

# Greater harmonisation in ID documents

by Fons Knopjes en Ineke Ruiter

The diversity of ID documents circulating in most countries is considerable. Unfortunately the format and security features of these documents tend to vary significantly. In some instances, inconsistencies also exist in the policies adopted by the issuing authorities of a single country. The lack of standards evident at a national level also prevails at a European level, and there is little coherence between the ID documents issued by the various EU member states.

The addition of ten new members has only served to exacerbate this problem. Despite the above, the issuance of travel documents by EU member states has been subject to EU regulations since the 1980s. These regulations, which stipulate minimum security requirements, are regularly updated (the most recent update was on 17th October 2000, when the Counsel of the European Member States passed Resolution 2000 C 310/01). Although final responsibility for formulating policies and guidelines resides with the respective national governments, a more proactive approach from Brussels could well result in new guidelines for document consistency.

## A coherent policy

The attacks of 11 September 2001 have set in motion a chain of events that has caused the fight against terrorism to feature high on the political agenda. Within this context, a growing need to establish and verify a person's identity has been discerned. As overall security is largely dependent on the quality of the identification process, increasingly stringent demands are being made of ID documents (including the associated issuance processes and security features). Although the useful life of ID documents is becoming ever shorter, the latest ICT developments offer many opportunities.

To improve quality, safety, security and efficiency, the issuance and inspection of security documents should be based on a coherent policy. Such a policy should look to (i) limit the number of ID documents (ii) promote standardisation and (iii) facilitate central document production. These objectives are in keeping with international recommendations. The formulation of minimum security requirements would also help to improve document security, and offers a good jumping board to standardisation. A global and integrated approach will result in long-overdue quality and efficiency improvements. Regardless of the complexity of this process, document control can be rendered reliable and consistent. Moreover, by coordinating knowledge and investment at each level, a number of synergies can be created.

## From the present to the desired situation

For a coherent policy to have effect, it must be endorsed and supported by the different ministries involved in the issuance and inspection processes. It is up to each EU member state to determine the preferred level of security, and to implement the measures needed to achieve it. A policy governing document issuance and inspection – and the system that embeds this policy – should at any rate be based on a thorough and comprehensive risk analysis, which will prove time-consuming (a quality assessment can take several years). A number of procedures will undoubtedly have to be re-evaluated, while others will need to be discontinued. Moreover, to arrive at a durable and broad-based system, the migration of existing architectures and processes should be gradual – migration cannot take place overnight. To give an example, the expiry of a manufacturing contract could be a good opportunity to migrate to a new system.

## Making the most of a new system

### Efficiency improvements

- Combining and harmonising existing and new procedures can help to limit investments in new documents and issuing systems.
- Application and issuance procedures will be more uniform, improving public acceptance.
- The streamlining of documents and processes, at both a policy and implementation level, will be improved.
- Developments like biometrics and electronic identifiers can be integrated.

### Improvements in quality, security and integrity

- Well-considered decisions with regard to the security level of individual documents (an improved security balance).
- Systematic improvements to the quality of documents and issuing processes.
- Improvements to document control processes and/or procedures.

## In brief

The formulation and implementation of a coherent policy will unquestionably improve efficiency and quality. Although an optimal solution could be some years in the making, an ongoing change process that aims to bring the various ID documents into line holds the prospect of considerable cost savings in the medium term. In the end, a uniform and coherent system will not only enhance the reputation of national governments, it will also boost public confidence and be viewed in a positive light by (inter)national partners.

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