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Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on priority actions to increase cooperation in the field of archives in Europe**

(presented by the Commission)

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

On 6 May 2003 the Council of Ministers of the European Union issued a resolution on archives in the Member States.<sup>1</sup> This resolution invited the Commission to convene a group of experts, which was also to be representative of the new Member States, with the aim of examining a number of issues concerning the situation of archives in the European Union and to present a report to the Council that would include orientations for increased future co-operation on archives at the European level.

The Resolution of 6 May 2003 builds on an earlier Council resolution on archives of 14 November 1991<sup>2</sup>. This resolution of 14 November 1991 led to a report from a group of experts, *Archives in the European Union*<sup>3</sup>, which was presented to the Council in 1993. Further to this report the Council, in its Conclusions of 17 June 1994<sup>4</sup>, stressed the importance of archives as part of Europe's cultural heritage and agreed on the importance of greater co-operation in the field of archives. These Council conclusions were an important catalyst in promoting co-operation between archives services in Europe during the past ten years.

Since 1993 information and communication technologies have made continuous and rapid progress with direct effects on document and archives management. Moreover during this period the European Union expanded from 12 to 25 Member States. Many of the Member States and indeed the Institutions of the European Union itself have enacted numerous legislative changes with a view to granting citizens greater access to information and documents. The importance of the flow of information across borders has also greatly increased. These developments have had significant consequences for document and archives management and have led to a greater awareness for the need to increase co-operation in this field between the Member States and the EU Institutions.

The Commission therefore welcomed the Council resolution of 6 May 2003 as an opportunity to address the issues facing document and archives management in the enlarged European Union. In response to the Council resolution a group comprising of experts from each of the 25 Member States assisted the Commission in preparing the *Report on Archives in the enlarged European Union*. This Report is presented to the Council together with the attached draft Commission proposal for a Council recommendation concerning priority actions for increased co-operation on archives in Europe.

The Report describes the current situation of public archives in the Member States and the Institutions of the European Union as well as the probable evolution of document and archives management and the role of archive services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In accordance with the Council resolution of 6 May 2003, the Report includes a number of orientations for increased future cooperation on archives as well as suggestions for concrete actions in the field of archives at the European level.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C113 of 13.5.2003

<sup>2</sup> OJ C314 of 5.12.1991

<sup>3</sup> OPOCE, 1994, ISBN 92-826-8233-1

<sup>4</sup> OJ C235 of 23.8.1994

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see the attached Executive Summary of the Report

The proposed priority actions mentioned in the Report include measures to prevent, limit or restore damage to documents or loss of archives through natural and other catastrophes drawing on the lessons from natural catastrophes such as the flooding that recently occurred in different European countries. It is also proposed to improve the preservation of documents and archives including measures to promote standards and specifications for archival buildings and repositories. Co-operation on archives should be strengthened especially in the area of authenticity, long term preservation and accessibility of electronic documents and archives. There are also suggestions that measures should be taken to prevent the theft of archives and putting in place arrangements for the recovery of stolen documents. It furthermore proposes the creation of an EU gateway to the archival heritage of the enlarged Union in order to provide easier and trans-border access to archives for citizens of the European Union.

These priority actions are to be implemented through enhanced co-ordination, information sharing and exchange of good practice at the European level. To this end the Report proposes the creation of an Archivists Group of the EU Member States and EU Institutions. This Group would ensure the exchange of information and seek further co-operation in the field of archives on the basis of consensus and in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity. It would focus on the concrete actions indicated in the report and in particular on the priority actions mentioned above. The Archivists Group envisages to produce, after a period of three years, a first progress report on these priority actions on archives in Europe.

