

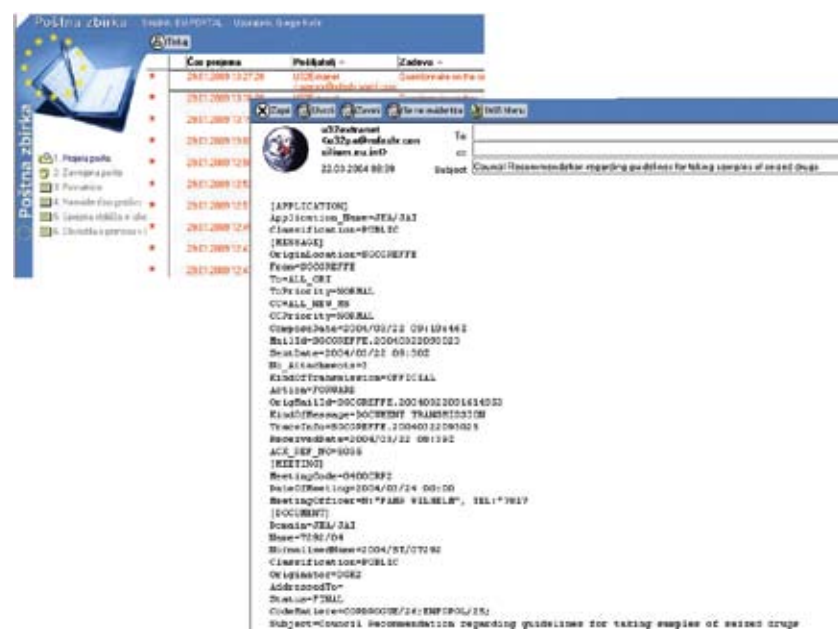
EU documentation - IT system to support the passing of decisions on legislative and other EU (council) acts

The aim of the project was to provide an efficient information system (IS) to support the preparation of positions in the process of passing legislative proposals and other EU (Council) documents. The client's requirement was to build an efficient IS for passing legislation which falls within the jurisdiction of the Council of the EU, however this does not include legislative acts which fall within the jurisdiction of the European Parliament or those passed in the procedure of the committees (comitology). In planning the IS, only those EU Council documents needed to be taken into consideration (Figure 1) which are transmitted to Member States via e-mail, U32mail/ExtraNet, and those transmitted via established channels to the Ministry of the Exterior, Ministry of Justice or Ministry of Defense (Cortesy, ESDP, JUST) were excluded.

In the context of developing an information system, our job was to transform the user's needs into functionalities which support the working procedure. It involves monitoring all information, monitoring all those involved in the working procedure, and the precondition is that the information is created within the framework of an IT-driven working procedure.

Who are the key parties involved in the procedure?

The EU legislative procedure involves processing large numbers of documents which can take as long as several years. And documents passed simultaneously can have a greater or lesser effect on existing legislation in a particular Member State. In the event that a document has an effect on a Member State's legal environment, all of the aspects must be examined and a position statement must be



Picture 1. E-mail message received through U32Mail/Extranet

prepared. The position statement is prepared by experts who clearly define the effects the passing of a certain document will have on individual aspects of the state: e.g. financial, legal, environmental. Depending on the area which the document deals with or affects, preparation of a position statement falls upon different line ministries (i.e. the government), and in certain cases the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. While in rare cases preparation of a national position statement may require involvement of only one ministry, usually preparing a position statement normally requires involvement of several line ministries. Therefore in Slovenia the taskforces involved in the procedure of adopting position statements regarding EU document proposals consist of representatives from different ministries and government agencies. The responsibility of such taskforces is to ensure expert representation of all aspects involved in the preparation of a particular position statement, and its preparation still lies within the field of responsibility of the relevant ministry. As already pointed out, in certain cases the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia carries out finalization of certain position statements. Representation of Slovenia's positions at Brussels meetings within most working bodies and the COREPER I and II Committees is the responsibility of the staff at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia with the European Union. Timely publication of position statements is essential for their work.

