SG(94)7
004

EUROPEAN UNION
THE COUNCIL

Brussels, 25 May 1994 (17.06)
(OR. f)

7156/94

RESTREINT

ASIM 106
(FX DOC)

NOTE

from : Presidency

to : False Documents Working Party – Select Group of Experts on False Documents

No. prev. doc.: 4826/94 ASIM 34

I. INTRODUCTION

The main aim of a computerized image archiving system is to improve border controls so that persons with false documents (passport, visa or other means of identification) are prevented from entering and moving within the territory of the European Union. There is a need to combat illegal immigration and promote police cooperation.

To do this, certain users need easier access to large numbers of documents so that they can quickly identify false ones.

The proliferation of documents (both genuine and false) calls for frequent updating, and the techniques used to produce authentic documents and counterfeits of them are becoming more and more sophisticated, hence the need for a high-quality medium. These two requirements of speed and accurate reproduction are not fully met by paper, and so the use of a computerized image archiving system is essential.

So far, two Member States of the European Union have computerized image archiving systems: France (SIDO) and the Netherlands (EDISON). The United Kingdom has created a "VIPER" prototype, but work on it is currently halted. These three countries are already cooperating and the others have acknowledged the need to develop a system of this type.

In September 1993 the False Documents Working Party drew up the terms of reference for a feasibility study on the setting up of a computerized image archiving system for the European Union, and gave the task to a Select Group of Experts which met on 11 November 1993 and 10 February 1994 (see 10296/1/93 ASIM 18 REV 1 and 4826/94 ASIM 34).

In the light of those meetings, and in order to define clearly the requirements of users of a computerized image archiving system, each Member State was asked to inform the Secretariat of:

- national requirements;

- the requirements to be met in the context of the European Union as a whole.

Eight Member States responded to this request. Their comments are summarized below.

II. REQUIREMENTS

The requirements, as reported by the delegations, appear to be the same at national and European level.

1. Main characteristics

The characteristics that ought to be possessed by any computerized image archiving system are:

(a) high quality of image and colour;
(b) easy access for authorized persons ([1]);
(c) flexibility of updating;
(d) rapid distribution;
(e) locking facility to prevent unauthorized access;
(f) reasonable initial outlay;
(g) clear texts;
(h) possibility of enlarging details on screen;
(i) system of cross-references.

It should be possible to show up the watermark and fluorescent features of reproductions of authentic documents. Failing that, such features could be described in a text.

2. Chief users, security and training

Two levels of use should be distinguished:

- LEVEL 1: border control posts;
- LEVEL 2: experts.

([1]) The Italian contribution speaks, for example, of autostart and touchscreen.

In the interests of efficiency, the greatest possible number of authorized users ought to be involved. This would avoid work having to be repeated and make up for the fact that some Member States do not have many experts available.

In the interests of security, however, the use of the system should be confined to experts or, at least, accessing should take place in rooms set aside for the purpose.

Quite a few countries have emphasized the importance of training not only in the use of the computerized archiving system but more generally in the area of passport control. Some have also acknowledged the educational role of the system. The training of users will be at varying levels according to the complexity of the tasks and information involved, and last about half a day in the case of border control staff, several days in the case of experts.

3. Type of information

The type of information in the database depends on the requirements of the Member States and of the users in each country. The information generally deemed necessary is as follows:

LEVEL 1	(a)	reproductions of authentic documents
	(b)	reproductions of counterfeits
	(c)	summary information on falsification techniques
LEVEL 2	(d)	full description of method of falsifying documents
	(e)	profiles of persons involved in fraud (forgers and holders)
	(f)	information on organized channels, trafficking and offences.

The question arises of the language used at either level. This is generally the user's language, at least at Level 1, which does not pose any problems except as regards the summary information on falsification techniques, which have to be translated, discarded or left in the original language (thus greatly restricting its value at European level).

There is also the question of the origin of documents:

(a) documents of the European Union

(b) documents of the European Economic Area

(c) documents of "risk" third countries

(d) documents of third countries that do not present any particular risk.

The Member States prefer to put the initial emphasis on documents of the European Union, since these are statistically the most numerous as regards processing (and as regards falsification) ([1]), with priority being given to authentic documents, as false documents are already circulated by means of the Forgery Bulletin. Documents from what are deemed "risk third countries" come next.

4. Centralization and standardization

Standardization

The Member States recognize the need to standardize the software used but not necessarily the equipment. The standardization of iconographic data will curb both the expenditure and the extra workload relating to the conversion of images.

([1]) The United Kingdom contribution states that of the 3000 false documents discovered at the United Kingdom border in 1993 nearly half were documents of the European Union.

The standardization of texts makes for increased efficiency.

The United Kingdom is currently cooperating with France (SIDO) and the Netherlands (EDISON) on standardizing their databases.

On the question of standardizing the European Union's systems with those of third countries or international organizations, it may be noted that the Netherlands already cooperates with INTERPOL, which intends to use the EDISON system.

Centralization

The nub of the problem is whether to set up a European central unit or whether the national central units are capable of liaising among themselves.

Although some Member States advocate centralization (at a level which has not been clearly defined) of the recording of data (Portugal) and/or the storing of data – even if the data are produced on a decentralized basis (Germany) – generally speaking, the Member States favour the idea of centralization at national level rather than a centralized system at European Union level. A number of delegations would have difficulty with the setting up and financing of a European centre.

The Editorial Board of the Forgery Bulletin could perhaps play a role (as yet undefined) in coordinating the national central units.

III. CONCLUSION

The practical experience of countries with image archiving systems should serve as a basis for further study, especially as cooperation in this field already exists between the three countries mentioned. This should enable many problems to be avoided, especially as regards standardization and centralization.

France has declared itself willing to host a meeting whose aim would be to try and establish compatibility between the European systems currently operational and, of course, to help countries which do not yet have a computerized image archiving system.

It is suggested that the results of this survey and the future stages of the feasibility study should be examined at the next meeting of the Select Group of Experts.