Secrétariat général du Conseil

Directorate General Communication and Document Management

Directorate Document Management

Archives, Records and Documentation Unit

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Archival Access and Online Archives of the Council of the EU

Considering the user perspective

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Council Archives

HISTORY - set up in Luxembourg in 1952 (ECSC archives), Brussels since 1958 (EEC and EAEC archives), Merger Treaty 1967 (ECSC, EEC and EAEC archives in Brussels).

TODAY - 9 linear km of archival material.

ARCHIVES REGULATION - 30 years rule & deposit EUI Florence.

COLLECTIONS - from Treaty of Paris to Treaty of Lisbon

CONTENTS - (European) Council / Coreper meetings, budgetary files, files relating to the preparation of legal acts (directives, regulations & decisions).

LANGUAGES - French, German, Italian, Dutch, English (from 1973), Danish (from 1973), Greek (from 1981).

**ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTIONS** - in French, 1952-1975 accessible online

Archive Users

External researchers:

- Scientific researcher/university professor
- PhD student
- Lawyer/law office employee
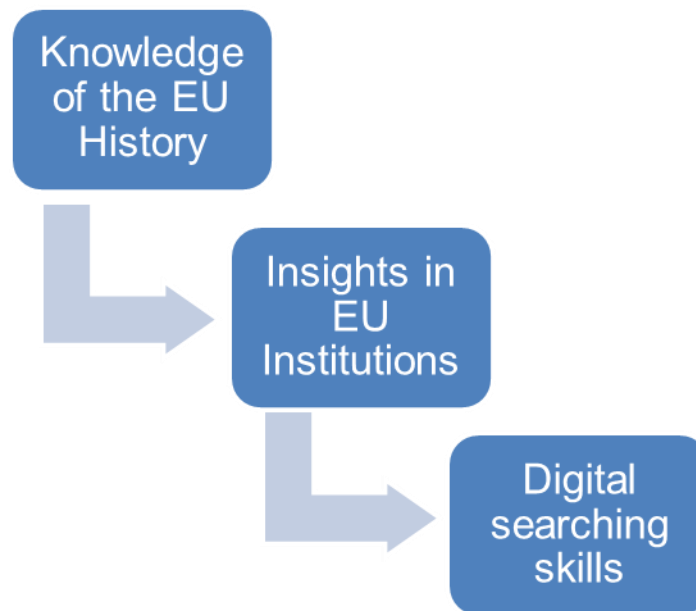- Other: journalist, undergraduate

Internal researchers:

- Council (Transparency, Public Information, Legal service, staff administration, …)
- Commission, Parliament, Court of Justice, EEAS
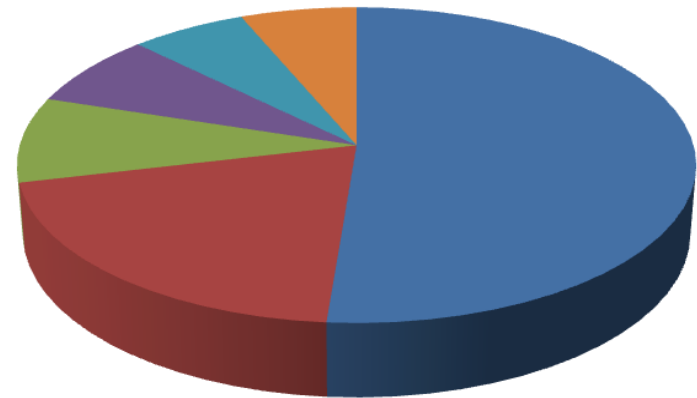
- External Researchers
- Internal Staff - Council
- Internal Staff - Commission
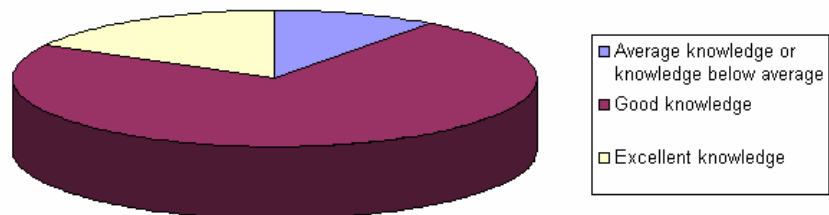- Internal Staff - Parliament
- Internal Staff - Court of Justice
- Internal Staff - EEAS

Archive Users Skills

Archive Users Skills

- Knowledge of EU History

Archives Users - Knowledge of EU History

- Average knowledge or knowledge below average
- Good knowledge
- Excellent knowledge

On 9 May 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman first publicly put forward the ideas that led to the European Union.
So 9 May is celebrated as the EU's birthday.

