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UN/EDIFACT

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE EDIFACT STEERING COMMITTEE (ESG) TO GE.1**

SOURCE: THE ESG CHAIRMAN
STATUS: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
ACTION: FOR DISCUSSION, September 1997 GE.1 session, agenda item 5

Introductory Note

1. The EDIFACT Steering Group (ESG) is responsible for management of the process for developing UN/EDIFACT standards. The ESG makes recommendations to the Working Party on the Facilitation of International Trade Procedures (WP.4) and its Groups of Experts on what should be done to produce better UN/EDIFACT standards, in as effective a manner as is possible. Thus, the ESG group only makes recommendations about what could be done. It does, however, make management decisions on how to accomplish what has already been decided.
2. To encourage the greatest possible openness in the process and input into its recommendations, the ESG encourages wide circulation of its reports.
3. Since the March 1997 GE.1 session the ESG has met on three occasions :
 - Geneva 18 March 1997 & Singapore 20-25 April 1997 (a combined meeting)
 - Geneva 19-20 May 1997
 - Geneva 21-22 August 1997
4. The reports for the 18 March/20-25 April meeting and the 19-20 May meeting have been widely circulated and copies are available from the UN/ECE Secretariat and Regional UN/EDIFACT Secretariats. The report of the August meeting is available as TRADE/ CEFACT/1997/ CRP.20.

5. UN/EDIFACT Mandate & Future Strategy

5.1 A Mandate and Procedures Group (MOP) was established during the Singapore JRT to consider a draft mandate for an EDIFACT Working Group (EWG) and develop terms of reference, including a proposal for the future management of the UN/EDIFACT process. A draft mandate for the EWG has now been finalised and will be considered for final approval at the Anaheim JRT.

5.2 The EDIFACT Working Group (EWG) encompasses the activities of all JRT Message Development and Technical Groups (with the exception of the Business and Information Modelling (BIM) Group). In addition, it also includes the Directory Production Team (DPT) and the Syntax and Message Design Rules Groups.

5.3 BIM Group activities will be combined with those of AD-HOC Group 1 (AC.1) and the activities of both groups incorporated in the mandate of the Techniques & Methodologies Working Group (TMWG). The activities of the Directory Audit Team (DAT) and those of the Standards Liaison Rapporteur have not, as yet, been included in any mandate and will be the subject of further discussion within the CEFACT Steering Group.

5.4 The proposed future strategy for UN/EDIFACT was also discussed at the Singapore JRT. As requested during the March 1997 session of GE.1 the two CRPs covering both the organisation and strategy issues which were submitted to that meeting have been consolidated into a single document TRADE/CEFACT/GE.1/1997/3) taking into account both the JRT discussions and subsequent comments received. This document will now be submitted to the CEFACT session for consideration and possible approval.

6. Message Development

6.1 In response to a decision at the March 1997 GE.1 session the ESG at its May 1997 meeting approved the terms of reference for a new group to develop a complimentary set of Message Design Rules covering Version 4 (batch and interactive) of the Syntax. A copy of the terms of reference is attached to the report of that meeting. Subsequently the ESG, at its August 1997 meeting, endorsed the membership of the group which will formally meet for the first time at the Anaheim JRT.

6.2 At the May 1997 meeting the ESG also agreed to abolish the existing Management Network Services Joint Message Development Group (JM.13) and replace it with a new JM.13 Group, Directory Support Services. The approved, revised terms of reference for the Group are attached to the report of the meeting..

6.3 In response to a request from the WEEB Rapporteur, the ESG agreed to support the establishment of a separate Joint Message Development Group (JM.14) for accounting. However, the other Rapporteurs were requested to investigate possible interest within their specific regions prior to any formal decision being taken.

7. Technical Issues

7.1 During the Singapore JRT the ESG met with representatives of the Joint Technical Assessment Group (JTAG). They advised the ESG that the Group had concluded that there was a critical lack of guidance to message designers.

To remedy this situation they proposed the preparation of two documents:

- * A "Developer's Handbook" to serve as a guide in the design of UN/EDIFACT messages and,
- * a document containing a series of proposals for the improvement of procedures.

The ESG has approved the development of these documents and drafts should be available by the end of 1997. They will then be submitted for JRT review and approval.

7.2 The ESG also endorsed the publication and distribution of three JTAG working documents which had been approved through the regional process. The procedures contained in these documents will now be implemented at the Anaheim JRT. These documents are the:

- * Batch Technical Assessment Checklist (Version 5.6);
- * Interactive Technical Assessment Checklist (Version 1); and
- * Procedures for Unresolved DMRs.

7.3 The ESG reviewed the European Commission's **Portia Report** which highlights legal issues in respect of the use of EDI messages. Whilst the report contains a study of UN/EDIFACT the ESG noted that the conclusions reached were also valid for all other EDI standards. In view of the reports conclusions it was decided to request the Legal Rapporteurs Team to develop an appropriate disclaimer for publication in future UN/EDIFACT Directories.

