

Paperbusting

Who, or what takes paper out of the work process - is it computers, communications, software applications, legislation, or is it people who are able to use regulations and modern information technology and effectively apply them in day-to-day processes...

The project: Information System Supporting the Operations of the Executive Council of the SRS

The main and (possibly) the only product produced by the government and ministries are documents, whether this means documents on paper, microfilm or electronic documents, and the task of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia is to provide effective document management support throughout the lifecycle - creation (whole studies have been made just on originating documents in the past), reproduction, distribution/dissemination, secure (long-term) storage and reuse of documents.

People at the old Secretariate of the Executive Council of the SRS soon realized that document management is a process just like any other, and a special taskforce was put together in the late 1970s for the purpose of establishing this process.

At the end of this year, exactly 30 years will have passed since the successful introduction of the so-called Information System Supporting the Operations of the Executive Council of the SRS (ISPD).

Key solutions introduced by this project:

- The process of working with the documents was organized like an assembly line - the transfer lines between stages were minimized (windows between office walls, elevator leading from the main office to the printing shop (documents were reproduced in much larger volumes at the time) and archive);
- Document metadata and summaries

(documentary content processing) were processed on the central mainframe computer. Documents were naturally sorted by content, filed in case files and assigned for processing. An "advanced" text editor was used to process these documents (parameters, summaries), called the Advanced Text Management System (ATMS). In order to edit a text the user practically needed more programming than typing skill. For full text searches and Boolean algorithms, STAIRS was used (Search Text And Information Retrieval System);

- The microfilm was introduced for making backup copies of paper documents and for efficient reuse of documents involved in solved cases (documents captured on microfilm date back as far as 1964). The entire documentation leading up to the end of the government's term in 2000 has been microfilmed, sorted by content and filed in microfilm pockets.

Introduction of the PC and HOST environment

In the mid 1980s PCs and the first text editors slowly began to infiltrate the working process - e.g. DisplayWrite (DW) 2 to 5. Local networks were still in development and more of an utopian dream than reality, and document-oriented programs were beyond utopian. In order to avoid losing an effective tool for searching through host content, we developed our own program for inputting metadata in Clipper (PIS - Office Information System), and we used DW to record summaries of government documents, meeting summons, resolutions and entire minutes. Every day we integrated the metadata with the content, then we used PS PC (Personal System for Personal Computer) to send everything to the Host and feed it into the database in STAIRS. Complicated but effective!

Key solutions for this project (whilst preserving all functionalities of the old system):

- tracking the case by preparing a reminder of unresolved cases;
- multiple entire documents were entered into the system.

PIS was later also one of the (many) contributing building blocks used to develop a program popularly used in state administration, the first serious document management program existing on the Lotus Notes platform, the SPIS 1.x (1995+).

Introducing electronic documentation management systems

Of course, the precondition for introducing modern document management solutions was substantial development of information technology - local networks, "multiplication" of workstations, introducing e-mail (initially CC:Mail).

An effective platform (Lotus Notes), an effective electronic document management system (SPIS) which SRC developed in collaboration with the (now sadly discontinued) Government Centre for Informatics, and LN-integrated e-mail - all of these soon allowed for the exchange of electronic or digitized documents between different public administration bodies. The Electronic Commerce and Electronic Signature Act (ZEPEP) sanctioned and legalized, subject to certain conditions, the official validity of these documents, which laid the first stones on the road to driving paper out of state administration.

The basic functionalities of the solution are:

- Registering and sorting documents by

- content;
- Assigning cases for processing, tracking deadlines, matter resolution;
- Notification of employees involved in the procedure;
- Preparation of incoming and outgoing documents with the mode of sending in electronic or paper format, etc.

In order for the government to conduct business electronically, the Standing Orders of the Government needed to be amended, and some guidelines for government bodies handling documents for deliberation by the government, the SPIS needed to be upgraded to include new functionalities, and electronic format documents needed to be ensured.

e-support for government sessions and e-sessions

Electronic support for government sessions were divided into two parts:

- electronic support in the process of drafting proposals, summoning meetings and drafting conclusions from meetings of government and government bodies (under the jurisdiction of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia) and
- electronic support for ministers, assisting them in deciding on each individual item on the agenda at regular, extraordinary or correspondent meetings of government or government bodies.