Harmonization with operative procedures on the EU level

Around 150 documents are e-mailed to Slovenia from the EU on a daily basis: draft proposals, agendas, invitations to meetings where draft proposals are discussed, as well as many other initiatives and types of documents such as analyses, reports etc. These documents are also published regularly on the EU's official web pages. All documents are reviewed in the Government Office for European Affairs (SVEZ), and appropriate action is taken so that ministries and taskforces are invited to prepare position statements regarding individual bill proposals. They must ensure that the position

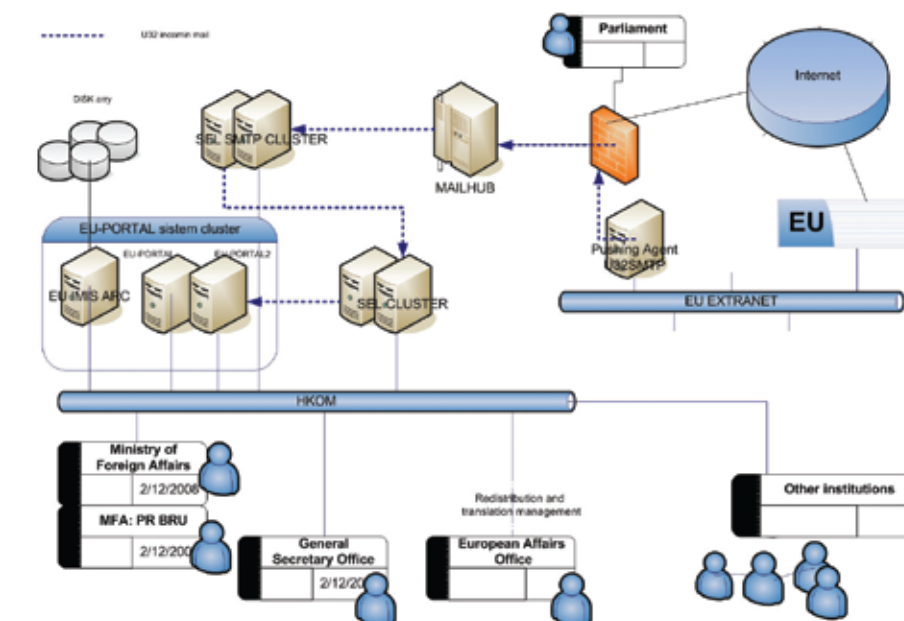
statement is prepared in due time, i.e. before the first meeting where the bill proposal is discussed on the EU level. EU meetings take place on multiple levels, where Slovenia is represented by staff of the Permanent Representation in Brussels, or by delegates from line ministries/the Government. On the EU level there are more than 4,000 meetings per year - from taskforces to the Council of the EU where Slovenian delegates represent Slovenia's national positions. It is therefore especially important that those representing Slovenian interests always have access to up-to-date information on Slovenia's official positions. Similarly, these delegates must provide feedback (reports, minutes), which can affect modification of Slovenia's official position. In most cases, the position towards a certain act is maintained from the beginning until the end of the act adoption process. For cases where changes are necessary, however, a flexible system must be in place which allows for monitoring all changes and providing up-to-date information at any point in time. Until the introduction of the new system, harmonization procedures in Slovenia and the integration into EU processes was conducted via e-mail, and the Government Office for Development and European Affairs used an internal discussion database.

Guidelines for planning the IS

- Key elements based on user demands:
- 2,500 documents per month, delivered via e-mail from the EU,
 - the solution should be user-friendly,
 - creating a single and all-inclusive position in the initial phases of discussion,
 - robust system due to the large number of users from various ministries and other bodies,
 - must comply with applicable Slovenian law,
 - transparency and ability to make fast decisions are essential,
 - possibility of a centralized access to up-to-date information,

In light of the above we can speak about the need for a system with a strong support for teamwork and a large number of documents, as well as a substantial number of users with varying interests. The system should be highly dependable. Considering the existing infrastructure, the logical choice of environment for the information system was the Lotus Notes/Domino system. The method of transmission and publishing EU system documents as a system input did not affect the choice of architecture when implementing IT support for this working procedure. The entire IS should be upgradeable at any time and ready for addition of new features and concepts.