Proposal for a

## **COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

### **on priority actions to increase cooperation in the field of archives in Europe**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular the second indent of Article 151(5) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) As a result of the Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Culture meeting within the Council of 14 November 1991 on arrangements concerning archives<sup>6</sup>, and Council Conclusions of 17 June 1994 concerning greater cooperation in the field of archives<sup>7</sup>, initial progress has been made towards greater cooperation between the Member States in the field of archives.
- (2) The Council Resolution of 6 May 2003 on archives in the Member States<sup>8</sup> stressed the importance of archives for the understanding of the history and culture of Europe and for the democratic functioning of society within the framework of the enlargement of the Union on 1 May 2004.
- (3) Multidisciplinary forums have been held within a Community framework on the problems involved in the management, storage, preservation and retrieval of machine-readable data, with the participation of public administrations and national archives services, as well as representatives of industry and research.
- (4) The Council Resolution of 6 May 2003 stressed the need for further development of information and communications technologies applications and solutions in the field of archives.
- (5) The Commission underlines the work done by the institutions of the Union in the specific field of film archives in Europe, including the Council Resolution of 24 November 2003<sup>9</sup> on the deposit of cinematographic works in the European Union and the Commission Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on film heritage and the competitiveness of related industrial activities of 16 March 2004.

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<sup>6</sup> OJ C 314, 5.12.1991, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 235, 23.8.1994, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 113, 13.5.2003, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 295, 5.12.2003, p.5.

- (6) In the Resolution of 6 May 2003 the Council also invited the Commission to submit a report on the current situation and future development of archives in the enlarged Union. The “Report on archives in the enlarged European Union”, which was drawn up by a group of experts from the Member States and was completed in June 2004, is a sound basis for the further development of archives in Europe. It includes, at the Council’s request, proposals for practical actions and guidelines with a view to increasing cooperation at European level in the field of archives,

HEREBY RECOMMENDS:

- A. The following measures in the field of archives should be carried out by the Member States and the institutions of the Union over the next few years, in the order of priority indicated:
- (1) Preservation of and prevention of damage to archives in Europe:
    - development of a model action plan to promote damage-prevention measures for documents and archives in the context of natural catastrophes and other harmful incidents.
    - promotion of Community-wide actions for the preservation and restoration of damaged documents and archives.
    - establishment and promotion, by the national archives services of the Member States and the archives services of the institutions of the Union, of standards and specifications for the construction of new archives purpose built buildings.
  - (2) Reinforcement of European interdisciplinary cooperation on electronic documents and archives:
    - increase in cooperation on safeguarding the authenticity, long-term preservation and availability of electronic documents and archives, in particular by updating and extending the current requirements for setting up electronic document and archive management systems such as MoReq (Model requirements for electronic documents and archives management systems), which promote better public administration and by continuing to organise DLM<sup>10</sup> Forums on electronic documents and archives.
  - (3) Establishment and maintenance of an Internet Gateway for documents and archives in Europe:
    - provision, through the national archives services of the Member States and the archives services of the institutions of the Union, of an Internet Gateway which would give easier and cross-border access to documents and archives of the Member States and institutions of the Union. That Internet Gateway could be hosted by the national archives service of a Member State.

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<sup>10</sup> DLM= Document Lifecycle Management

- (4) Promotion of best practice with regard to national and European law on the management of, and access to, documents and archives:
- the national archives services of the Member States and the archives services of the institutions of the Union should monitor new draft legislation in that field to be enacted in any of the Member States, with the aim of seeking best practices especially with regard to requirements for the management of and access to documents and archives.
  - link data on archival legislation and other related laws at national and Community level and facilitate consultation thereof by setting up a database in order to encourage dissemination of that legislation. That database could be hosted by the national archives service of a Member State.
- (5) Adoption of measures to prevent the theft of archival documents:
- development of an action plan and common guidelines by the national archives services of the Member States that will allow for the exchange of information and best practices in order to combat the theft of archival documents and to promote the recovery of stolen documents.

- B. The Member States and the institutions of the Union should jointly promote the implementation of the priority measures identified in the “Report on archives in the enlarged European Union” of June 2004 and referred to in point A of this recommendation. It is not expected that the implementation of those measures will have budgetary implications for the Union.
- C. A European Archives Group comprising experts from the Member States and the institutions of the Union should be set up in order to ensure cooperation and coordination on general matters relating to archives and follow-up of the work referred to in the “Report on archives in the enlarged European Union” of June 2004, and in particular the priority measures referred to in point A of this recommendation.
- D. At the latest three years after the date of publication of this recommendation the European Archives Group should present a progress report on implementation of the priority measures referred to in point A.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council*  
*The President*