



MINUTES OF

THE FIRST MEETING

OF THE EUROPEAN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM

ON ELECTRONIC INVOICING

13 September 2011

Charlemagne Building (Room Sicco Mansholt), Rue de la Loi 170, 1040 Brussels

GENERAL

On 13 September 2011, the first meeting of the European Multi-Stakeholder Forum on e-invoicing ('Forum') was organised by the Commission. The Forum brings together representatives of National Fora and other stakeholders at EU level. It aims at exchanging experiences and best practices on e-invoicing. The Forum should also help the Commission in identifying further measures to facilitate the mass adoption of e-invoicing across borders in line with its objective to make e-invoicing the predominant method of invoicing by 2020.

The meeting was chaired by the Commission Services. Delegates from almost all Member States attended the meeting, with the exception of Malta, Lithuania and Slovenia. All invited stakeholder associations and other organisations attended the meeting. A representative from Croatia participated as an observer.

The meeting was organised along two main items: (i) a comprehensive overview of the current situation which gave all national delegations and stakeholders an opportunity to present their views on e-invoicing; and (ii) the adoption of the annual work programme of the Forum and the constitution of four activity groups.

The meeting helped to successfully define and initiate crucial activities of the Forum and gave the participants an opportunity to share views, experiences and expectations across borders and different stakeholder categories.

The next meeting of the Forum will take place around March/April 2012.

1. OPENING AND KEYNOTE SPEECHES BY THE COMMISSION SERVICES

Daniel Calleja Crespo, Deputy Director General of the Enterprise and Industry DG, welcomed participants to the first meeting of the Forum. He stressed that the European Commission expects the Forum to deliver concrete results and recommendations for the uptake of e-invoicing. He also invited Member States, through their National Fora, to live up to their crucial role in the introduction of e-invoicing.

Main issues addressed:

- Adoption level of e-invoicing for SMEs is lower than for large enterprises. SME adoption therefore crucial for mass take-up of e-invoicing.
- Service providers to develop services and solutions that require low investments in terms of infrastructure and skills.
- Standardisation bodies must ensure that their standards respond to the needs of the business community and SMEs in particular.
- The reform of the ICT standardisation policy should bring more flexibility to the recognition of standards developed outside the formal standardisation organisations.
- The co-existence of various standards should be addressed by further standard convergence or by developing software applications which ensure compatibility without the need for user intervention.

Mario Nava, Acting Director at the Internal Market and Services DG, gave a second keynote speech in which he focused on the potential benefits of e-invoicing for the Single Market.

Main issues addressed:

- Cross-border e-invoicing still is a challenge. Legal and regulatory harmonisation/convergence between Member States is key and the Forum should identify the areas which represent obstacles in this respect.
- Invoices and payments have a strong link. Hence, the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) should help further integrating the e-invoicing market across the EU.
- E-invoicing is crucial for the modernisation of public procurement in all Member States and represents a key step in the process chain which leads to full 'e-procurement'.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND RULES OF PROCEDURES

The agenda of the first meeting and the Rules of Procedures of the Forum were adopted by the members of the Forum.

3. ROUND TABLE WITH PRESENTATIONS BY NATIONAL DELEGATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS AT EU LEVEL

The round table was introduced by a statement of the representative of the European Central Bank (ECB) who endorsed the main points made by the two keynote speakers, especially regarding the mutual benefits between e-invoicing and SEPA.

All present national delegations briefly summarised the market situation and key developments at domestic level. Stakeholder representatives presented their expectations and key requirements on e-invoicing.

In their interventions, all participants had an opportunity to react to the Forum's work programme proposed by the Commission and indicated in which activity stream they were willing to take an active role, either as a contributing member or activity leader.

4. ADOPTION OF THE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME AND IDENTIFICATION OF ACTIVITY LEADERS

On the basis of the reactions of participants, the proposed annual work programme was endorsed and four activity groups were constituted. First results of the work of each activity group will be discussed during the next meeting of the Forum.

Activity 1: "Monitoring the e-invoicing uptake in Member States and at EU level"

Group leader: Pieter Breyne (National Forum Belgium)

Secretariat: Gerd Heinen (European Commission)

The representatives of all National Fora will be requested to contribute to this Activity by providing qualitative and quantitative information on their domestic situation. In the coming weeks, the group will develop a methodology and meaningful indicators for measuring the adoption of e-invoicing. The group leader suggested preparing a questionnaire for collecting the relevant data.

Activity 2: "Exchange of experiences and good practices"

Group co-leaders: Charles Bryant and Manos Schizas (National Forum UK)

Secretariat: Nathalie Pasquier (European Commission)

The group will assess best practices across all aspects which are relevant for e-invoicing. However, some specific topics could be analysed in more depth; for example, the role of service providers and how to achieve inter-operability, the role of the public sector and SME targeted initiatives.

Activity 3: "Propose appropriate solutions for remaining cross-border barriers"

Group leader: Stefan Engel-Flechsig (National Forum Germany)

Secretariat: Gerd Heinen (European Commission)

This group is expected both to address potential difficulties in the transposition of the revised VAT Directive and to identify legal and regulatory issues outside the field of VAT which may complicate the exchanges of e-invoices across borders (e.g. archiving, accounting, auditing requirements). The group will primarily deal with intra-EU issues.

Activity 4: "Migration towards a single e-invoice standard data model"

Group leader: Peter Potgieser (Representative of CEN)

Secretariat: Antonio Conte (European Commission)

The group will assess the outstanding standardisation gaps and synergies among ongoing standardisation activities at European and international level. It will recommend specific actions that will attempt to resolve the identified problems. The compatibility of various e-invoice messages (ISO 20022 e-invoice message, UBL message, Expert Group core-invoice, etc.) with the Cross-Industry Invoice version 2 will be addressed. The group will not carry out standardisation activities but deliver policy/operational advice.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Establishment of national fora

At this stage, 16 national fora have been formally set up, namely in the following Member States: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. All of these fora have already met at least once with the exception of Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain where a first meeting is planned in the coming weeks.

Eight Member States have not yet formally established their national forum: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, and Romania. However, the meeting participants from these countries indicated that a national forum would be set up by the end of the year. No information is available for the three Member States which have not been present at the meeting: Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia.

Composition of national delegations

To ensure a balanced representation of the public and private sector, the Commission encouraged those national fora which currently have two representatives from the public sector to reconsider the appointment of their delegates.

The Commission services will follow-up with the relevant national fora.

Observers to the Forum

The Decision allows for the participation of observers to the meetings of the Forum. The Commission may decide to grant observer status on the basis of a thorough assessment of the final composition of the EU Forum, as well as the composition of the national fora. The Commission will assess requests of interested parties on this basis.

CIRCABC system

The Forum is now active on CIRCABC. This system will enable to efficiently share documents across the members of the Forum. An email will shortly be sent to Forum's members with subscription details. Folders have been created for each activity with lists of contact details of the according participants.

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