For each type of document entered into governmental procedure, the document's lifecycle was defined (e.g. information, regulation, law), and similarly the various types of decision-making proceedings were defined (e.g. regular proceedings, summary proceedings, finalized deliberations at the government working body (WB), consideration at the WB and the government ...).

e-Seje (e-Sessions), a software application providing electronic support for government sessions, is a stand-alone application yet it draws upon and feeds information back into the SPIS. Pursuant to the Decree on administrative operations, the entire documentation is first registered in SPIS, and after the decision is passed classifying it as

session material, it is published for so-called inter-ministerial coordination (after prior mandatory inter-ministerial coordination between key ministries), and in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Government it is scheduled for further proceedings or refused. The Standing Orders naturally state that the session documentation can only exist in electronic format, with the exception in cases of documentation not created within the state administration system (e.g. documentation prepared by management boards) - this is then digitized in the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia - or if the documentation is too bulky for e-mailing, or if it is classified with a level of confidentiality higher than that permitted for e-mail transmission.

The competent departments of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (Sector for Working Bodies, Sector for Preparation and Execution of Sessions) call a session in fully electronic format, prepare the agenda (including expanding the agenda, striking out items and preparing the consolidated copy) and attach relevant documents for each item on the agenda. Each government session has an attendance sheet, and each item on the agenda is followed by a conclusion, and the minutes are prepared automatically. With electronic session support the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia reduced paper consumption and the number of couriers, and the printing shop was discontinued altogether.

At the session itself (regular, extraordinary), the ministers needed to have access to electronic documents. Due to the ministers' need to access their own information systems and e-mail accounts, we created a virtual private network and secure ID card to make this possible, as well. Access to electronic documents has proven to be very effective especially in cases where additional items and documentation were put on the agenda.

Another point of interest are the so-called e-sessions. In the old times when paper was still used these sessions were called "correspondent sessions", and the deadlines for submission of comments still apply today. I can still remember the times when couriers

would wait in front of the ministry for the minister to bring a document in order to deliver it to the General Secretariat of the Government in time. While e-sessions resemble regular sessions, they are enhanced by all the functionalities of remote voting described in the PV (deadline for delivery of For/Against votes, clarification of Against votes, withdrawal of items on the agenda, request for discussion at an extraordinary session...). In addition, the minutes are drawn up automatically with all the required information (who voted For, who voted Against, the decision Passing/Rejecting the document etc.).

A few dates:

- Electronic sessions: Summer 2001;
- Access of ministers to e-documents at sessions: 11.9. 2001;
- Rejection of paper documentation (prepared by ministries, government agencies): end of September 2001;
- Digitalization of documents (documents not created by ministries and government agencies): Summer 2002;
- Introduction of electronic signatures at the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (Entrust): Summer 2003.

After 2003 the documents which fall under the responsibility of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (signed by the Secretary General or expert staff of the GSGRS) may only leave the "house" in paper format if so requested by the recipient or if required by relevant law.

In conclusion of this chapter, we can stipulate the following:

- that there are no reasons for paper to be used in governmental procedures since 2003 (naturally, this does not apply to classified and top-secret rated documents);
- that documents printed on paper and signed are also stored as electronically signed documents in one of the repositories of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (procedural, current or permanent database);
- that paper is used only as an aid in the preparation process (the accuracy of the "consolidated version" can be controlled more easily prior to sending if the document is printed on paper) and

- if we read the regulations carefully, there are only a few documents which still require printing on paper.

e-archives and a final farewell to paper

The level of IT used in the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia is so high that it ensures secure operation of the entire information system. The IT covering the key processes is duplicated. Each day the entire content of data libraries is recorded onto backup and/or archival tapes, and the key databases are also replicated on a remote server every few minutes. All the technical conditions are met for, allowing constant availability and 24/7/365 operation, all that is missing is a little "red tape" required by standard 27001 (logging and supervising all these procedures, more detailed processes involving backups, regular testing of the ability to reestablish the system using backup copies, risk management, operation of IT in times of disaster etc.). The Rules on IT Security Policy and a few IT security policies have already been adopted, and Internal Regulations is now in the final stages of preparation, as required by the National Archive of the Republic of Slovenia.

