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SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

Directorate C - Transparency, Efficiency & Resources  
SG.C.1 - Transparency, Document Management & Access to Documents

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## EUROPEN ARCHIVES GROUP 5 OCTOBER 2023

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 1. Opening

Isaac Sastre, the Director-General of Fine Arts the Ministry of Culture welcomed the participants.

#### 2. Adoption of the agenda

The Commission added a short point to provide information on AGM and EU-Login under AOB.

The agenda was adopted without further changes.

#### 3. Artificial intelligence in archives

The EAG discussed its future strategy in Oslo in November 2022 and Stockholm in May 2023. Following these discussions an ad-hoc working group prepared an outline of the strategy for discussion in Madrid. As the importance of artificial intelligence for archives became increasingly apparent in the working group, the Commission decided to put AI on the agenda in order to have a separate discussion on this topic before the strategy discussion.

The discussion on **artificial intelligence** consisted of **presentations** and a **roundtable discussion**.

There were four presentations that are annexed to these inclusions

- **Maria Oliván Avilés** (COM, chair of the EAG) presented the ongoing work by the EU legislator to regulate AI to address the potential risks of the rapidly developing technologies.
- **Cristina Díaz Martínez** (ES), presented the Spanish Archives Portal (PARES) and handwritten-text-recognition project.
- On behalf of the **Archives Portal Europe**, **Bogdan Popovici** (RO), presented the Automated topic detection in Archives Portal Europe's multilingual environment
- **Zoltán Szatucsek** (HU), reported on the Budapest handwritten-text-recognition workshop that took place in June 2023.

The **roundtable discussion** took place with four panellists:

- **Andrea Hänger**, the Vice-President of the Bundesarchiv,
- **Cristina Diaz**, Head of Institutional relationships in the Sub-Directorate-General of the Spanish State Archives,
- **Stefan Nellen**, Head of Information Access Division of the Swiss Federal Archives and
- **Zoltán Szatuscek** director of the Department of IT and Innovation at the Hungarian National Archives.

They discussed **three theses** that had come to the forefront during the discussions on the strategy outline:

- the so-called **black box problem**, i.e. the challenge of AI for recordkeeping and archiving because of the inability to see how deep learning systems make their decisions;
- that **archival information** can serve as **input for external AI development** by providing valuable training data to accelerate better AI models and contribute to building the European data economy;
- **AI algorithms can analyse and interpret historical documents**, extracting valuable insights, patterns, and connections that may have previously remained hidden.

### **Conclusions:**

- While archives are making progress and gaining experience in using AI technologies, especially for handwritten text recognition, they are just starting to explore the ‘black box’ problem. The panellists, and the subsequent discussion, noted the **difficulties in handling AI generated** source material. One remark was that it may become necessary to provide information about how information in archives is generated, e.g. something akin to food labelling in supermarkets. There were differences of opinion on the usefulness of preserving algorithms while it was also remarked that it is not necessary to be stricter with information produced by machines than for information produced by humans. It was generally thought to be of fundamental value that archivists become learn more about, and become much more familiar with AI.
- Some archivists recognised the huge potential of developing a **new service model** whereby archives would produce publicly available data that can serve to develop algorithms. Others however had doubts about the feasibility, including the investment that would be needed as well as possible ethical and security problems.
- There was some skepticism about **using AI** to generate insights, patterns and interpretations from **historical documents**. Some of the archivists saw a danger of creating biased results while others saw this as a potential area for cooperation that could be picked up in the framework of existing cooperation in the Archives Portal Europe.

#### 4. Strategy plan outline

The meeting discussed an **outline for the future strategy** of the EAG prepared by the ad-hoc working group established at the Stockholm meeting. The outline contained two main chapters:

1. Archives and democracy and
2. the role of archives in the digital transition.

Each section addressed several themes. In the first section this was transparency, the role of independent archives in democracy and archives and civil rights. Themes addressed in the second section were archives, artificial intelligence and the data economy, the role of archives in the digital transition and the dissemination and accessibility of information.

The chair asked the participants to discuss the themes and challenges set out in the paper and suggest **concrete steps forward** that will allow the EAG to develop a proposal for adoption at the next meeting in the May 2024. Possible future courses of action should keep the following criteria in mind:

- issues that cannot be solved at national level and/or are better tackled at EU level
- relevance to the EU / EU agenda
- potential impact at the national level
- potential influence of National Archives on EU policy and programs

The discussion took place in small groups of five or six people. Written conclusions were collected afterwards. The results were very diverse and to some extent underlined points already made in earlier discussions, for example for archives to play a role in the review of the GDPR. Many of the participants thought that the Archives Portal Europe could be used more strategically and as a means for further cooperation on some of the issues discussed.

A more detailed summary of the points discussed at each of the tables is annexed to these conclusions. The Commission hopes to bring this discussion to an end at the Brussel meeting of the EAG in May 2024.

#### Next steps

After the meeting, the Nordic countries volunteered to draft a strategy paper and submit it to the Commission for a written consultation of the EAG as a whole ahead of the Brussels meeting.

#### 16:30 AOB and Closing

##### 5. AOB

Constantin Stancu (COM) gave a short explanation of AGM/EU Login systems by

##### 6. Next EAG meeting

Belgium presented a short video and announced that the next meetings that will be take place in Brussels on 30 and 31 May 2024.