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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

SUMMARY

EUROPEAN ARCHIVES GROUP

**ARCHIVES IN EUROPE
FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE DIGITAL ERA
2nd Progress Report to the Council**

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SUMMARY

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ARCHIVES IN EUROPE FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE DIGITAL ERA 2nd Progress Report to the Council

Background

In November 2005 the Council of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on increased cooperation in the field of archives in Europe.¹ The Recommendation asked for the creation of a European Archives Group (EAG) comprising experts designated by the Member States and the EU institutions to ensure cooperation and coordination on general matters relating to archives. The Council furthermore recommended a number of priority measures that the EAG should follow-up.

In 2008 the EAG submitted a Progress Report to the Council on the implementation of the 2005 recommendation². In the report the EAG noted that digital recordkeeping is changing the relations between archives services and records creators as well as the role that archives and archivists fulfil in public administration and society. The report concluded that archives services should examine their role in more detail and assess the significance of existing archival concepts, procedures and processes.

Four years after its first Progress Report, the EAG is submitting a follow-up report. The Report was adopted by the European Archives group at its meeting in Copenhagen on 30 May 2012.

Co-operation in the field of archives in Europe

The European Archives Group, created in early 2006, has continued to promote and coordinate cooperation between archives at the European level, notably where this can provide real added value. The EAG meets twice every year. Since the second semester of 2009 the meetings are organised jointly with meetings of the European Board of National Archivists (EBNA) and hosted by the EU Presidency.

The EAG has continued to provide general orientations and guidance on the implementation of the priority actions of the Recommendation, notably:

Preservation and disaster prevention

European interdisciplinary co-operation on electronic documents and archives

¹ OJ L 312, 29.11.2005, p.55

² Progress Report to the Council SEC(2008)2364; COM(2008)500

The establishment and maintenance of an internet portal for archives in Europe

The EAG has furthermore examined the challenges for archives in the digital era identified in the 2008 Report. Its findings and recommendations are presented in the attached report and summarised below.

Archives in the digital era

The widespread use of ICT is changing the role that archives fulfil in society. The European Archives Group has examined the challenges that these changes pose for archives, notably in the following areas.

- The changing role of Archives

National Archives are actively looking at their current and future responsibilities in the digital world. The National Archives will work to balance their mandate and responsibilities with other interests. To this end they will seek to cooperate more closely with other information management networks and bodies, including e-government agencies.

- On-site versus online access to archives

Access to archives across Europe is changing as internet technologies become more widespread and as the archives put more material online. The question is what priority national archives should give to the different types of access. Archives need to identify the needs of their users to define the balance between on-site and online services and decide which services should be developed.

- Archives and the Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information³

Encouraging public use of the information contained in archives is part of the mission of national archival institutions. However, re-use of archives⁴ by the private sector raises various issues such as authenticity, intellectual property rights, data protection, charging policy and the balance between public and private services.

- Digitisation

Digitisation and online publication allow archives to make more material available both to the academic community and to a wider public. It also facilitates the re-use of information from archives. However, making information available online is not a cost-free activity and the capacity of National Archives to digitise their collections may in part be motivated by funding possibilities.

- Costs and funding

Finding adequate ways of funding digitisation is crucial to opening online access to Europe's archival heritage. Archival institutions therefore believe it is important to develop a shared European funding agenda in addition to a European digitisation programme.

³ OJ L345 31.12.2003, p. 90.

⁴ In December 2011 the European Commission proposed a revision of the Directive on Public Sector Information (PSI), which will bring archives, museums and libraries into the scope of the Directive, even if the obligations facing them are not as extensive as they are for other public sector bodies.

Conclusions

The role of archives is changing because of their involvement in modern information society and the digital information chain. This is not just a technical issue but intricately linked to the involvement of archives in e-government. At the same time archives retain many of their traditional responsibilities as custodians, information providers and guarantors of authenticity.

Archives are relied upon to provide authentic and trustworthy sources for the retrospective accountability of administrations. In order to fulfil their responsibilities it is necessary that National Archives are involved in setting the rules for digital records management at the early stages of the document life-cycle. Archives should do more to be involved in governing the business processes of government, not just from a technological perspective but also by creating new visions about the archival institutions themselves and their connection to government.

