

Convergence

UN/CEFACT, OASIS/UBL and CEN-BII

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0.11	30 October 2008	John Ketchell/Alain Dechamps	Suggested amendments
0.12	31 October 2008	Anders Grangard	Suggested amendments
0.2	31 October 2008	Peter Potgieser	Handled suggested amendments from 0.11 and 0.12 and separate input on 0.1 from Tim McGrath
0.21	4, 5 November	Tim McGrath, Antonio Conte, Anders Grangard, John Ketchell/Alain Dechamps	Suggested amendments
0.9	7 November	Peter Potgieser	Proposed final document. Handled all suggested amendments. For review by other meeting participants.
1.0	26 November	Peter Potgieser	

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iv
1. Background to the informal meeting	1
2. Organisations and technical activities involved	1
2.1 UN/CEFACT	1
2.2 OASIS	1
2.3 NES	1
2.4 CEN/ISSS Workshop BII	2
3. History	2
4. Essentials of the meeting	3
5. Conclusions / Actions	4
5.1 Conclusion	4
5.2 Actions / next steps	4
6. Participants	5
7. Meeting invitation	5
8. References	6

The target audience of this publication is intended to include:

- Business decision makers
- Public sector decision makers
- Members of the European Commission
- As yet not identified non-technical stakeholders

This implies that:

- The playing field needs to be sketched to allow for recognition of the topic
- The language used must be non-technical and contain no jargon

1. Background to the informal meeting

DG ENTR/D4 "ICT for Competitiveness and Innovation" of the European Commission organised an informal meeting in Brussels on 15 October 2008 in order to get a clear picture about the current status, progress and implications of the convergence of the Universal Business Language (UBL) standard into standards developed by UN/CEFACT, and to discuss whether or not any actions - in addition to the ongoing convergence - seemed to be needed. The CEN/ISSS 'Workshop on Business Interoperability Interfaces for Public Procurement' (WS/BII), that is actively addressing UBL as part of its activities, was to be part of that picture.

This debate on the convergence may also be relevant to the work of the 'Expert Group on e-Invoicing', which was set up by the European Commission at the end of October 2007.

For a list of participants in the meeting, see section 6 below.

2. Organisations and technical activities involved

2.1 UN/CEFACT

UN/CEFACT (United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business) has a global remit. It encourages close collaboration between governments and private business to secure the interoperability for the exchange of information within the public and private sectors as well as between them. It is now drawing up the next generation of trade facilitation and e-business standards and tools [1].

2.2 OASIS

OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) is a not-for-profit consortium that drives the development, convergence and adoption of open standards for the global information society. [2]

UBL (The Universal Business Language) [3] is the product of an international effort to define a royalty-free library of standard electronic XML business documents such as purchase orders and invoices. UBL is a strongly document-centric approach to electronic commerce, that focuses on standardizing business data in a way that maps easily to traditional printed forms.

2.3 NES

NES is a cooperative effort among a group of countries and organizations to facilitate the practical use of electronic collaboration in the procurement chain, based on available international standards.

The participating countries plan to apply the northern European implementation of UBL 2.0; a first version showing this was made available on March 23, 2007.

The initiative comprises representation from both government and industry [5]. The main aim of NES is to facilitate the establishment of a common platform for e-procurement among its members, and through this to:

- facilitate interoperability and practical use of e-procurement in both domestic and cross border trade
- facilitate harmonization of different types of e-procurement documents
- contribute to the development and use of an international standard for e-procurement.

Technical developments concerning NES are now undertaken inside the CEN/ISSS Workshop/BII. CODICE is a Spanish framework that similarly tries to ensure electronic collaboration in public procurement.

2.4 CEN/ISSS Workshop BII

The objectives of this Workshop [4] are to provide a basic framework for technical interoperability in pan-European electronic transactions, expressed as a set of technical specifications that cross-refer to relevant activities, and in particular are compatible with UN/CEFACT standards in order to ensure global interoperability.