Archive Users Skills

- Insights in EU Institutions

Archives Users - insights in EU institutions

- Average knowledge or knowledge below average
- Good knowledge
- Excellent knowledge
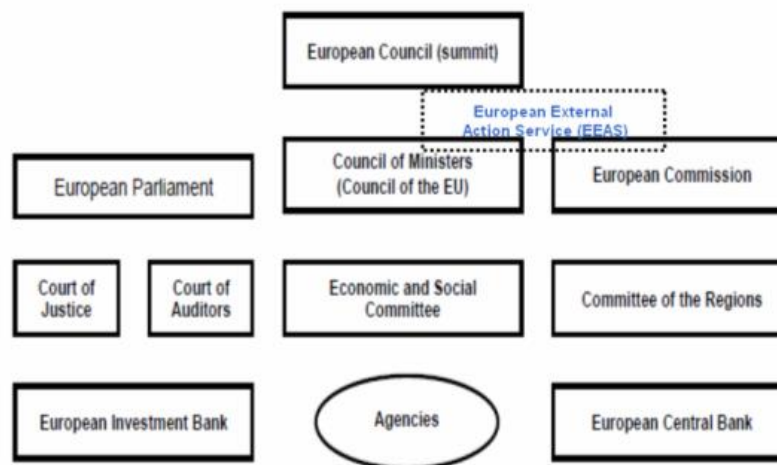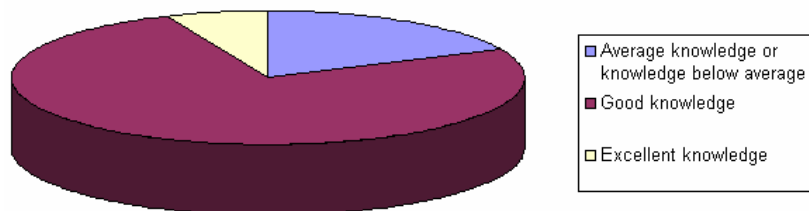
Archive Users Skills

- Digital searching skills

External researchers:
- Understand archival search interfaces better

Internal researchers:
- Less familiar with archival research

Technology expectations:
- Approach archives through digitised surrogates of paper archives
- Full-text search possibilities
- Intuitive tools, not requiring detailed help files
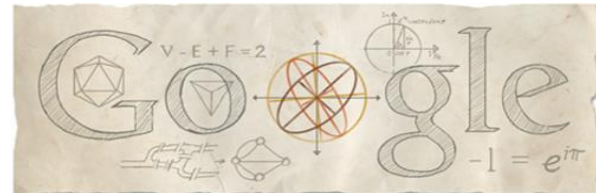
generation ?