Digital preservation and providing access to born-digital material are core responsibilities of National Archives. The transfer of increasing amounts of born-digital records increases the need to create a sustainable technical, organisational and knowledge infrastructure to keep digital material permanently accessible and ensure its reliability. This will require a notable effort from archives whereby sharing experiences and developing common strategies are essential ingredients.

The National Archives recognise the importance of ensuring that citizens across the EU have online access to the rich archival heritage in Europe. The Brussels Declaration on Digital Access to Archives in 2010⁵ underlines their intention to make the fullest possible use of digital technologies to promote open access to Europe's archival holdings. It should be noted however that this poses specific qualitative requirements on the descriptive information and the ability of archives to guarantee the authenticity of digital records.

Archives in Europe are working together to face the challenges of the modern information society even as they strive to continue to fulfil their traditional responsibilities to governments and citizens. Archives already have a two decade long history of cooperation in Europe. They will continue to learn from each other and, wherever possible, cooperate to develop new standards, practices and solutions in order to take the next step to becoming a full partner in modern information society.

The National Archives will examine how they can work together more closely to meet the challenges ahead and create a new concept for the next years of cooperation. They will coordinate their efforts, between themselves and with the EU institutions, via the European Board of National Archivists and the European Archives Group. In addition, the National Archives will seek to engage more closely with other bodies involved in information management and e-government. The National Archives aim to be a full partner in EU policy development on open data and online access to information.

⁵ The Brussels Declaration was adopted by the European Board of National Archivists in Brussels on 19 November 2010.

Decisions and recommendations

Decisions

- (1) The National Archives will work together to create a **shared digital agenda** for archives which links European objectives with national ambitions and efforts. They will investigate how the archives can contribute to a sustainable Archive Portal Europe Foundation after 2015. The EAG will seek to promote a common policy for archives in the growing European information area and will examine how fundamental archival values can find their place in the new digital developments. Special attention will be given to interoperability, long term accessibility of data, persistent identifiers, open data and appraisal.
- (2) The National Archives will cooperate to **bring online by 2015**:
 - The main sources that help citizens to better understand relations between countries and administrations in the history and construction of Europe as well as the diversity of national cultures, traditions and identities.
 - The archival "showpieces" of each Member State.
 - Collections relating to major historical events and anniversaries.
- (3) The National Archives will cooperate more closely with other bodies in order to ensure that archival interests, such as preservation and access, are balanced with other interests, such as data protection. For example, they undertake to draft a Code of Conduct for archives in the framework of the proposal for an EU Data Protection Regulation that will be discussed with other interested parties.

Recommendations

- (4) National Archives should be partners for governments in setting standards for the **management of electronic records**. They will continue to work together with other public and private sector organisations in the DLM Forum with a view to promoting the further development of guidelines and standards, such as MoReq2010.
- (5) Common standards for **online services** should be shared. The developing role of social networking and its potential influence on the provision of archival services needs to be examined.
- (6) Archives organisations should work collaboratively to overcome barriers and encourage greater **re-use of information from archives**. There is a need to develop a common model from existing best practice in Europe that can be used as a framework for archives which do not yet have a policy for re-use. The model should include how to license content for re-use and guarantee authenticity as well as options for charging or free access. Archives should share experiences with libraries and museums and conduct further research on what customers and potential customers are looking for. The EAG should promote best practices in this area and act as the advocate for the sector, stressing that archives contain rich content with potential for re-use.

- (7) National Archives should share their knowledge and experience and exchange information about approaches to **digitisation** of archival material. The development of a Europe wide strategy, including models and common standards for digitisation, would assist individual archives to put digitisation programmes in train and contribute to greater interoperability between countries. It is also necessary to examine the funding of digitisation programmes. Should archives charge for additional services such as online access, and if so in which cases? The EAG should make recommendations on digitisation for online access and encourage the development of appropriate strategies.
- (8) The transfer and preservation of increasing amounts of **born-digital records** calls for intensified cooperation and exchange of best practices and solutions between National Archives. Where possible they should develop common concepts and solutions, taking account of existing projects in this field.⁶ It is necessary to better quantify the funding required for born-digital archive material so that archives have a better grasp of how much it costs and how limited budgets need to be balanced between traditional and digital media. The cost of preserving born-digital records should be assessed with greater precision, e.g. through improved cost models, in order to provide the National Archives with better instruments to forecast the necessary funding over time.

⁶ For example projects such as PLANETS, PRESTOSPACE and Digital Preservation Europe.