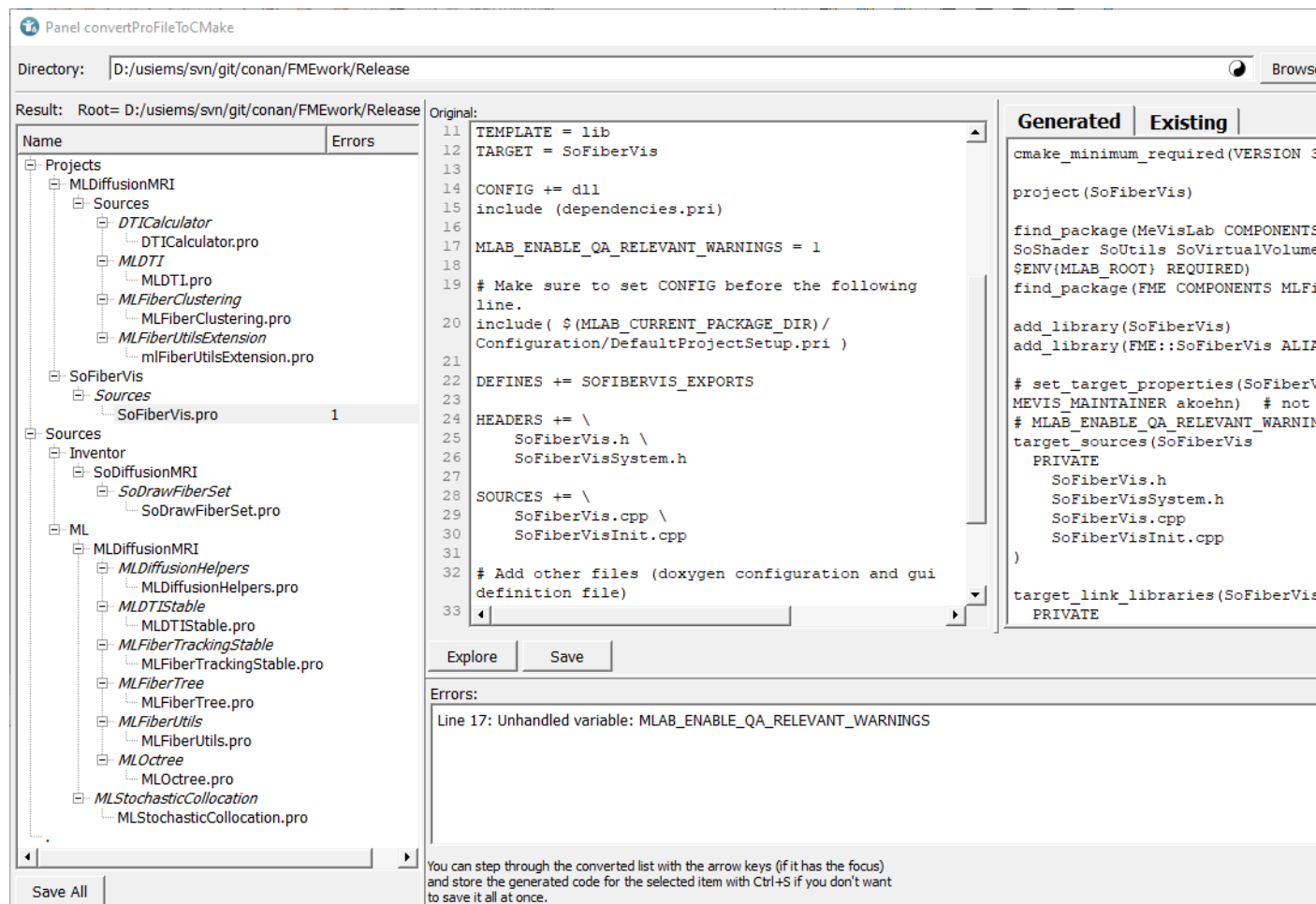
There are a few pitfalls that one should be aware of when migrating from .pro files to CMake files, even when using the .pro file converter in MeVisLab.