Archival Research & Access

Archival Research & Access

Up to recently……
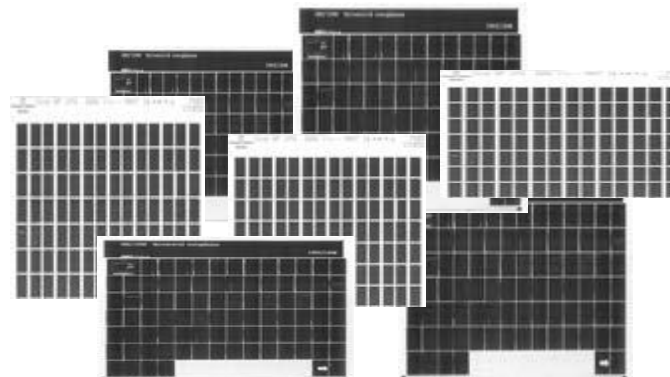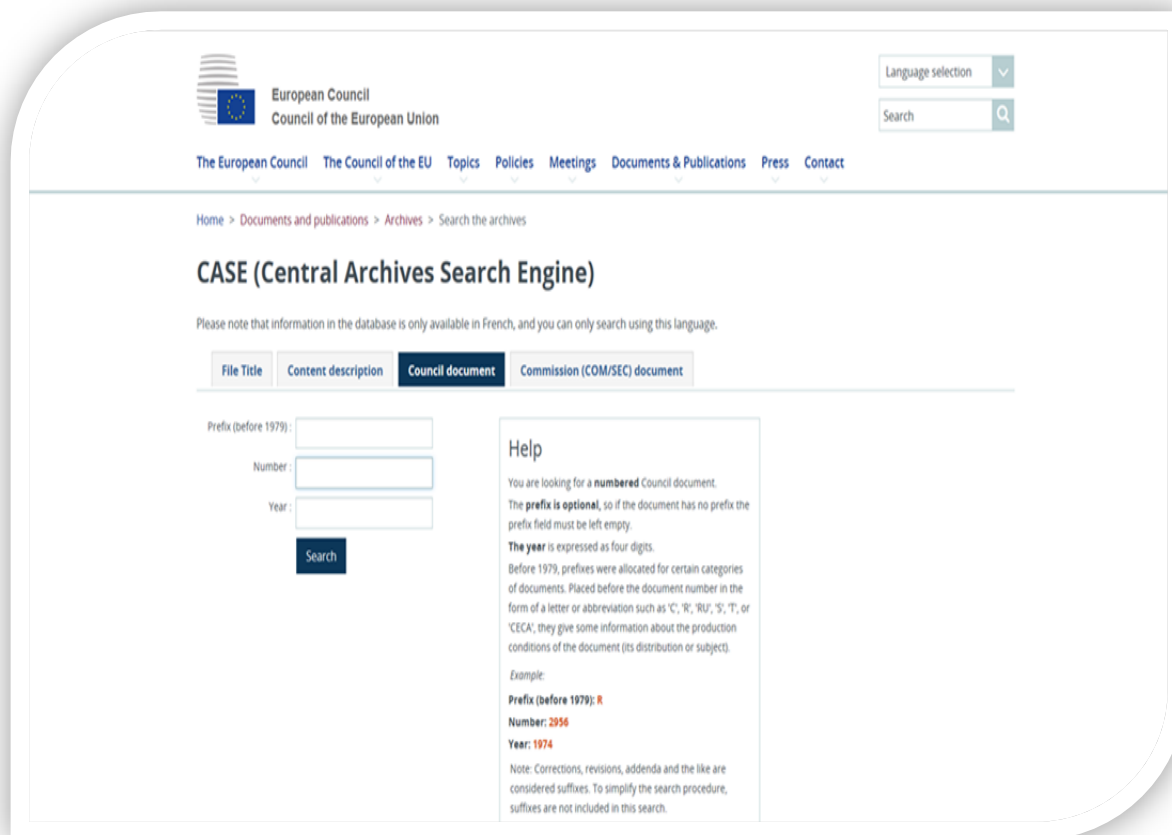
Archival Research & Access

- Inventories
- Historical notices
- Search engine

Archival Research & Access

Now & future …

- **Digitisation microfiches & paper originals**

    - Exploit new possibilities for accessibility & communication.

    - Offer new services - i.e. enhanced searching and retrieval possibilities (metadata & full-text searches).

- **Access digitised archives through local Council IT infrastructure**

    - Consult digitised files instead of microfiches.

    - Decrease in number of visiting days in the consultation room.

- **Make digitised historical archives accessible on Internet / intermediate archives (not public, < 30 years) accessible on Intranet**

    - Legal & technical challenges

Conclusions

- **Diversity of archives users:** Internal/external researchers, different nationalities/languages, different backgrounds/professions.

- **Good knowledge of EU history/diverse insights in EU institutions:** External researchers cannot always distinguish missions/archives of the EU institutions.

- **Diverse archival skills:** Expert users consult inventories, understand provenance, visit multiple archives.

Archivists must be able to deal with all information seekers and try to limit the gap i.e. by reference help, language…

Conclusions

- **Diverse digital searching skills:** Expert users combine different strategies to find archival material. Researchers prefer immediate easy search without long help tools.

- **Similar technology expectations:** Archives users prefer to consult digital copies & expect to find everything on Internet/Intranet.

