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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

Summary of the

**Progress Report to the Council
on the implementation of Council Recommendation 2005/835/EC
of 14 November 2005
on priority actions to increase cooperation in the field of archives in Europe
presented by the European Archives Group**

{SEC(2008) 2364}

1. BACKGROUND

In its Resolution of 6 May 2003 on archives in the Member States¹, the Council recognised the challenges that archives were facing on the eve of the enlargement of the Union with ten new Member States. The Council called for an assessment of the situation of public archives in the EU, taking particular account of enlargement, and asked the Commission to submit a report that would address the possibilities for enhanced co-ordination and co-operation.

In response to the Council Resolution, the *Report on archives in the enlarged European Union*, prepared by a group of experts from the Member States, was submitted to the Council by the Commission in February 2005.² The Report contains both an analysis of the situation of archives in the European Union and a number of proposed actions and future orientations for increased co-operation between archives at the European level.

The Report on Archives led to Council Recommendation 2005/835/EC on priority actions to increase cooperation in the field of archives in Europe of 14 November 2005.³ Point A of the Council Recommendation calls for the creation of a European Archives Group (EAG), comprising experts designated by the Member States and the institutions of the Union, to ensure cooperation and coordination on general matters relating to archives and in particular to implement five priority measures referred to in point B of the Recommendation. In point C the Member States and the institutions of the Union are jointly called upon to promote the implementation of these priority measures. It is noted that the European Union will endeavour to support projects aimed at the implementation of these measures under existing programmes. In point D of the Recommendation the Council requests that, at the latest three years after the date of publication of the Recommendation, the European Archives Group present a progress report on implementation of the priority measures.

The progress report requested by the Council was adopted by the European Archives Group at its meeting of 6 June 2008. The EAG progress report is submitted to the Council in annex to this Communication.

The EAG considered that the report should include not only the achievements on the implementation of the Council Recommendation but should also set out some of the new challenges for archives that lie ahead. The progress report has been structured accordingly.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS

2.1. Increased cooperation in the field of archives in Europe

The EAG was created at the beginning of 2006 and comprises experts from all 27 Member States of the European Union⁴ as well as from the five European institutions mentioned in Article 7(1) of the EC Treaty. Since its inaugural meeting in April 2006, the EAG has met once every semester to discuss the progress achieved in the implementation of the Council Recommendation and to provide guidance and general orientations for the work undertaken on the five priority actions.

¹ OJ C 113, 13.5.2003, p. 2

² COM(2005) 52 final.

³ OJ L 312, 29.11.2005, p. 55

⁴ Bulgaria and Romania participated as observers in 2006 and are full members of the EAG since their accession to the EU at the beginning of 2007.

The EAG has sought to co-operate with other relevant networks and sectors. For the implementation of a number of the priority measures the EAG has sought to co-operate with existing bodies such as the DLM Forum⁵ and the European Branch of the International Council on Archives (EURBICA). The archives sector is also actively participating in the European Digital Library Foundation and is represented on the High Level Expert Group on Digital Libraries and the EDL interoperability working group.

With regard to the priority measure 'adoption of measures to prevent theft of archival documents', the EAG has sought to work together with museums and libraries to address a problem that is common to all three sectors. Cross-sector co-operation is considered fundamental for success in recovering stolen goods. To this end a joint conference to discuss the problem will be organised by the French EU presidency in Roubaix in October 2008.

In accordance with point C of the Council Recommendation, the Commission has sought, where possible, to support projects aimed at the implementation of the Council Recommendation. Funding for the update and extension of the Model requirements for the management of electronic records (MoReq2)⁶ and for the Legal database for archives in Europe⁷ was requested and obtained in the framework of the IDABC programme⁸. It is expected that a proposal from the EAG working group to create an internet portal for archives⁹ will be funded from the eContentplus programme¹⁰.

2.2. The five priority measures of the Council Recommendation

Progress has been achieved with regard to all five priority measures in point B of the Council Recommendation of November 2005.

2.2.1. Preservation and disaster prevention

The Council Recommendation calls for the development of an action plan to promote damage-prevention measures for documents and archives following natural catastrophes and other harmful incidents, the promotion of Community-wide actions for the preservation and restoration of damaged documents and archives and the establishment and promotion, of standards and specifications for the construction of new archives purpose built buildings.

