**Note to the attention of the Secretary General of the European Parliament/the Council**

Dear Secretary General,

The steering committee on the dedicated multi-column table editor used in trilogue negotiations on legislative files adopted this note at its inaugural meeting on [date]. Its purpose is to present the project, take stock of the developments so far and to give an overview on the next steps as well as on the overall context the project is set in.

**Background and description of the project**

Trilogue negotiations are an informal process allowing the Union’s co-legislators to enter into direct contact to exchange and reconcile their respective positions on a legislative proposal, with the support of the Commission, and thereby to speed up the outcome of the legislative procedure.

Parliament, Council and Commission stated in their 2007 joint declaration on practical arrangements of the (then) Co-decision procedure[[1]](#footnote-1) that “cooperation between the institutions in the context of codecision often takes the form of tripartite meetings (‘trilogues’). This trilogue system has demonstrated its vitality and flexibility [...]”. They also refer to Trilogues as being “conducted in an informal framework”.

Negotiations are based on a joint document, indicating in separate columns the Commission’s legislative proposal and the positions of the Parliament and the Council on each individual part of the text with a further column for the compromise text agreed between the negotiating teams of the co-legislators. This document is referred to as “multi-column table”. It is typically prepared for each file by either Parliament or Council services and updated by the same service as negotiations progress. This task involves a great deal of manual work and often happens under time pressure.

Until now existing IT tools, instead of a dedicated solution, have been used for the preparation of the document before and during the negotiations. However, it became apparent that with increased complexity of a file the current text editor is unstable and unreliable. It is also not suited for providing a basis for new features that would result in a faster preparation process and higher quality of the presentation of the content which would improve the administrative support for the negotiating parties.

This is why in the beginning of 2016 the two Secretary Generals of Parliament and Council exchanged letters/notes on the interinstitutional collaboration on the management of multi-column tables used in legislative negotiations[[2]](#footnote-2). Both felt that the manual work required by the services on either side to produce and maintain such documents for each legislative file under negotiation is extremely time-consuming, precisely in situations that are often characterised by a lack of time due to the on-going negotiation process. To overcome such difficulties the Secretary Generals agreed that the solution would be the creation of a specialised editor, based on xml-technology, for the handling of multi-column tables. Its objective should be to facilitate the entirety of the process from the production of the first version of the multi-column table through the negotiations until the finalisation of the agreed text.

This shared understanding was based on previous experiences with xml [Akoma Ntoso] and a Parliament study on the usefulness of such an editor. The European Parliament has gained already solid experience in using xml in particular as regards Members’ amendments. This knowledge was instrumental in developing, in close contact with users, a first study of a multi-column table editor based on xml technology which assessed the benefits and capabilities of such a tool. It focussed on the practical advantages for users when managing texts/documents based on the concept of structured content. Users’ feedback was very encouraging. The results were shared with the Council in 2015 by way of mock-ups simulating the editor’s potential design and certain features. As a result of this exchange of views both Parliament and Council came to the conclusion that this study could serve as a valuable input for the further joint development of an editor.

**Coherence and compatibility with other IT projects and initiatives**

This project, although being in itself independent, should not be seen in isolation. Each institution is involved in a number of other IT initiatives that could impact in various ways on the development of the multi-column table editor.

In this regard the Parliament is continuing its effort to xml-ise the internal production chain of its legislative documents from outset to end of the legislative cycle to rationalise, structure and improve access to key parliamentary documents and document chains by building on its know-how and its positive experiences[[3]](#footnote-3). The Council is considering joining the Commission’s new tool for legislative drafting which is equally based on xml-technology. The Commission has indicated to move ahead in the coming years with the development and roll-out of this new drafting tool. Furthermore at the Interinstitutional Formats Committee, the Commission, Parliament and Council confirmed the choice of xml Akoma Ntoso as the basis of the structured document exchange between the respective institutions. [reference to landscaping exercise?]

While the move towards the use of xml technology for the production of legislative texts and the intention to enhance synergies between the institutions’ IT environment is a common feature of all these initiatives, it is important to continuously monitor that coherence and mutual complementarity between these projects are maintained.

The steering committee furthermore agreed on a number of other points, including the responsibilities and decision-making rules of the steering committee, the roadmap and the technical shape of the project. These points are listed in greater detail in the annex.

With these first steps concluded the project and the steering committee are now ready for the institutions involved to start their cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

**ANNEX**

**I. Governance structure**

With a view to establishing a structure which coordinates all the relevant aspects in the development of such an editor and which ensures a collaborative environment between the institutions and the business and IT sectors of their administrations, the Secretary Generals in their letters each appointed representatives for their respective institution [list names?]. These representatives met on two occasions [18 March and 30 September 2016] to launch and oversee the necessary preparatory work for the setting up of a dedicated steering committee structure for this project. Each side communicated as members of the steering committee

* at the level of decision makers: [...]
* at the level of project managers and IT business analysts: [...]

[decision-making of the steering committee]

[list of responsibilities of the steering committee]

[role of the Commission]

**II. Project shape**

As part of the preparatory works the representatives from both sides undertook further studies which focussed on the functionalities and criteria that can be considered essential in determining how content between the two institutions could be exchanged. [more details on this analysis]. The study led to the conclusion that the project could develop essentially according to two scenarios:

1. The joint development of a content exchange mechanism with a limited core of basic editing functionalities. This mechanism ensures the reliable exchange of information between the two institutions while limiting editing functionalities to what is necessary to guarantee the basic readability; the bulk of the editing functionalities will be largely developed individually by each institution.
2. The joint development of the editor and all its functionalities: besides a content exchange mechanism a joint development of a fully-fledged editor ensures that users on both sides profit from the same functionalities and capabilities. Information is exchanged with greater ease and incompatibilities are avoided. Timing and finalisation of the editor are synchronised.

At its first meeting the steering committee decided to develop the project in line with scenario [1/2], the main reasons being [...].

This decision will serve as the basis for adopting the project methodology and the management plan. In a further next step the solution for the design of the architecture and of first prototypes will follow.

**III. Roadmap, timeline**

**IV. Other practical arrangements**

1. reference [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. reference... [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. see Parliament Project Portfolio IPOL 6 and PRES 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)