3.1.1. How to use the .pro file converter

MeVisLab has an interactive tool for converting .pro files into CMake files. This is accessible through the MeVisLab main menu, select **Scripting** → **Migration** → **Convert Pro Files to CMake...**

This is how it looks like (with a package from the Standard SDK converted):

Figure 3.1. The convertProFileToCMake user script



Select in the upper bar the directory of the .pro files that should (recursively) be converted with the **Browse...** button. The directory is persistent, so there is no need to re-enter the directory for another try.

The **Options...** button opens a small dialog where one can define which packages should get which CMake namespace. A sample definition could look like this:

```
MyPackageGroup/*=MyNamespace  
MyPackageGroup/MySpecialPackage=MySpecialNamespace
```

This is also persistent, so this needs to be entered only once.

After entering this data, pressing the **Convert** button starts the process. The script will now first scan all packages for package .pri files (which it will need to correctly assign CMake namespaces to the entries in the `CONFIG` variable). Then it will convert the requested .pro files. The resulting files are not written back immediately, but listed in the area below, where they can be inspected and saved manually.

The list on the left side displays all the converted files and directories. Note that one can also click on intermediate directories, since `CMakeLists.txt` files are generated for these too (for the necessary [add_subdirectory](#) statements). If there were any errors during the conversion, a number on the right of the item will show how many errors were emitted for this file.

The area to the right of the list allows the inspection of the conversion itself. The left half shows the original .pro file (if one selects a .pro file, for directories this stays empty). The right half shows the resulting file under the **Generated** tab. If there is already a file in this place, its content is shown under the **Existing** tab. The target file name is shown below this area on the right (usually it is "`CMakeLists.txt`", but if more than one .pro file is in a directory, the converter will decide to work with include files that end on .cmake).

Below this are two buttons **Explore** and **Save**. **Explore** will open the file explorer at the selected location. **Save** will save the currently selected file. The keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+S** will also do this.



Note

All files are saved together with the **Save All** button below the directory/file tree (keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Shift+S**).

The area below the text areas shows the warnings/errors that happened for the selected file. One should inspect any errors and modify the generated file if necessary.

3.1.2. Translating the CONFIG entries.

The entries in the `CONFIG` variable usually denote other libraries that the project links against.

The name stays the same for entries that are found in one's own package .pri files, but is prefixed with the CMake namespace that was defined in the dialog opened by the **Options...** button. The known exports of the StandardSDK on the other hand are converted through an internal list. These are then added as arguments of the [target_link_libraries](#) function.

3.1.3. Unhandled CONFIG entries.

Occasionally an entry in the `CONFIG` variable is unknown. The converter will still treat this as a library to link, but will prefix it with the `UNKNOWN` namespace. To resolve this, one needs to find either what the correct CMake name for this library is, or if this is not a library at all and just serves some other purpose. In this case one might perhaps use an [option](#) statement to define an optional variable, and some [if](#) statement afterwards that uses this variable, and has the necessary statements in its body. What these statements should look like is out of scope for the converter and this text.

3.1.4. Include directories.

Include directories in CMake are specified through the [target_include_directories](#) directive. One important aspect of this is that the directories are specified differently for in-build use and after installation (this assumes that the target library is installed in a completely different directory).

For in-build use, include directories are specified as absolute paths, using the `CMAKE_CURRENT_SOURCE_DIR` variable, and in a generator expression that only expands for the in-build use. Example:

```
target_include_directories(MLModuleWrapperExample PUBLIC
  $<BUILD_INTERFACE:${CMAKE_CURRENT_SOURCE_DIR}>
  $<BUILD_INTERFACE:${CMAKE_CURRENT_SOURCE_DIR}/someSubDirectory>
)
```

These directories should be `PUBLIC` if other libraries build against this library.

For building against the installed library, include directories are specified as relative paths, but relative to the installation folder. If one uses the [mlab_install_headers](#) directive, it is not necessary to do anything if your include directory is the source directory of your library itself, or a sub-folder called `include`, `Include`, or `src`, since `mlab_install_headers` sets this automatically. Otherwise it is necessary to add a statement like this:

```
# compute relative installation directory:
file(RELATIVE_PATH REL ${CMAKE_SOURCE_DIR} ${CMAKE_CURRENT_SOURCE_DIR})

target_include_directories(MLModuleWrapperExample PUBLIC
  $<INSTALL_INTERFACE:${REL}/someSubDirectory>
)
```