After the publication of the recommendation a tri-national working group on preservation and prevention of damage to archives, chaired by the German Bundesarchiv, was established. The working group has focussed on the most urgent of the problems mentioned in the Council Recommendation, i.e. disaster prevention. It has made progress in regional cooperation between the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany and notably in its plans to establish, in 2008, an internet based

⁵ DLM = document lifecycle management. The DLM Forum is a stakeholder organisation that unites many of the National Archives of the EU27 and other public and private organisations interested in electronic records and archives management,

⁶ See 2.2.2 below

⁷ See 2.2.4 below

⁸ 2004/387/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on interoperable delivery of pan-European eGovernment services to public administrations, businesses and citizens; see: OJ L 181, 18.5.2004 p. 25

⁹ See section 2.2.3 below

¹⁰ Decision No 456/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2005 establishing a multiannual Community programme to make digital content in Europe more accessible, usable and exploitable, OJ L 79, 24.3.2005, p. 1

information service for use in case of disasters. This should include detailed information on disaster prevention and disaster management, but also information on where to find appropriate resources and capacity.

The objective is to enlarge the internet database to a European level as a tool to structure and enable networking between European Archives. This will allow archives across the EU to prepare themselves properly for all possible cases of disasters.

2.2.2. *European interdisciplinary co-operation on electronic documents and archives*

The Council Recommendation of 14 November 2005 asks for the further development of European interdisciplinary co-operation on electronic documents and archives. In particular, the Recommendation asks for the updating and extension of the current requirements for setting up electronic document and archive management systems, such as MoReq. The Council Recommendation also asks for a continuation of the DLM Forum conferences on electronic documents and archives.

In co-operation with the Commission, the DLM Forum has developed the updated and extended version of the Model requirements for the management of electronic records (MoReq2). The DLM Forum will ensure MoReq2 governance and promote compliance testing for MoReq2 compliant software.

In accordance with the Council Recommendation the DLM Forum will continue to organise large conferences on electronic documents and archives. The fifth DLM Forum Conference will be held in Toulouse (France) from 10-12 December 2008 and will focus on achievements and new directions for information and records management in Europe.

2.2.3. *The establishment and maintenance of an internet portal for documents and archives in Europe*

The proposal to establish an internet portal for archives in Europe aims at making Europe's diverse archival material kept by private or public cultural heritage institutions easier to access and to use online for work, leisure and/or study. For the first time it will be possible to retrieve archival information in Europe regardless of national, institutional and sector boundaries. This will be an important contribution to fulfilling the vision of a common multilingual access point to Europe's distributed digital cultural and scientific heritage.

The project will not establish or identify new standards but implement a common framework across Europe that includes existing global archival standards. The project will also support and encourage the acceptance of trans-national standards in order to guarantee interoperability with different archival portals set up on national and institutional level.

The project group, led by the Sub-directorate general of the Spanish State Archives, has built a strong network of archival institutions and has intensive contacts with other cultural heritage institutions (libraries, museums). The archives portal will be linked to EUROPEANA and it is expected that a contract will be signed with the Commission to fund the project from the eContentplus programme.

2.2.4. *Promotion of best practice with regard to national and European legislation regarding archives*

The Council Recommendation of 14 November 2005 asks for the promotion of best practice with regard to national and European law on the management of, and the access to, documents and archives. To achieve this it proposes setting up a database that will link data on archival legislation and other related laws at national and Community level and facilitate their consultation. The database will provide an overview of existing legislation and allow best practices to be identified and disseminated.

A working group to develop a legal database for archives in Europe is led by the Direction des Archives de France in cooperation with the European branch of the International Council on Archives (EURBICA). The database contains archival and related legislation as well as interpretative and contextual information of the EU and the EU member states. The development of the legal database is supported by the European Commission and funded from the European Union's IDABC programme.

The legal database was presented to the Commission in June. The content will be provided by the Member States and the European institutions during the second half of 2008. The database will be maintained by the member states and hosted by the International Council on Archives (ICA).

2.2.5. *Measures to prevent theft of archival documents*

A working group for measures to prevent theft in archives, led by the Swedish Riksarkivet, focussed on two issues that it considered the most important, first, what measures could be taken against theft from archives and the ensuing trade in cultural artefacts and second, the need to undertake a study that will show the extent of theft problems among archival institutions in the Member States.

The Working Group has fulfilled its assignment. In June 2007 it presented a report to the EAG on theft in archives based on a survey of almost 200 archives throughout Europe. The survey gives insight into the nature and extent of theft in archives. Based on this report the working group sought to provide advice and some recommendations. The group developed some 'Principles and practical guidance' for the prevention of theft in archives which will serve as a common tool for archival institutions. The 'Principles and practical guidance' were presented to the European Archives Group in June 2008.

The working group has furthermore prepared a draft declaration on the prevention of theft in archives and the fight against their illegal trade for adoption by the Heads of the National Archives of the 27 Member States. This declaration will be presented at a seminar about theft in archives will be held in Roubaix, during the French EU presidency in November 2008.

3. FUTURE CHALLENGES

The European Archives Group proposes that Archives Services reflect on their role in a rapidly evolving environment and examine how they can better serve society in general and public administration in particular. The group identifies five challenges for archives in the future.