- **Goal**: Archival search through intuitive & easy tools, metadata & full-text search possibilities + online digitised archives.

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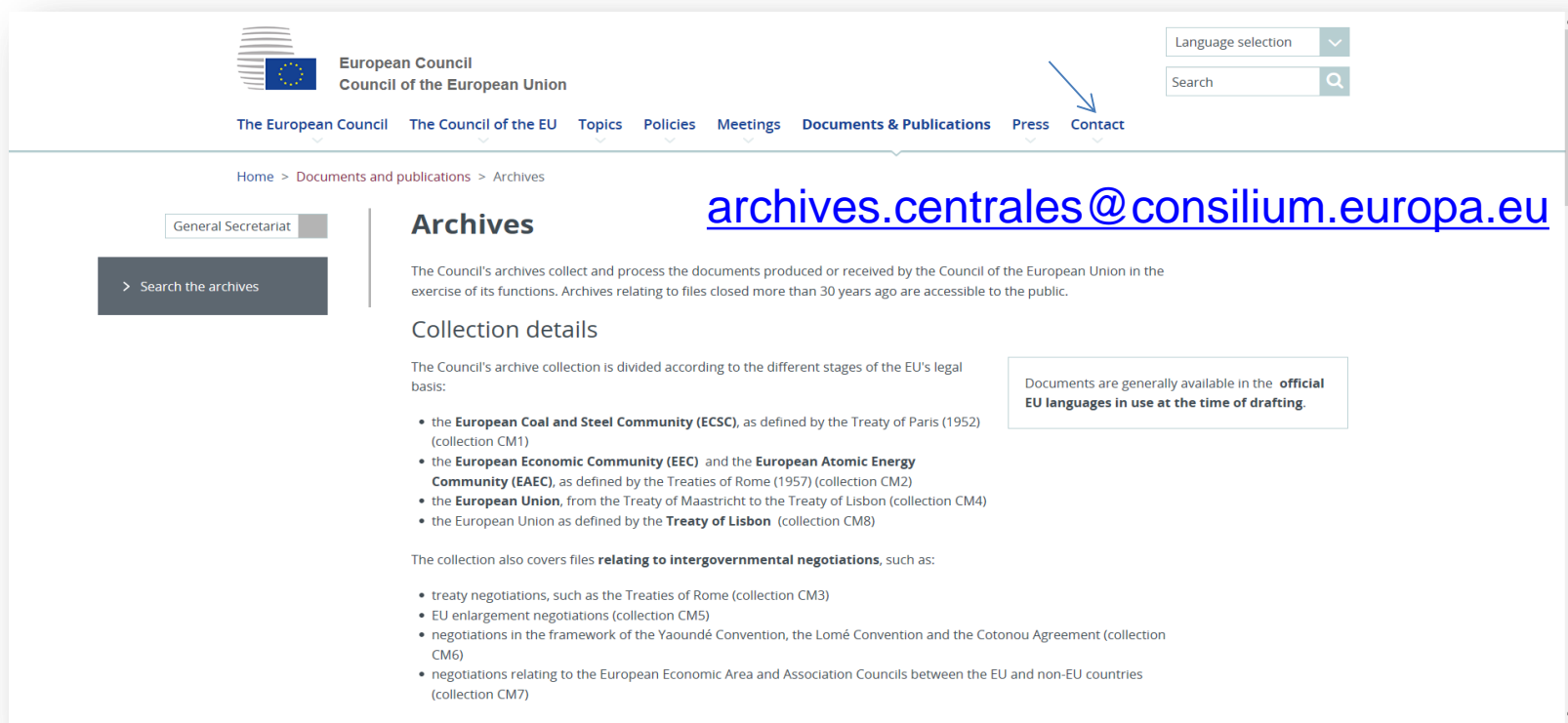
Final thought

« In principle the ultimate rationale for the existence of archival institutions is not the preservation of archives for their own sake or because archivists appraise them to be valuable, but <u>because they are used by people</u> from all walks of life, for all manners of purposes, to address historical problems. »

CONWAY, P. Partners in Research. Improving Access to the Nation's Archives. User studies at the National Archives and Records Administration. Pittsburgh, 1994.

Questions?

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/archives

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