

Inter-Institutional Committee for Informatics

Conclusions on document exchange formats following the discussion on office automation platforms

The mandate of the Inter-Institutional Committee for Informatics (hereafter “CII”) includes, on the one hand, the exchange of information about the IT policies of the Institutions represented in it (hereafter “*the Institutions*”) and, on the other hand, the identification and encouragement of potential areas of synergy.

In this context, during its meeting held in Brussels on 14 December 2010, the CII held a discussion about the current situation of, and the future strategies for, the office automation platforms used by the Institutions, based on a survey distributed ahead of the meeting and filled in by all the Institutions as well as by 15 additional EU Agencies (hereafter “*the survey*”).

In addition, in order to initiate and facilitate the discussion, the Commission delivered a presentation of its project “Next Office Automation Platform” (NOAP).

The main findings of the survey were the following:

- (1) At present, the EU institutions typically run Microsoft-based solutions on the corporate desktop, as their office productivity suite, on the e-mail platform side, and on the collaborative platform, although diversity is certainly higher in the latter.
- (2) All respondents indicated their expectation to remain on Microsoft-based platforms in the office automation realms mentioned above for the foreseeable future (i.e. for the 2 years to come).
- (3) The revisable document formats used at present are mostly Office 2002/2003 formats (84% of replies). The expected prevailing document format for the future is Office Open XML (68% of replies).
- (4) The Internet browser offering is already diversified at present, with a strong OSS presence (Firefox) alongside Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser, and this offering will become increasingly diversified in the years to come.

The discussion showed the following:

- A decision is due on what how revisable document exchange format should evolve in the future. Indeed, Microsoft Office 2003 with Office 97 compatibility, the format currently used for inter-institutional exchanges, as well as the most widely used internally in the Institutions, is outdated.
- Standards have since been adopted by standardisation bodies in this area, as well as in the area of non-revisable document formats.

- Irrespective of the migration intentions of each of the Institutions, there is now a high expectation both internally and externally that document exchange formats should be based on standards.

Following the discussion held during the meeting, the Institutions agreed that a common approach to revisable and non-revisable document exchange formats was advisable.

This common approach can be summarised as follows.

1. Exchanges with the external world.

- 1.1. As a general rule, **non-revisable document formats** should be preferred. In this area there are two standards, both of which are implemented by a large variety of viewing tools, including Open Source Software (OSS). The **PDF (ISO/IEC 32000-1:2008)** is a widely used official standard. However, for archiving purposes, the second standard **PDF/A (ISO 19005-X)** offers some advantages. It is recommended to use at least one of the two ISO standards for non-revisable document formats.
- 1.2. In cases where documents have to be exchanged using **revisable document formats**, the principle to be applied by analogy is the same as when dealing with multilingualism. Citizens and the Institutions' partners (e.g. Member States) should be put at the centre, and the Institutions should take all appropriate measures to be able to provide them with documents in the standard format of their choice.

The minimum requirement is to support XML-based revisable document formats standardised by the International Organization for Standardization, namely:

- Open Document Format for Office Applications, or **ODF (ISO/IEC 26300:2006)**.
- Office Open XML, or **OOXML (ISO/IEC 29500:2008)**.

In addition, the Institutions are encouraged to support, on a best effort basis, other widely used document formats.

Whenever multiple formats are supported, equal quality may not be guaranteed.

2. Interinstitutional exchanges.

- 2.1. As far as **non-revisable document formats** are concerned, there is no reason to depart from the format recommended for exchanges with the external world. Therefore it is recommended to use at least one of the two ISO standards (**ISO/IEC 32000-1:2008** or **ISO 19005-X**).
- 2.2. As far as **revisable document formats** are concerned, XML-based international standards are the preferred approach. Given the fact that:

- on the one hand, OOXML is much more widely used than ODF at the moment, and this situation is not likely to evolve in the foreseeable future; and
- on the other hand, all the Institutions plan to migrate to office automation platforms which will produce XML files natively while providing 100% native support for legacy formats such as Office 2003,

the preferred document exchange among the Institutions is **OOXML**.

2.3. The guidelines given above should not become an impediment for achieving even greater administrative efficiency through interinstitutional co-operation. In particular:

- where, for legal or other purposes, a non-revisable document must be regarded as the official version, the Institutions should, where necessary, exchange also its revisable version;
- where, for technical reasons, an Institution needs a revisable document in its native format, the originating Institution should provide it in that format, in addition to the official exchange format (if different);
- where, for legal or other reasons, a closed group of users is established, specific arrangements can be made.

The Institutions agreed to take the appropriate measures so that, at the end of their ongoing or future migration projects, they can implement this common approach in an efficient and fully synchronised manner.