The Workshop will be focused on implementation facilitations and co-ordinating pilots implementing the technical specifications output. The requirements and final specifications will be published as CEN Workshop Agreements and input into UN/CEFACT.

The starting point for the Workshop is the NES and CODICE customisations of OASIS Universal Business Language 2.0.

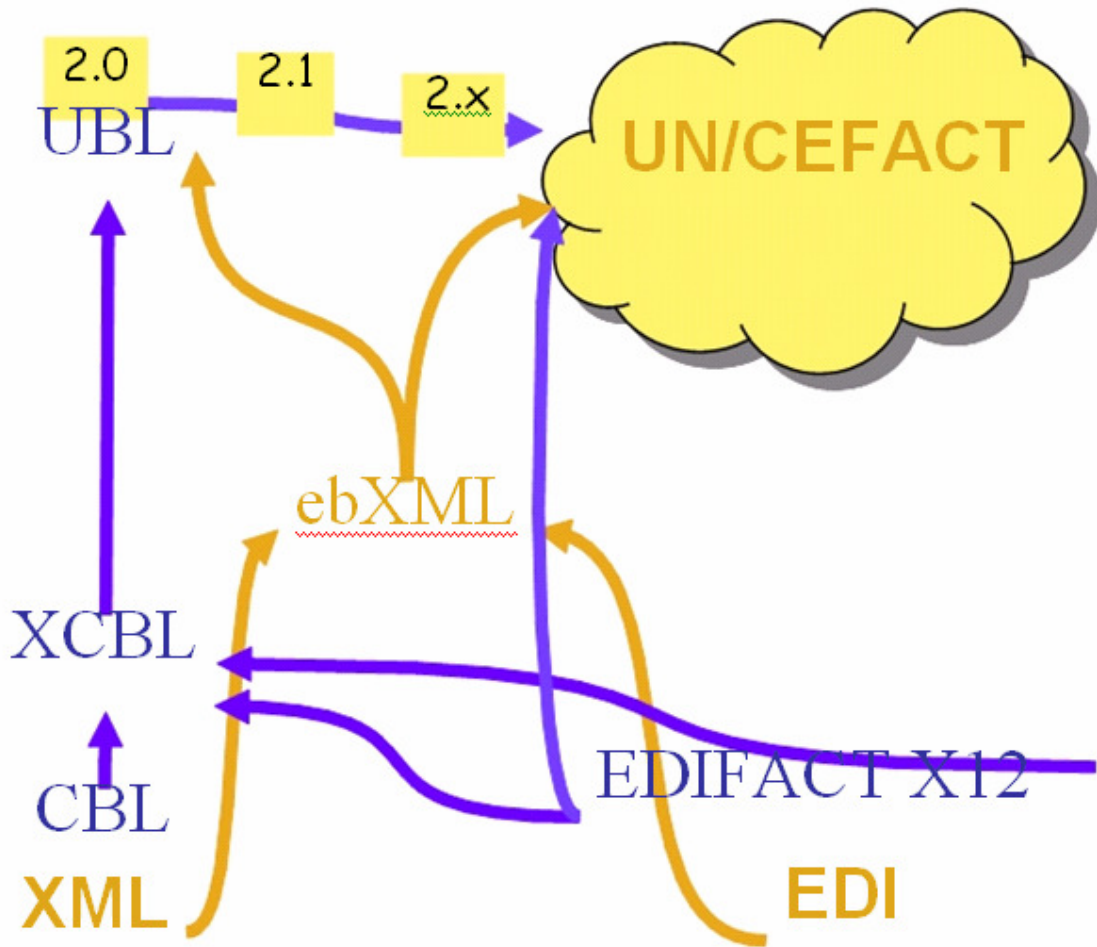
3. History

On 17 June 2005 a 'MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MoU) BETWEEN UN/ECE AND OASIS' was agreed as a framework for collaboration between these two standards bodies. [6]. UBL was one of a number of specific topics identified in this MoU for more detailed discussion between the two bodies.

