Council of the European Union
General Secretariat
Directorate-General Communication and Information

Subject: Implementing rules for the deployment of Agora and Delegates Portal

This staff note concerns all staff involved in the preparation of documents for the European Council, the Council and its preparatory bodies and, in particular, administrators and assistants working in the policy Directorates-General, as well as in the Legal Service.

The preparatory work[1] for the roll-out of Agora within the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) and Delegates Portal to all Council preparatory bodies is nearing completion. Both systems will be fully deployed as from 7 November 2016.

Consistent working practices are required for the smooth introduction and operation of both systems. To this end, staff will find in Annex I an initial set of rules for:
(a) implementing those provisions of the DFM policy[2] which are currently supported by Agora.
(b) producing and issuing working papers (the new meeting document) from Agora.
(c) ensuring efficient and timely document distribution to delegations through communities on Delegates Portal.

Staff are requested to observe those rules, which will evolve in the light of user feedback, experience, system developments and future policy decisions.

Annex II contains complementary guidelines on the use and handling of working papers.

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[1] Staff Note 23/16
[2] Document and File Management Policy DE 27/15

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Implementing rules for the deployment of Agora in policy units

I.   **Files**

1.   Policy units must create a file in Agora for each of their dossiers in progress, for each new dossier that is assigned to them and for any dossier that materialises in the course of their daily work.

2.   The choice of file type (for the time being "legal procedure", "policy" or "miscellaneous") must be consistent with the purpose served by the dossier in question.

3.   A file in Agora is the official file for the dossier to which it relates. It must be complete. To be complete, a file must contain all information needed to understand the evolution of events from start to finish or, in the case of ongoing files, all information needed to understand how state-of-play has been reached.

4.   To be complete, a file should therefore contain:
       (i)   links to all documents distributed to delegations (see section III, paragraphs 8 to 11),
       (ii)   links to all significant documents or content produced to facilitate internal understanding of issues and / or to give steer and support from within the GSC to discussions (see section III, paragraphs 12 to 14),
       (iii)   all relevant metadata in file sections (*chef de file* and common) where fields need to be completed and / or kept up to date.

II.   **File teams**

5.   File teams have full access to all file content.

6.   Agora will propose the policy unit that creates a file as the default file team for the file concerned.

7.   The policy unit that creates a file should adjust the default file team to reflect the actual situation as regards (i) involvement of colleagues in work and (ii) need for colleagues to contribute to or access file content. Consequently, colleagues from other services and departments should be added to default file teams as appropriate.

III. Documents
Workflow documents for distribution to delegations (including in particular STs and CMs)

8. Workflow documents for distribution to delegations should be linked to the community[3] for which they are produced and linked to the file(s) in Agora to which they belong. They are automatically registered and stored in the CARS. They are accessible to all users of CARS and Agora unless classified. They may be tagged for filing purposes. They must remain linked to at least one file. The occasional practice of transmitting Workflow documents to delegations by email should cease.[4]

Agora documents for distribution to delegations (the working paper or WK)

9. Working papers (WKs) are meeting or working documents produced in Agora for distribution to delegations. They replace all types of working documents currently issued by the GSC including DSs, MDs and other informal notes, which are to be phased out and discontinued[5]. They are transmitted to delegations through communities on Delegates Portal (see section IV). The standard practice of transmitting working documents to delegations by email should cease.

10. Working papers must be linked to the community for which they are produced[6] and to the file(s) in Agora to which they belong. They are automatically registered and stored in CARS. They are accessible to all users of CARS and Agora unless classified[7] or unless "restrict access" has been enabled. They may be tagged for filing purposes. They must remain linked to at least one file.

11. In addition, working papers are subject to the guidelines on use and handling set out in Annex II.

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[3]   i.e. working party or working party sub-formation.
[4]   See Staff Note 17/11.
[5]   Except for DS documents classified RESTREINT UE / EU RESTRICTED, which will continue to be used until the AGORA-R platform is available.
[6]   Working papers may be associated to other communities if need be.
[7]   Note, however, that, as stated in footnote 2, working papers classified RESTREINT UE / EU RESTRICTED are not yet supported by the system.

Agora documents for internal reference (the departmental document or DD)

12. Departmental documents (DDs) contain information of relevance to a file from an internal perspective. They are created by uploading content to files in Agora from servers and shared or individual drives. Each uploaded item of content is automatically assigned a container with a number and stored in CARS as a departmental document with access strictly limited to the file team (see section II, paragraphs 5 to 7). Each container should be given an appropriate title. Departmental documents may be tagged for filing purposes. Departmental documents are not registered by the system and can therefore be removed from files or replaced at any time.

13. Departmental documents cover a range of content including, but not limited to, notes to the file, relevant emails, documents produced to facilitate or consolidate understanding within the GSC of issues in play and documents formulating or expressing the opinion of the GSC on questions that arise.

14. Policy units should use the departmental document functionality whenever appropriate. Content should be uploaded to files as departmental documents if conducive to a better understanding of progress and state of play, in accordance with the need for file completeness referred to in section I above.

IV. **Communities**

15. Policy units must ensure that a community is created in Agora for each operational Council preparatory body under their management.

16. Policy units must ensure that all communities created for their operational preparatory bodies are "active" by virtue of having at least one nominated delegate appointed per delegation.