3.1.1. The European Directive for the re-use of public sector information

The EAG proposes to more closely study how to better exploit and more widely disseminate archival content. It notes especially that Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 November 2003 on the re-use of Public Sector Information¹¹ offers opportunities for re-using the rich content of Europe's archives. It recommends that Member States' Archives Services consider the advantages and disadvantages of extending the terms of that Directive to archives and examine the different models for exploiting the content of archives and making it more widely available to European and world citizens.

3.1.2. The relationship between on-site and on-line access to archives

The EAG considers that the balance between online and onsite access to archives is evolving. The progress report notes that this question would benefit from a wider study of practice and experience in EU countries and that, beyond an exchange of information, it would be useful to develop some best practice guidelines. The report therefore recommends that the EAG should undertake further study of this matter and in particular consider the implications for European Archives Services of the changing balance between online and onsite access to archives. It proposes an exchange of information about current approaches to the digitisation of archival materials and suggests that the EAG encourage archives in the EU to develop appropriate strategies for the future.

3.1.3. Digital record keeping: consequences for administration and society and the changing role of Archives

The growing use of new technologies has crucially affected public administration and how they manage information as well as the way that documents are created, stored and accessed. Over the past decades the implementation of ICT in administration has moreover gone hand in hand with the development and implementation of efficiency and quality of service and with growing attention to transparency and accountability of government. Good governance and e-government are central concepts in the public administration of the 21st century. It is unmistakable that e-government and digital recordkeeping will profoundly change many of the traditional principles and practices of archives services.

Digitisation of society will affect not only the traditional archival concepts and practices, but it will also change the relations between archives services and records creators and ultimately the role that archives services and archivists fulfil in public administration and in society. An analysis of the developments in the EU member states, within the context of their different legislative and administrative traditions, could give a valuable insight in the value of different standards and practices.

The EAG concludes that an exchange of information on the current situation in the EU member states would benefit the way that these matters are handled in the different countries. National Archives are actively looking at their current and future role in e-Government. The EAG proposes to stimulate and promote discussion on this issue with a view to exploiting the full potential value of the Archives for society in general and public administration in particular and will report more fully on this issue in 2010.

¹¹ OJ L 345, 31.12.2003, p. 90–96

3.1.4. *Creation of a European expertise network*

The progress report considers that cooperation between archival professionals in the EU member States should be considered as one of the main tools for promoting co-operation between archives themselves. It suggests the establishment of a European expertise network to provide archive institutions and professionals in Europe with:

- firstly, support in implementing – at their respective levels – different projects developed as part of current priorities or those yet to be defined;
- secondly, support and information regarding the other areas of expertise mentioned in the report.

To achieve these objectives the EAG proposes to cooperate with both the archives services in the Member States that are involved in the different projects as well as with professional associations of archivists. In the absence of a European archivist association, the latter could be represented by European branch of the International Council on Archives (EURBICA) of which many of these associations are a member.

3.1.5. *Plan for a centre of excellence for European archivists*

Over the past few years, a number of societal and professional changes have highlighted the need to develop a category of high-level professional managers in the field of document and archive management who could aspire to a successful career and occupy strategic posts. The aim is to create in the European Union a new generation of archival managers who not only have a sound knowledge of the main issues and challenges facing the profession but who are also capable of defining management strategies and can communicate at the very highest level. This proposal could take the form of a European centre of excellence that would bring together the archivists of the future and thus further develop European expertise.

The European "centre of excellence" will allow for the training of a body of professionals capable of developing in both a national and an international context. It will also create a specific network for exchanges and discussions on the basis of an approach encompassing not only national characteristics and expertise, but also the purely European context, thereby furthering high-level European cooperation in this field.

The "centre of excellence" would be organised in a decentralised fashion so that its structures would be lighter and would not be permanently attached to any one organisation or institution. All the EU Member States should be involved.

4. CONCLUSION

Co-operation between the archives of the Member States has moved forward since the adoption of the Council Recommendation at the end of 2005. As in the past, this is an evolutionary process, based on shared interests and ambitions and the recognition that co-operation should, and can, be mutually beneficial. On this basis, co-operation between archives in Europe has been surprisingly successful over the last two decades. In order to continue that success, the EAG makes a number of recommendations to continue to work together during the coming years:

- the EAG shall continue to monitor and provide guidance for the implementation of the priority actions set out in the Council Recommendation of 14 November 2005 as well as the new measures that have resulted from these actions and that may result from this

progress report. The EAG shall closely co-ordinate its work with the European Board of National Archivists;

- the EAG shall increasingly work together with other relevant sectors and networks with a view to achieving maximum mutual benefits and economies of scale in the efficient management, storage, preservation and retrieval of public sector information, as well as more efficient and user friendly access to archival content and services for the European citizen;
- the European Commission will continue to support the work of the European Archives Group.