Picture 2. Topology and infrastructure of EU Documentation



Setting up a suitable system

The architecture which supports the EU Documentation solution is Lotus Notes/Domino R7. Lotus Notes collections make up the application solution, allowing the use of the Lotus Notes client. Because the input document burden is considerable (est. about 1 GB per month), the architecture also includes IMiS Arc for saving attachments containing source EU documents.

The system is placed in a cluster, providing increased reliability of working with the application.

The system includes the following users:

- ministries and government agencies,
- Slovenian Government,
- Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia with the European Union,
- National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia.

Description of supported functionalities

EU Documentation is part of the central information system of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, which is used as the basic IT tool for receiving, logging, classifying and publishing documents sent to Slovenia via the official information exchange system of the Council of the European Union, U32mail/Extranet. The EU Documentation is used for coordinating positions prepared by relevant ministries involved in the process of passing legislative proposals and other EU acts. It is also used as a platform for Slovenian delegates to report the results from the meetings of working bodies and the Council of the European Union. The system allows the following procedures:

- Publishing all documents arriving from the EU and Slovenian documents created in the position preparation process;
- Publishing comprehensive information, links to different versions of EU documents and transparency of the position of the Republic of Slovenia;
- the official position of the RS is always clear, and previous versions of positions are also visible;
- Preparation of the position of the RS: Because EU Documentation is first and foremost a centralized system, it allows collaboration and

interaction between experts and ministries in preparing positions. In this manner, ministries can influence the formation of positions in various ways - firstly, they can use the working collection which only allows ministries directly involved in the procedure by SVEZ by assigning the procedure to the relevant ministry or taskforce to work on the preparation of the document concerned;

- Preparing comments to position proposals: On the second level of preparing the positions, ministries can join the EU File Collection, where all EU documents and all positions are published on a regular basis. All positions undergo a harmonization process, which produces the official position of the RS. On this level, ministries can provide comments, allowing them to participate in the formation of the position;
- Sending the position statements to the Government: If ministries involved in the process of preparing the position are not in agreement regarding the content of the position statement, the Government Office for Development and European Affairs sends these positions to the Government for processing. This transfers the responsibility of forming the position of the RS onto the Government.
- Tracking ongoing procedures: Relevant bodies can track how many procedures are outstanding and what activities are currently underway in relation to a particular government position. (Figure 2)
- Inclusion of Slovenian representatives in the European Union: This group of users has the same viewing privileges as other government users and therefore have timely access to information on preparing and accepting Slovenia's official position statements when representing its interests in the EU. After the conclusion of meetings, these usually deliver a report on the meeting, providing feedback on the discussion of a proposed act, as well as any required corrections to Slovenia's position statement.
- Tracking all EU documents and official position statements in the National Assembly of the RS: Users from the NA have the possibility of reviewing all EU documents and official

position statements adopted by the government, and may become involved in the procedure of preparing Slovenia's position statements, if needed.

- Archiving of all EU Slovenian documents in accordance with applicable law in the Republic of Slovenia.

Picture 3. Schematic overview of the current status of procedures for preparing positions for the competent ministries



Summary

We began to use the EU Documentation system to track the EU legislative procedure one month prior to Slovenia's accession to full membership in the EU. The usefulness of information collected in a central resource allows quickly rallying a wide circle of experts to assist in the formation of position statements. The advantage afforded by this system is prompt publication of documents, making them available to all interested parties who must then collaborate in one place. Thus in the process of preparing for various meetings in the EU, Slovenian delegates all have access to the same version of the position statement at any moment in time, ensuring authentic representation from all representatives and consistency of the positions they represent. At the moment, the EU Documentation system contains approximately 180,000 European and Slovenian documents.

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