

European Archives in an Era of Change

The European Community and Its Archives

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About the author: Eric Ketelaar is National Archivist of the Netherlands. For an expanded introduction see the Gallery of Contributors at the end of the issue. Abstracts in English, French, German, and Spanish follow the article.

"ROLL UP THAT MAP; it will not be wanted these ten years."¹ With these words William Pitt discarded a map of Europe after hearing the news of the Battle of Austerlitz (1805) in which Napoleon defeated the emperors of Russia and Austria. Likewise, a map of today's Europe will be out of date shortly, as a result not of military actions but of political and economic integration. Borders between countries will continue to show on the map, but their practical importance is diminishing. Beginning 1 January 1993, the following twelve countries of the European Community (EC) will constitute one common trade and monetary territory without inner borders and barriers: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxem-

bourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain—with countries like Austria, Malta, Morocco, Sweden, and Turkey on the waiting list for membership.² Correlated with this

²After World War II, there was an organized effort to insure Europe's future strength and security through the formation of three international communities within Europe. They are the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Atomic Energy Community, and the European Economic Community (also known as the Common Market). The three are known collectively as the European Community. The European Coal and Steel Community, founded in 1952, was the first of the European Communities. The European Economic Community was established in 1957 and the formation of the European Atomic Energy Community occurred in 1958. These three communities unified their efforts even further in 1967 by consolidating their separate executives into one commission for the European Communities. The European Commission is the executive branch of the European Community; it proposes and implements treaties through the authority of the European Community's Council of Ministers. The European Parliament performs the legislative functions of the European Community, and the judi-

¹Philip Henry Stanhope, *Life of the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London: J. Murray, 1862), 4:369.

to guarantee the free circulation of goods, employees, and services. In principle, any preferential treatment of one nationality is forbidden. For example, public bids for government buildings and works estimated to cost over 460,000 Dutch guilders (approximately 275,000 American dollars) have to be open to contractors from every country in the EC. To arrive at a true equality, national particularities which are an obstacle to free circulation and equal treatment of all Europeans have to be demolished.

Obstacles were the subject of Michel Duchein's RAMP study commissioned by UNESCO and entitled "Obstacles to the Access, Use, and Transfer of Information from Archives."⁵ Thanks to American efforts, facilitating access to archives is a priority of the International Council on Archives.⁶ It also ranks high on the harmonization agenda recently established by the national archivists of the twelve EC countries. In setting such a high priority for access, they responded to a major preoccupation of researchers, as it has been demonstrated by Richard Griffiths of the European University Institute in Florence.⁷ In his 1990 project report, Griffiths criticizes the great differences, not so much in legislation on access as in actual practice, citing the unequal treatment of foreigners, privileged access for "official historians," cruelly short opening hours, limits on the number of boxes one can order, and other practices.

General access practices vary. In Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain, records

are accessible after their transfer to an archival repository. But the retention period for keeping records in the offices of origin ranges from between twenty-five years in Spain to fifty years in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands that period is to be shortened to twenty years in the near future. Other countries have determined access dates regardless of whether the records are still in the offices of origin or transferred to a records centre or an archives: Denmark (fifty years), Germany (thirty years), and the United Kingdom (thirty years). The thirty-year rule is also applied by the EC to its own records. In some countries, like France and the Netherlands, access is governed not only by archival legislation but also by freedom of information legislation.

Under the leadership of Michel Duchein, experts from the national archives of the twelve EC countries are currently working on the harmonization of both legal and practical rules concerning access. This expert committee will report to the group of twelve national archivists. The group of twelve national archivists, established in 1990 under the auspices of the International Council on Archives, has succeeded in putting archival policy on the agenda of the European Council of Ministers. The council of ministers recently invited the European Commission to set up a group of experts—these experts to be proposed by the member states and appointed by the commission—for the purpose of examining to what extent greater harmonization of archives policy and practice is desirable within the European Community. The commission is to transmit the group's progress report to the council of ministers before the end of 1992. This group of experts will have official European Community status, whereas the national archivists from the twelve member countries will continue to meet on an informal basis. It is likely that the national archivists will also be among the group of experts as will archivists of European Community institutions.