Even when the Protection of Documents and Archives and Archival Institutions Act (ZVDAGA) was passed, we believed that there was no reason to keep us from establishing electronic archives (eA) and introducing electronic documentary archives. In 2007 we begun to analyze processes and SRC integrated all of that into SPIS (current database management software), and in the first half of 2008, upon successful completion of testing, we launched production of the solution.

We divided up the establishment of the eA into four stages, or complete processes:

- Stage 1: Preparing a central current archive for 2000-2004 with mechanisms to check integrity and supplement missing documents (digitalization, checks involving data in the paper case file, "searching" for missing documents with public servants (if no such document exists an official note is made), lifting the restraints off classified information, checks and correction of errors in storage

dates etc.). The central database also includes a list of all case files and documents before extraction, a plan of classified levels with storage times and a registering plan. At this stage, the authenticity of the electronic signature on electronically signed documents is checked. Any documents failing the check are examined, and the findings are attached to the document in the form of a comment (certain problems have been found in testing, and these are linked with documents electronically signed during the testing period). This stage is entirely within the responsibility of the Head Office. The Head Office presents complete files to a three-member archives committee;

- Stage 2: The archives committee (or authorized expert staff of the GSG archives) eliminates unnecessary documents and case files. If the committee finds a case file incomplete, it sends it to the MO for completion. Otherwise the case file is marked suitable for conversion into a long-term storage format;
- Stage 3: In the course of the check procedure the committee checks the case files/ documents whether or not the decision for elimination is justified. If elimination is found to be unjustified, it is returned to the previous stage. At the end official minutes are prepared on the eliminated documents and case files and these minutes are then filed in the database. Once all the "formalities" have been completed, the documents and case files marked for elimination are deleted from the database.
- Stage 4: When the case files and documents are only being checked for conversion to long-term storage format, the initial stages of setting up an electronic archive are completed. The deadline for all activities is 31.12.2009, the 30th anniversary of the ISPD. The final stage, namely conversion of documentation into suitable format, will be outsourced to a provider with an adequate IT certificate who will ensure legally compliant conversion of documentation into electronic format, in accordance with our Internal Regulations.

Key solutions of the eA:

- management of documentation in legally compliant long-term storage format (PDF-A);
- central searchable database containing metadata and key contents;

- electronic support for ordering and taking out archived documentation;
- (automatic) sorting and sending of archived documentation to the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in electronic format;
- documents are stored at three different locations;
- electronic support for eliminating documentation with expired storage periods and preparation of all necessary paperwork involved in the elimination;
- separate storage of documents depending on the classified level of the documentation etc.

Conclusion

All of the documentation created after December 2000 regardless of the author or medium on which it was created will be stored at the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia only electronically, with the exceptions stipulated in the Protection of Documents and Archives and Archival Institutions Act or relevant laws which explicitly require storage of original document in paper format.

I can say with certainty that paper is no longer needed in government operations (the same applies to the work of the GSG itself). Of course, paper will still be used in the in-between stages, but its consumption will be (and already has been) greatly reduced.

Government documents which involve natural persons will be printed on paper and delivered in paper format for a number of years, and the GP will continue to receive documents in traditional format. The Head Office is the point of contact between the outside environment, which will continue to use paper, and the internal, fully computerized processes. In addition to the responsibilities entrusted by the Regulation on Administrative Operations, the Head Office will, and in some cases already does, play the role of the converter ("transfigurator") of data from one medium to another - from paper to electronic format and vice-versa.

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