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From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on JHA Information Exchange (IXIM) / Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject:	Automation in the context of the SIS recast

I. INTRODUCTION

At the informal videoconference of the members of the Working Party on JHA Information Exchange (IXIM) on 5 October 2020 the Presidency outlined why automation and the automation of certain processes is regarded as a relevant topic for all SIRENE Bureaux. In light of upcoming changes concerning the Schengen Information System (SIS) recast, the Presidency is certain that this issue is crucial to discussions on the design of current and future SIRENE work processes.

II. STATE OF PLAY

The number of alerts and hits in the SIS has increased drastically over the last couple of years. For instance, over the last five years the number of alerts on persons in the SIS grew from 797 244 in January 2015 to 983 278 in January 2020. Over the same period, the number of alerts on objects went from 55 million in January 2015 to 90 million in January 2020. These numbers illustrate the increased volume the SIRENE Bureaux have to handle.

As shown by the results on the latest questionnaire on SIRENE capacity building[1] in IXIM, most of the SIRENE Bureaux have not received sufficient additional staff in recent years despite the increase in the number of hits and of incoming and outgoing forms in the SIS.

Under Regulations (EU) 2018/1860, (EU) 2018/1861 and (EU) 2018/1862, several new features will be added to the SIS, which will further increase the workload for the SIRENE Bureaux. It is therefore more necessary than ever for SIRENE work processes to be designed – in accordance with national and European data protection law – as efficiently and effectively as possible. Automation can play an essential role here, especially since the SIRENE Bureaux work with standard forms stipulated in the SIRENE manual, which are an ideal foundation for the automation of processes.

It is the responsibility of the Member States to design and improve SIRENE work processes within the framework of the applicable regulations. Therefore, IXIM is the appropriate forum to share experience and ideas and to support each other in improving those work processes.

However, it is likely that there will be different perspectives on what automation means in relation to the SIS. Practically, it could mean implementing the SIS AFIS in a (semi-)automated way, finding automated solutions for validating incoming forms, automating the insertion of certain alerts (e.g. on missing persons), or developing different functionalities to improve the national systems, for example to enhance communication with SIS end users.

III. DEFINITION OF AUTOMATION IN THE SIRENE REALM

The starting point for a common understanding of what automation means for SIRENE should be the definition of 'automation' used by the former Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX), work on which was initiated by the Romanian Presidency and finalised under the Finnish Presidency in November 2019[2]. Drawing on those findings, the following description could serve as a basis for a common understanding of automation in relation to SIRENE work processes.

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[1]   ST 7129/20.
[2]   ST 12506/1/19: '*Automation of information exchange in a strategic context'.*

Automation of SIRENE processes

The document ST 12506/1/19 defines 'automation' as a management concept, as a general approach by which a process or procedure is performed without or with only minimal human assistance to produce the intended result.

Applied by the SIRENE community, this procedure concerns the exchange of supplementary information between the SIRENE Bureaux and, additionally, within the Member States' internal communication flows.

For the SIRENE Bureaux this might mean:

- checking the particulars of persons or objects automatically against national databases;

- scanning incoming SIRENE forms automatically, including specific fields for keywords or data values;

- further processing the extracted information automatically, possibly even up until the final revision or up until it is forwarded to different authorities/business units within the Member State or to another SIRENE Bureau.

In this regard, as stated in the abovementioned document, automation mainly serves to release resources from labour-intensive and time-consuming routines. For the SIRENE Bureaux this is especially the case where SIRENE staff are still working on repetitive tasks and manual processes. Overall, there is a lot of potential for the implementation of automated procedures in the SIRENE realm.

In line with the findings in ST 12506/1/19, automation in this case helps the SIRENE Bureaux to cope better with the ever-increasing workload, provided that common standards are agreed upon and high data quality is ensured.

The goal is to find a commonly understood definition that reflects the needs and realities of the SIRENE Bureaux in all Member States with regard to automation and to specify tasks of the SIRENE Bureaux which could be (further) automated in accordance with the respective legislation. It should serve as a basis for more in depth-discussions that should continue under subsequent Presidencies.

IV. QUESTIONS

Delegations are invited to share their thoughts on the following questions:

1. Do you agree in general with the definition/description of automation in the context of SIRENE processes?

2. In your view, are there other aspects that are relevant in defining automation in regard to SIRENE work processes? Do you consider that any of the abovementioned criteria are not relevant? If yes in either case, please specify.

3. Can you outline other concrete examples of tasks performed by the SIRENE Bureaux which may benefit from (further) automation and how?

Please send you replies to IXIM.DE2020@bmi.bund.de and ixim@consilium.europa.eu by **11 November 2020** at the latest.