⁵Michel Duchein, *Obstacles to the Access, Use and Transfer of Information from Archives: a RAMP Study* (Paris: UNESCO, 1983).

⁶James B. Rhoads, "North American Contributions to International Archival Endeavors," *Miscellanea Carlos Wyffels=Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique* 57 (1986): 309-322.

⁷Richard T. Griffiths, *Challenge and Response in Western Europe: the History of European Integration*, EUI Research Project Report (Florence: Villa il Poggiolo, 1990).

Harmonization and convergence at national levels are required, but these efforts should be coordinated with a coherent archival policy set for the records of EC institutions themselves. These institutions include the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, among others. Growing European integration will lead to a shift in decision making from institutions on the national level to those on the intergovernmental and supranational level. With this shift in the transaction of business, the records of the European institutions are increasing in volume and in importance. The national archivists are concerned about the insufficiency of the appraisal process within EC institutions and the resulting lack of coordination with national disposal policies. This is closely linked with another weakness of the archival system of the EC institutions: an authority which has the right of inspection for records management does not exist. The right to inspect the records management practices of offices of origin is a legal responsibility of the archival authorities in all European countries. In a 1988 journal article, K.J. Jaitner, director of the EC archives, deplored the restriction of the EC archives to only a few archival functions, "of all the tasks of central archives, in the fields of guaranteeing law, servicing administration, science, research and education, it is almost exclusively the research aspect that is stressed."⁸

The EC institutions, which have their legislative bodies and executive offices in Strasbourg and Brussels, maintain their common "historical archives" in the European University Institute in Florence which receives transfers from EC institutions more than a thousand kilometers away.⁹ The Eu-

ropean Commission and the other European Community institutions have their own records centres to which the secretariats are supposed to transfer their non-current records. In each records centre the material is indexed and prepared for transfer to Florence. One of the aims of a European archival policy should be to achieve more coherence in the records and archives management of the EC institutions. Jaitner has complained that "At present there is no logical, unitary archives structure with precisely described competences and tasks."¹⁰

With regard to appraisal, attention is being given to improving policies and practices within EC institutions and to coordination with member states. Harmonization of national appraisal policies is not likely to be attained in the near future. Such harmonization seems more feasible in the field of archival training and education (see the contributions by Paule René-Bazin and Eckhart G. Franz in this issue) and in technical developments (see the joint article by Margarita Vázquez de Parga and Pedro González and the article by David Bearman in this issue). In fact, the group of twelve national archivists has included in its agenda not only training and education, but also standards for buildings and equipment (including health and security regulations), preservation, and new technologies as possible areas for harmonization and common European legislation. Other concerns of the national archivists of the twelve EC countries are harmonization of policies and practice regarding audiovisual archives, reprography, lending documents abroad, and the protection of private archives.

In 1986, the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives discussed centralization and decentralization within a national archival system. Different archival systems can be put on a scale measuring the extent of centralization. On a suprana-

⁸K.J. Jaitner, "The European Community Historical Archives in Florence," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 9 (1988): 178.

⁹*Guide to the Historical Archives of the European Communities*, 2nd ed. (Florence: Villa il Poggiolo, 1990); and Jaitner, 176–180.

¹⁰Jaitner, 178.

tional level one might put the current European harmonization somewhere in the middle of such a scale, with total integration at one end.¹¹ European archival integration should not, however, lead to total amalgamation. The new Europe challenges

our abilities to associate the shift from centralization to decentralization with networking, as described in John Naisbitt's *Megatrends*.¹² By structuring the power and communication flow within Europe horizontally, we can achieve free communication between systems and among people, fostering equal access to and care for our European archival patrimony.

¹¹Eric Ketelaar, "Centralization/decentralization and archives," *Centralization/decentralization and archives: Proceedings of the twenty-fourth International Archival Round Table Conference* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 1987): 114-116.