17. Policy units must be satisfied that the membership of all active communities under their management is sufficient to ensure correct dissemination of documents and other information to the preparatory bodies in question.

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Guidelines on the use and handling of working papers

Preamble

The general rule that documents submitted to the European Council, the Council or to one of its preparatory bodies should be produced as standard (ST) documents, remains valid. Therefore working papers should be used sparingly and, at any rate, their use must be limited to the circumstances outlined in paragraph 2 below.

1. Definition

Working papers are communications transmitted by GSC departments to specific "communities" of recipients before or after meetings or for information or other purposes. Their use is limited to the preparatory phase of work. They replace DSs, MDs and similar types of note or "non-paper". All working papers are managed through the AGORA system.

2. Recourse to working papers

The circumstances in which the use of working papers may be justified are as follows:

(a)   the content reflects preliminary or draft positions of delegations or external partners.

(b)   the content is exploratory or likely to be superseded (e.g. preparatory input for more formal documents, arguments or positions in the making, etc).

(c)   Disclosure of the content beyond the members of a working group could hinder discussions or negotiations.

3. Production

All departments that circulate meeting documents and informal notes to delegations should produce such meeting documents and informal notes as working papers via AGORA.

4. Registration and storage

Working papers produced via AGORA are assigned a unique identifier, registered and stored automatically in CARS.

5. Filing

As with standard Workflow documents for distribution to delegations (STs, CMs, etc), originating departments must link their working papers to files. If a working paper cannot be linked to an existing file, the originating department will need to create a new file for it in the central file repository via AGORA.

6. Distribution (in the sense of "making available")[8] and access rules

Working papers are delivered via AGORA and on a targeted basis to specific communities of recipients (i.e. delegates who have been appointed by member states or other bodies to working parties and groups).

In addition and for each working paper issued, AGORA allows originating departments to manage the distribution list at delegation level.

When a working paper is ready to be sent to delegations, the originating department releases it directly via AGORA with no central intervention by Coordination, whereupon it is accessible to the members of its community.

(a) Access by Council members (need to know)

Council members (i.e. member states, the GSC, the Commission, the External Action Service) have access to working papers at level LIMITE and RESTREINT[9] via Delegates Portal (the new EXTRANET).

(b) Access by non-Council members (need to know)

The community set-up functionalities in AGORA enable originating departments to include delegations for non-Council members (e.g. EU entities and agencies, third countries, third parties) in their distribution lists. Some non-Council members (i.e. EU entities and agencies) will have access to Delegates Portal and will be able to retrieve working papers from there as members of a community. Others (i.e. third countries and third parties) will not have access to Delegates Portal but will receive working papers as email attachments directly from AGORA if they have been included in the delegation list for the community or communities concerned. At level RESTREINT, the exact arrangements for distribution of working papers to non-Council members remain to be determined.

(c) Access within the GSC (duty to share and need to know if appropriate)

Working paper metadata (e.g. the unique identifier, the title, the name of the originating service, etc) are accessible to all GSC staff via AGORA.

The content of working papers is also accessible to all GSC staff via AGORA by default. Exceptionally, if the nature of the content of a working paper requires a limitation of access to the originating department itself, the "restrict access" function can be used.

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[8]   In fact, delegations receive a notification that a working paper is available rather than a copy of the working paper itself.

[9]   It should be noted that AGORA and Delegates Portal will not be available on the "RESTREINT UE / EU RESTRICTED" platform until mid-2017. Consequently, existing arrangements for the distribution of restricted material continue to apply for the time being.

7. Publication in the public register

Originating departments should compile periodically a list of references to LIMITE and RESTREINT working papers produced for their communities and publish each list on the public register in the form of a standard document for general distribution. The frequency with which such lists are prepared is a decision for the originating departments concerned based on reasonable expectations and the *modus operandi* of the communities under their management.
LIMITE or RESTREINT working papers which have been the subject of a request for access that has been granted are transmitted electronically to the requesting party.

8. Markings

Working papers bear the marking LIMITE when unclassified and RESTREINT UE / EU RESTRICTED when classified[10].
They also bear a caveat stating that they are intended for a specific community of recipients and that their handling and further distribution are under the sole responsibility of community members.

9. Reference to working papers in agendas

Working papers need not be referred to in ST or CM agendas for meetings of Council preparatory bodies but will be included in the list of meeting documents accessible electronically from Delegates Portal to members of the communities of recipients concerned.

10. Translation

If some or all of the content of a working paper needs to be translated, the text for translation should be put into an SN document and the translation request sent via Workflow as usual. The working paper can be produced when the translated text is ready.

11. Printing

If paper copies of a working paper are needed in a meeting room, staff can print copies themselves or order copies from the copy shops but, in either case, they should exercise restraint, in keeping with the spirit of Staff Note 22/14 on the arrangements for print on demand. Meeting-room attendants will also print copies of a working paper on the day of a meeting if asked to do so.

12. Working papers as a vehicle for circulating advance copies of official documents

A working paper should not be used to distribute an advance copy of an official document (e.g. an ST) unless all reference to the number of the official document is removed and unless the official document is clearly marked as a draft or preliminary version.

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[10] Please note again, however, that the functionalities for RESTREINT UE / EU RESTRICTED working papers will not come on stream until mid-2017.