



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS
Directorate A: Civil and commercial justice
Unit A.2: Civil justice

MINUTES

SEVENTH JOINT MEETING OF THE TAKING OF EVIDENCE STEERING COMMITTEE AND THE SERVICE OF DOCUMENTS STEERING COMMITTEE

29 January 2026

I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Commission welcomed everyone and introduced the Commission members joining this meeting. The Commission presented the agenda, and the Committee adopted the agenda.

II. MEMBER STATES' DEPLOYMENT AND GO-LIVE STATUS UPDATE

Each Member State provided an update on their deployment and go-live status, sharing the potential issues that they are facing.

Currently, 21 Member States are in production:

- 16 Member States have all authorities live
- 5 Member States have some authorities live
- 6 Member States don't have any authorities live

One Committee member stated that their National Implementation (NI) had encountered difficulties due to missing or contradictory documentation. The Commission responded that the corresponding request had been received and logged and assured that the comments would be duly considered.

Another Committee member reported that there was still an issue with special characters. The Commission replied that this issue had been fixed, and the problem should no longer occur after Release v.4.0.0.

Some Member States emphasised that many cases were still being received on paper. The Commission responded that Member State authorities already using the system were obliged to send requests through the decentralised IT system, and if any such Member State or its authority continued to regularly send paper forms, the Commission should be informed and that Member State contacted to raise awareness. Under the legal acts, there is a right to refuse paper requests when the sending authority is live. The Committee member replied that they did not wish to refuse any requests based on their format but would attempt to contact those Member States still submitting paper-based forms.

One Committee member stated that, when they received a paper request, they checked whether the box regarding exceptional circumstances had been ticked. If it had, the request should not be refused; otherwise, if the box remained unticked, the request could be refused in line with the regulation.

Another Committee member asked whether a modern SMTP implementation will be provided. The Commission answered that this implementation is not being considered for the time being and that should be raised as a change request to be ranked by the Steering Committee. The Commission offered providing further clarification of a change request process if needed.

The Commission clarified that the primary purpose of requesting the numbers of cases exchanged in production was not to obtain precise figures but to assess whether the decentralised IT system was being used effectively and whether communication between the Member States was functioning properly. Therefore the statistical data will not be requested any longer (except the monitoring exercise based on the Regulations).

III. PRESENTATION OF MALTA REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND USE OF THE REFERENCE IMPLEMENTATION

In the first part of the presentation, it was emphasised that Malta had successfully deployed the Reference Implementation (RI) in May 2025 for the Service of Documents (SoD) and Taking of Evidence (ToE). While the process was overseen by Malta's Ministry of Justice, the end users were from the Court Services Agency (CSA) and the Office of the State Advocate (OSA).

The CSA began its preparatory and testing processes in early 2025, and by the end of April 2025, all systems were in place for it to become operational. The OSA, as the competent authority for ToE, had previously also been responsible for SoD. Following a restructuring, however, the CSA has assumed the role of Central Authority, Transmitting and Receiving Agency for SoD since May 2025.

Though Malta and Gozo operate as separate jurisdictions within the same national judicial system under the CSA, all e-CODEX-related work is handled by the OSA in Malta.

For SoD, there were initially two users: one responsible for assigning cases and another handling the operational aspects. As more Member States went live and the number of cases increased, additional users became necessary. Currently, there are four active users: one assigns cases, two

process received requests, and one handles the transmission of requests and follow-ups. There are plans to further increase the number of users in 2026 due to the rising number of requests. In Malta, the number of cases received exceeds those sent abroad: approximately 400 cases have been received so far, compared to nearly 70 transmitted. These numbers already show an increase compared to previous years.

Since going live, Malta has not encountered any major issues. Early transmission problems were resolved by the CSA technical team. The primary challenge has been identifying the correct receiving agency. The plan for 2026 includes increasing the number of users to manage the growing volume of cases, as well as providing further training—particularly in effectively locating the appropriate receiving agencies.

Taking of Evidence (ToE) processes are managed by the OSA. Since going live, Malta has received two requests under ToE but has not transmitted any requests to date.

In the second part of the presentation, the background of the technical implementation was outlined. In Malta, the technical rollout was overseen by the Ministry of Justice's Information Management Unit. The Malta Information Technology Agency managed the ICT infrastructure for the government, supplying an Azure resource group, a site-to-site VPN, and access to the Malta Government Network. Malta adopted the Reference Implementation provided by the Commission. The system was implemented on Azure. Staging environment maintained for validation and testing when required – normally turned off – only pay for compute when needed. For security purposes, Azure NSG was used, site to site VPN with Malt Government Network, Microsoft Defender Advanced Threat Protection and backup policies. They can implement Azure Site Recovery at a later stage easily if a fast DR becomes a requirement. The high-level architecture with all relevant elements was presented. Malta uses Azure infrastructure; therefore, costs are kept on a quite low level. The resource utilization was also presented. For the operational tasks, the platform stability and performance were improved through system tuning. Azure Backup policies were enabled to ensure full recovery capability. Network access lists enforced using Azure NSG rules. Regular (weekly) OS patching is being conducted.