¹²John Naisbitt, *Megatrends. Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Warner Books, 1982).

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Abstract: The political and economic integration of the twelve countries which constitute the European Community will mandate the harmonization of archival practice within the community. The national archivists of the twelve countries are preparing archival policy to be discussed by the European Council of Ministers. High on this agenda will be the harmonization of legislation and practice concerning access. Harmonization is also sought in appraisal policies, in standards for buildings and equipment, in the adaptation of new technologies, in copyright protection, and in procedures for the lending of documents. Such harmonization among national archives would hopefully match efforts to establish a coherent archival policy for the records of European Community institutions. The author does not advocate a total archival integration but does favor a structure which would allow for the free communication between archival systems and which would foster equal access and care for European archives.

La Communauté européenne et ses archives

Résumé: L'intégration politique et économique des douze pays formant la Communauté européenne conduira à l'harmonisation de la pratique archivistique au sein de cette communauté. Les archivistes nationaux de ces douze pays préparent une politique en matière d'archives qui sera discutée par le conseil des ministres européens. L'harmonisation des législations et des pratiques liées à l'accès seront les deux points majeurs à l'ordre du jour. L'harmonisation devra aussi se faire au niveau des politiques d'évaluation, des normes pour des aménagements physiques et l'équipement, de l'adaptation des nouvelles technologies, de la protection des droits d'auteur, et des procédures de prêt de documents. Une telle harmonisation des archives nationales permettra sûrement d'établir une politique cohérente pour les documents des institutions de la Communauté européenne. L'auteur ne suggère pas une intégration archivistique totale mais privilégie une structure qui permettrait une communication libre entre les divers systèmes d'archives et encouragerait un accès uniforme et la conservation des archives européennes.

Die Europäische Gemeinschaft und ihre Archive

Abstrakt: Die politische und ökonomische Vereinigung der zwölf Staaten, welche die Europäische Gemeinschaft bilden, wird eine einheitliche archivarische Praxis erfordern. Die nationalen Archivare der zwölf Staaten sind im Begriff, archivarische Programme vorzubereiten, welche dem europäischen Ministerrat zur Diskussion vorgelegt werden sollen. Hoch an der Tagesordnung ist die Standardisierung von Gesetzen und Praxis hinsichtlich Benutzung. Einklang wird auch gesucht in Gesetzen für Bewertung, in der Standardisierung von Bauten und Ausstattung, in der Angleichung neuer Technologie, im Urheberrechtsschutz und für das Ausleihen von Dokumenten. Ein solcher Einklang zwischen den nationalen Archivverwaltungen wird sich hoffentlich Bemühungen anpassen, einheitliche Gesetze für die Archivverwaltung der Europäischen Gemeinschaft zu erlassen. Der Autor empfiehlt keine vollständige Vereinheitlichung der Systeme, sondern bevorzugt eine Struktur, die einen freien Austausch zwischen den verschiedenen Archivsystemen gestatten und einen einheitlichen Informationszugriff und Pflege der europäischen Archive fördern würde.

La Comunidad Europea y sus archivos

Resumen: La integración política y económica de los doce países que constituyen la Comunidad Europea exigirán la armonización de las normas archivológicas a seguir, dentro de la comunidad. Los archivistas nacionales de los doce países están preparando una regulación archivológica para ser discutida por el Consejo de Ministros Europeos. Lo primero a tratar en la agenda será la armonización de la legislación y la práctica relacionada con el acceso. La armonización es vista también en la política de evaluación, en los códigos para construcciones y equipos, en la adaptación de nuevas tecnologías, en la protección del derecho de autor, y en los procedimientos para el préstamo de documentos. Tal armonización entre los archivos nacionales podrían con esperanza igualar los esfuerzos para establecer una política coherente de archivo para las instituciones de la Comunidad Europea. El autor, no aboga por una integración total de archivos, pero favorece una estructura que pudiera permitir la libre comunicación entre sistemas archivológicos y en la cual se pudiera amparar igual acceso y cuidado para los archivos europeos.