



15th Colloquy  
15<sup>ème</sup> Colloque

Council of Europe  
Conseil de l'Europe



Bundesamt für Justiz  
Office fédéral de la justice  
Ufficio federale di giustizia  
Federal Office of Justice



Strasbourg, 20 March 2002

Coll (2002) 2

**15<sup>th</sup> COLLOQUY ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND LAW IN EUROPE  
“E-JUSTICE: INTEROPERABILITY OF SYSTEMS”**

Macolin (Switzerland), 3 – 5 April 2002

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**National Report of France**

Presented by:

**Mr Yves RABINEAU**  
**Inspector of Judicial Services**  
**President of the Coordination Committee Intranet/Internet**  
**Ministry of Justice**

# **Common interoperability framework for communication in the French judicial system**

## **1 - Government policy on the interoperability of public information systems**

When it published its action programme for the information society in January 1998, the French Government called on the public authorities to make systematic use of the new information and communication technologies in relations between public services and their users, be they private individuals or businesses.

It rapidly became clear that this meant first generalising exchanges between the information systems used by the different government departments, as well as between these systems and the tools commonly used by the public. Thanks to the adoption of Internet standards and the implementation of the "AdeR" networking project, which now links up the intranet services developed by the various ministries, French government departments now have a common directory service, secure, interconnected messaging and shared applications, all accessible to their central offices and to their regional and local branches.

The Electronic Signature Act of 13 March 2000, placing electronic documents on a par with printed documents, subsequently paved the way for the use of electronic communication for all administrative and legal formalities where a documentary evidence is required.

### **1.1 The approach adopted**

The Prime Minister's Circular, dated 21 January 2002, concerning the introduction of a common interoperability framework for exchanges and compatibility between government department information systems took things a stage further. The Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (ATICA), an inter-ministerial body set up in August 2001, was made responsible for preparing this framework, with which all government departments must now comply when introducing technical changes to the information systems they use, both for their own internal communication and in relations with their partners and users (private individuals, associations, firms).

Any inter-ministerial application or application accessible to anyone outside government departments must be certified in conformity with the standards laid down in the common interoperability framework; failing this, the department concerned must explain to the government secretariat why it departed from the norm and what it intends to do to remedy the situation.

In particular the government considers strict compliance with the document formats specified in the framework essential to the lasting conservation of electronic documents and to ready access to the information contained in them. Any new project must be seen as an opportunity to enhance the catalogue of XML architectures (schemas) the government decided to set up in October 2000.

### **1.2 Content of the common interoperability framework**

The common framework comprises a number of technical guidelines, standards and references.

#### **1.2.1 Guidelines and standards:**

- Internet (browser) standard "light" software client
- IPv4 Internet Protocol technology
- HTML format
- SMTP, E/SMTP & MIME compatible message services
- FTP file transfer protocol
- Light Directory Access Protocol (LDAP v3) compatible directories
- SSL v3/TLS data security

### 1.2.2 References:

- Technical references
  - Internet name charter
  - inter-departmental directory
  - inter-departmental messaging profile
  - public Internet site accessibility
- Operating references
  - quality of service (quality level evaluation and definition method)
  - Internet Protocol security

### 1.2.3 Formats:

- XML and data architectures
  - the XML family of standards is at present considered the best response to the need for interactivity between heterogeneous information systems;
  - to help partners format their information, a directory of government department DTDs (document type definitions – XML schemas) has been in operation and open to the public via the Internet since January 2001. Proposals for schemas must be submitted for comment at least two weeks prior to publication.
- Formats
  - A table of recommended formats for both data and still or moving images is appended to the interoperability framework. There are two categories: recommended formats and possible formats. For example, the formats recommended in version 1 of the common interoperability framework are:
    - For text files: Xml and Txt (with Sgml, Html, Rtf and Pdf as possible formats)
    - For image files: UIT T4 and Png (with Tiff, Gif and Jpeg as possible formats)
  - All other formats must be avoided, except in special cases where their use can be justified.

## 2. Application of these government standards by the judicial authorities: technical coherency framework

A technical coherency framework is currently under discussion with a view to the preparation of the Justice Ministry's next data processing master plan, a 5-year plan drawn up by the Committee on Data Processing, Networking and Electronic Communication (COMIRCE).

### 2.1 Objectives of the Technical Coherency Framework

This document serves four purposes:

- it ensures that the internal communications infrastructure can accommodate the various applications required in the best possible conditions;
- it facilitates communication between applications and with outside partners;
- it guarantees the durability of basic components by proposing carefully selected approaches and limits the number of different platforms and configurations through concerted component development;
- it helps control the cost of software package and component acquisition and data input and management activities by ensuring that new applications do not require their own basic components (data processing equipment, multimedia facilities, storage and print management, communication layers, data bases, access authorisation, etc).