At the beginning, Malta faced some challenges, primarily related to documentation that required clarification. The complexity of determining which certificates were used where demanded a deeper understanding, particularly as the names used in the documentation were not entirely consistent. Additionally, integrating multi-vendor components necessitated coordinated troubleshooting, and some component versions were incompatible with mTLS. On a positive note, support from eu-LISA and the Commission was both swift and effective.

Regarding opportunities for improvement, containerising certain components to simplify deployment and updates was suggested. Malta also proposed solutions for managing IP access list updates more efficiently. The documentation on certificates, however, still required multiple readings for full comprehension. For pModes and certificates, there was a suggestion to update and automate them across all Member States. Another proposal involved implementing a private large language model (LLM), augmented with the full system documentation and knowledge base,

which could significantly reduce support demands and speed up the deployment phase for implementers.

The Commission requested that Malta share the presentation. One Committee member expressed appreciation for the presentation.

The Commission noted that some of these improvements had already been raised by other Member States. It was emphasised that certain ideas were particularly interesting, and further details would be greatly appreciated. The Commission stated that it would contact Malta's representatives to gather more information.

IV. UPDATE OF PLANNED CHANGE REQUESTS

The Commission presented the slide on planned change requests and improvements. There had not been many updates, as recent efforts had primarily focused on Release 4.0.0, which included major changes. It was stated that planning for Release 4.1.0 remained unchanged and would incorporate some of the higher-priority change requests from the ranking.

One update concerned the maximum file size, which the Commission was addressing. Regarding file extensions, the Commission was still working to reach an agreement within the Technical Sub-Committee. The Commission would assess when development of the agreed solution could begin, with a possible inclusion in Release 4.1.0 (May 2026), though this had not yet been confirmed. Ideally, file extensions might also be included, and an update on their status would be provided at the Steering Committee meeting in March 2026.

As for the remaining items on the board, there were no updates on adding the signing module, as the Commission was still working towards a common approach—given that this feature is horizontal across the Reference Implementation (RI), affecting all instruments. A shared solution for all instruments needed to be established. An amendment had been communicated regarding Form A, point 6.1.1. Although the modification itself was considered straightforward to implement, it would require changes to the XSDs, and a solution was still needed to avoid major disruption.

The Commission then outlined the scope of the upcoming releases. Release v.4.0.0 would proceed as planned in early February 2026 and would include all scheduled features, such as EPOC and EPOC-PR integration, the use of CDB as a single data source, WCAG compliance adjustments, and resolved vulnerability issues. Three top-ranked improvements would also be incorporated: the finalRecipient (4Corner model architecture), an e-Translation service for predefined messages, and a pop-up confirmation before case closure. A full, detailed list of Release 4.0.0 updates would be provided in the release notes.

The scope of Release v.4.1.0 was not yet fully defined, and additional features beyond those already planned might still be included. Some items under development by the Commission had completed analysis, but it had not yet been determined which release they would be assigned to. A broader overview of planned releases would be presented at the next Steering Committee meeting.

V. REFERENCE IMPLEMENTATION RELEASE 4.0.0 ACTION PLAN

The Commission presented the Release v.4.0.0 rollout plan, which had previously been shared with the Technical Sub-Committee on 21 January 2026. The intention was that, after reviewing the provided information and addressing any additional requests from the Commission, Steering Committee members and the Member States' technical teams would assess whether the proposed timeline aligned with their national plans. Since the full details had already been presented to the Technical Sub-Committee, the Commission highlighted only the key points for the Steering Committee.

The requested technical documentation would be supplied shortly, and the Commission sought a green light from technical teams, with any concerns to be raised in advance. Release v.4.0.0 would be made available in the first week of February 2026, following the correction of minor documentation issues. Once released, technical teams would be expected to deploy it first in the Acceptance environment, followed by the Production environment.

A key difference from previous releases is that Release v.4.0.0 not only requires deployment but also the activation of the new Protocol (3.0.0). The Commission proposed that activation in the Acceptance environment should take place before 30 April 2026, which does not require coordination among Member States. However, Production activation would require a coordinated effort, currently planned for 10 June 2026. Additionally, 18 August 2026 marks a regulatory milestone, as EPOC and EPOC-PR must enter Production.

