**Note from the European Legislation Identifier Taskforce to the LegalCiteM Technical Committee**

Background

1. The Council of the European Union conclusions ([2012/C 325/02](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52012XG1026(01))[[1]](#footnote-1)) invite the introduction of the European Legislation Identifier (ELI). ELI aims to address the need to identify and exchange legal information originating from regional and national authorities at the European level. It does so by providing for unique identifiers for referencing European and national legislation, in Official Journals, Legal Gazettes, as well as online services. In addition to the identifiers, ELI envisages the provision of consistent, structured metadata about legislation. Adoption of ELI is voluntary for member states.
2. To progress the ELI initiative, a taskforce has been formed under the auspices of the e-Law (e-Law) Working Party of the Council, to lead and coordinate activity amongst member states. The taskforce, chaired by Mr John Dann (Luxembourg), consists of experts from the Publications Office of the European Union, as well as members from the governments of Denmark, France, Ireland and the UK.
3. The taskforce has been active for three years, meeting regularly to discuss technical and implementation issues as work to progress ELI has been taken forward by the commission and member states. The ELI taskforce’s perspective is practical and pragmatic, grounded in the reality of official publishing by member states.
4. Through the work of the ELI taskforce, the goal of facilitating the exchange of legislation data has become an action of the ISA Programme[[2]](#footnote-2), which aims to introduce interoperability solutions for public administrations in Europe. Funding from the ISA Programme has enabled the Office of Publications, in collaboration with the taskforce, to commission a number of pieces of work to further the adoption and implementation of ELI, such as the ELI ontology, a Guide to Best Practice, an ELI Register and other tools and support material.

Objectives of ELI

1. The objective of ELI is to enable a greater degree of semantic interoperability of legislation data in general and in particular between European and member state systems. ELI proposes a unique identifier (HTTP URI), which should be recognisable, readable and understandable by both humans and computers. In addition, ELI proposes a set of metadata elements to describe legislation in compliance with a recommended ontology. ELI aims to takes into account not only the complexity and specificity of regional, national and European legislative systems, but also changes in legal resources (e.g. consolidations, repealed acts, codes etc.).
2. ELI is targeted as being an extension to existing systems, so the initiative can be implemented by member states at reasonable cost. As a result the ELI taskforce has a narrow focus on the provision of identifiers and structured metadata.

The ELI Taskforce’s view of LegalCiteM proposals

1. The taskforce last met in Paris, on the 1st and 2nd of July 2015, and discussed the current trajectory of the standard proposed by OASIS Legal Citation Markup (LegalCiteM) Technical Committee. The taskforce would like to record our deep concerns about the direction the LegalCiteM technical committee is taking regarding identifiers for legislation. Based on our experience over the last three years with ELI, we believe the current proposals are much too restrictive and inflexible to be practically implemented by any official publisher of legislation in Europe.

1. The taskforce welcomes and strongly supports the evolution of technical standards that aid the interoperability of legislation and other legal resources. We share many aims and ambitions of the LegalCiteM technical committee and have sought to positively engage with this work.
2. We would draw the committee’s attention to the examples we have provided, based on our experience with ELI implementation, where a rigid approach does not suffice. We hope these have proven useful.
3. We note that our goals with ELI are limited to identifiers and metadata. We do not share the committee’s ambition to standardise a rigid scheme of parsable identifiers. We think this is misguided and would point the committee to the current Best Practice for URI Design and Ownership, [IETF RFC 7320](https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc7320)[[3]](#footnote-3)3 . This says that “publishing independent standards that mandate particular forms of URI substructure is inappropriate, because that essentially usurps ownership” and goes on to provide some acceptable alternatives for use in standards.
4. We find it hard to reconcile the spirit of the Council conclusion regarding ELI, which emphasises the rights of the publisher, in our case member states, to determine their own identifier scheme on a voluntary basis, with the rigidity of the committee’s proposals so far.
5. We believe there is ground for alignment of our ambitions around the use of the URI Template Specification4. This allows publishers to express their URI Scheme in a machine readable way. We have found there are commonly occurring building blocks in many ELI URI schemes that if specified by the publisher, could enable the parsing of an ELI, without infringing the publisher’s right to determine their own identifiers, freely and flexibly.
6. We remain concerned that the LegalCiteM Technical Committee is creating a technical standard based on idealised view of the world that has little chance of adoption in practice. We would strongly encourage the committee to find a more flexible approach around URI Templates.

July 2015. European Legislation Identifier Taskforce, with members from the Publications Office of the European Union and the governments of Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg and the UK.

1. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52012XG1026(01) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://ec.europa.eu/isa/actions/01-trusted-information-exchange/1-21action\_en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc7320>

4 <https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc6570> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)