7.4 In view of the considerable attention being given to the **Year 2000 Issue** and the increasing number of questions regarding its impact on UN/EDIFACT the ESG requested that a paper be prepared as a guide for users of the UN/EDIFACT standard. A first version of this paper was approved at the May 1997 ESG meeting and, subsequent to comments, a slightly expanded version was approved at the August 1997 ESG meeting and, endorsed for publication. A copy of this paper is attached as Annex A.

8. ISO Liaison

8.1 Draft procedures for the operation of the UN/ECE-ISO Joint Syntax Group for ISO 9735 are currently under development and will be discussed at the forthcoming ISO, IEC, UN/ECE Coordinating Committee meeting.

8.2 The ESG also requested that a small group meet at the Anaheim JRT to establish terms of reference for a JM group for joint STEP/UN/EDIFACT message development in response to a request from a small ad hoc group consisting of ISO TC184 members and UN/EDIFACT representatives. This initiative will also be discussed at the aforementioned Coordinating Committee meeting.

Annex A

UN/EDIFACT

STATEMENT ON THE YEAR 2000 ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

1. Considerable attention is being given to ensuring that computer systems and applications accurately process dates into the next century. In particular, the format of dates is being extended to include a value for the century. For example, from the "YYMMDD" format to "CCYYMMDD".
2. This statement has been prepared as a guide to users of the UN/EDIFACT standard on the Year 2000 issue to enable users to assess and make any required changes to their UN/EDIFACT implementations.
3. Dates are used both in UN/EDIFACT Messages and in the UN/EDIFACT Service Segments that envelope the messages.

UN/EDIFACT MESSAGES

4. For all UN/EDIFACT Messages, dates are specified in the DTM (Date/Time/Period) segment.
5. Within the DTM segment the value for a date is specified in data element 2380 (Date/time/period). This data element has a variable length of up to a maximum of 35 characters. As such, this can readily cater for dates and periods specified with the century.

6. Furthermore, Data element 2379 (Date/time/period format qualifier) in the DTM segment provides for a code value to specify the format of the date value given in data element 2380. The existing code list for data element 2379 caters for dates formatted with the century. Entries in this code list include:

- 102 CCYYMMDD
- 203 CCYYMMDDHHMM
- 204 CCYYMMDDHHMMSS
- 303 CCYYMMDDHHMMZZZ
- 600 CC
- 602 CCYY
- 710 CCYYMM-CCYYMM
- 718 CCYYMMDD-CCYYMMDD

7. Any additional date formats that may be required in the code list can routinely be requested through the UN/EDIFACT DMR (Data Maintenance Request) process.

8. While no changes are required to the DTM segment to cater for dates and periods specified with the century, users may need to make changes to their EDI implementations and to adjust their supporting Message Implementation Guidelines (MIGs) accordingly.

UN/EDIFACT SERVICE SEGMENTS

9. Two UN/EDIFACT Service Segments contain a date, the UNB (Interchange Header) segment and the UNG (Functional Group Header) segment. In both cases, the same composite data element S004 (Date/time of preparation) appears. Within S004 is data element 0017 (Date) with a representation of n6 and a note defining the format as "YYMMDD".

10. To incorporate the century in data element 0017 would require a change to the syntax to extend the length of the data element.

11. Arising from this situation a number of observations can be made:

- a) In data transfer, the date in data element 0017 serves as a time stamp of the data interchange. Typically, since this date is exchanged in a service envelope, it is not passed to the in-house computer application that subsequently processes the enveloped message data.

- b) Extending the length of data element 0017 would result in the UNB and UNG segment specifications not being downwardly compatible between the version of the syntax in which the change was applied and earlier versions of the syntax.
- c) For the purposes of interchange tracking and auditing, it is not considered to be a problem in recognising that for example, is in fact 31 January 2000, since neither EDI or the UNB and UNG segments existed in 1900.
- d) If it did become necessary to manipulate the date in data element 0017 from a YYMMDD format to a CCYYMMDD format, a simple test could be applied to the value of the first two digits of the YYMMDD format, such as;

If YY > 80, set CC to 19, else set CC to 20.

This solution assumes that no records of EDI activity were recorded prior to 1980. It potentially could cope with the issue until the year 2080.

- e) The ANSI X12 community in the United States has opted not to change the format of the date in their equivalent service segments to accommodate the value of the century.

12. Given the above position and in the absence of any significant number of user requests to make a change to the date in data element 0017, the UN/EDIFACT Steering Group (ESG) considers that no change is necessary, at this point in time.

13. However, if there are proposals for change, the following points should be addressed:

- a) The question of compatibility between versions 3 and 4 of the syntax;
- b) Consideration needs to be given to the impact of changing the length of date element 0017 in the UNB & UNG segments on those users who have no requirement to manipulate/process the data in data element 0017;
- c) Thought must be given to the format of the date, if a change is to be made. In the wider "Year 2000" date discussions, the problems which can arise if the format is specified as variable length of n..8 (rather than a fixed length of n8) needs to be considered;
- d) The widest possible user reaction to the proposal should be sought.

14. Should majority support from the UN/EDIFACT user community for a change be identified, the ESG would request the UN/ISO Joint Syntax Working Group (JSWG) to respond.