As outlined to the Technical Sub-Committee, Release v.4.0.0 Phase 1 – ACCEPTANCE would include two separate Acceptance environments, allowing Member States to deploy and activate based on their own needs, resources, and internal schedules. Deployment could begin as soon as the release is available, with activation and testing of the new Protocol and criminal instruments possible from late February. A common activation rehearsal was proposed for late March 2026.

In Phase 2 – PRODUCTION, deployment is recommended between April and May 2026, with the strong advice that Member States first conduct comprehensive testing in the Acceptance environment. Activation in Production must occur simultaneously across all Member States, with the Commission proposing a coordinated window between 4 and 10 June. A silent period of approximately 36–48 hours (planned for the weekend of 6–7 June) would be required, during which the RI would be temporarily unavailable, and no communication would be possible. A two-month reaction window would follow in case of issues.

In summary, the Commission presented a graphical timeline of the Release v.4.0.0 deployment plan.

One Committee member stated that they utilise a National Implementation (NI) and would need to evaluate the impact on their system before committing to any timeline. As such, they were unable to provide a date for transitioning to production. The Commission responded that the relevant documentation had been sent that day, acknowledging that the Member States would require time to analyse it. The Commission confirmed that NIs were being considered and

emphasised that the presented planning was a proposal, with feedback from all Member States welcome. Any necessary documents on architectural changes would be provided in advance, though it was recognised that the documentation might require additional time for assessment. The target date for feedback was set for 20 February, and the Commission noted that technical teams had already been informed. Additionally, the document regarding the Protocol change had already been shared.

One Committee member explained that they lacked sufficient resources to attend the weekly Wednesday meetings and requested that the agenda be shared in advance to determine relevance. The Commission replied that Technical Sub-Committee meetings should focus more on technical aspects and suggested splitting them into two parts (business and technical). It was acknowledged that the current topics were too broad and that the Commission was aware not all Member States could have representatives present for every discussion. The Commission then asked whether the Member State in question had received the circulated presentation and offered to clarify any unclear points.

VI. OVERVIEW OF RESULTS REGARDING EUSURVEY ON CHANGE REQUESTS

The recent ranking results for the second batch of proposed improvements were presented. While most Member States had submitted their votes, some had yet to do so. In cases where Member States had cast multiple votes for a single item, an average was calculated.

The top-ranked improvement was a banner notifying user when there is no connection to the CDB. The second-highest priority was editable PDFs, followed by adding a direct link to the case URL in email notifications.

The Commission asked whether the EUSurvey should remain open to allow the remaining Member States to submit their votes. As no feedback was received from Committee members, the Commission assumed the ranking was final in its presented form and confirmed that the results would be distributed.

One Committee member asked for clarification on how the CDB connection banner would work in practice. The Commission explained that, currently, if the CDB connection fails, users working in the RI may not realise that data is missing and might unnecessarily contact local support. A Committee member added that, in recent weeks, CDB outages had caused issues—particularly when a user was assigned to both civil and criminal authorities. If the CDB was down, the RI would not function at all for civil cases, and users assigned to criminal authorities could not access the system. A notification within the application would help avoid unnecessary support requests, making this improvement highly valuable. The Commission confirmed that this suggestion would be thoroughly analysed, with a proposed solution presented later.

One Committee member supported the request and mentioned an additional change request: a banner notifying user if a Member State's infrastructure is unavailable. The Commission responded that this would be treated as a separate change request and would require technical

assessment. It was noted that the Horizontal FAD already included functionality for a customisable RI homepage, where such notifications could potentially be displayed.

VII. NEXT STEPS AND PLANNING OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meetings are planned online for 11 March and 23 April.

In the second part of 2026 there are two meetings proposed (July, October). After the meeting the 2 July and 15 October were proposed.

The Commission stressed that it would welcome feedback from the Member States on whether the proposed frequency of meetings was sufficient. It also expressed the expectation that all remaining Member States would go live before the end of 2026.

The final arrangements for activating RI version v.4.0.0 should be discussed in March and April.

VIII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

One Committee member noted that some Service of Documents (SoD) users were sending Forms D and K as attachments to free-text service messages and asked whether this practice was acceptable. The Commission responded that raising awareness on the correct use of the system would be welcomed in light of this issue.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Commission

Austria

Belgium

Bulgaria

Croatia

Czechia

Denmark

Estonia

Finland

France

Germany

Greece

Hungary

Ireland

Italy

Latvia

Lithuania

Luxemburg
Malta
Netherlands
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Slovakia
Spain
Sweden
EUBF
UEHJ
eu-LISA