In 2006, the following cooperation statement on UBL issues was agreed:

1. UN/CEFACT recognizes UBL 2 as appropriate first-generation XML documents for eBusiness.
2. For OASIS and UN/CEFACT:
 - a) future UN/CEFACT deliverables constitute the upgrade path for UBL, and
 - b) the maintenance of UBL 2 remains with the OASIS UBL TC
3. In the expectation that UN/CEFACT will produce its own integrated set of XML schemas within a period of three years, OASIS will produce no further major versions of UBL past UBL 2.
4. OASIS will grant UN/CEFACT a perpetual, irrevocable license to create derivative works based on UBL.

The figure below depicts bullet 3. Note that UBL versions labelled 2.x are a so called '*minor version*' or '*maintenance release*', only intended to protect investments for those parties with implementations e.g. by removing bugs. The important aspect of 'minor' releases is that they don't break compatibility with the previous release. A valid UBL 2.0 document is also a valid UBL 2.1 document but it would not be a valid UBL 3.0 document (although it will not be called UBL 3.0 but something from UN/CEFACT). Versions 2.x therefore fall within clause 2(b) above. A '*major version*' would be a version 3.x or higher. There can thus be no ambiguity as to what is 'minor' and what is 'major'. OASIS' goal is to make the next 'major' release of UBL to be a UN/CEFACT deliverable.



The figure comes from [7]: a presentation by Tim McGrath at the CEN/ISSS eBIF plenary meeting of 27 February 2008.

4. Essentials of the meeting

After an introduction by the Commission, the representatives of the organizations involved briefly expressed their point of view on the situation. The essential elements were:

- There are common interests in OASIS-UBL and UN/CEFACT standards and development.
- There is an MoU [6] and a supplementary agreement in order to converge their activities
- Future development of UBL (as opposed to those developments for maintenance purposes) will be in various UN/CEFACT activities
- CEN/ISSS Workshop-BII will contribute actively to help the convergence and future developments
- The Expert Group on e-Invoicing of the European Commission [8] has a mandate to prepare a European e-Invoicing Framework by the end of 2009. This Framework will include legal and best practice guidelines, commercial and operational rules for e-invoicing systems and technical standards. The Expert Group takes the MoU between OASIS and UN/CEFACT as a given and prefer to rely on its outcome.

Both UN/CEFACT and OASIS acknowledged the opportunity to collaborate on the development of a common set of standards for eBusiness. This includes public e-Procurement. The goal is to have one common set of standards - not alternatives.

Concerns had been expressed that the deliverables of the CEN/ISSS Workshop BII were not in line with the 2006 Agreement, i.e. specifically that the Workshop was “developing new UBL standards”.

First it was noted and accepted that, so far, CEN/ISSS Workshop BII has only produced requirements for standards and not any “new UBL standard”. Its output was firmly intended to be submitted to UN/CEFACT, who is obliged to take due account of these requirements in any amendments it may make as part of the convergence process. It was suggested that the CEN/ISSS Workshop BII therefore actually provided a strong incentive to the completion of convergence between UN/CEFACT standards and UBL. To illustrate this, examples were shown of support for workshop participants by their constituencies.

In an additional discussion, the representatives of CEN/ISSS Workshop BII noted that they were not creating XML Schemas nor would any request be made to the UBL Technical Committee to do so.

The meeting also noted that whilst the approach to achieving some work items had evolved, the principles of the Agreement are still in place and collaboration between UN/CEFACT and UBL is greater now than it was three years ago. Within this framework it was acknowledged that OASIS and UBL each had a duty to maintain and support the current standards for its established user base in situations where suitable solutions were not yet available from UN/CEFACT.

It was identified that some of these concerns had arisen because of the complex arrangement of projects (inside and outside standards) working in this area and it was agreed that a “child’s guide” to the activities deliverables, and inter-relationships should be developed to avoid future confusion and to help the development of a coherent set of standards for European e-Procurement.

5. Conclusions / Actions

5.1 Conclusion

The Chair concluded that overall progress was well under way, as planned and agreed, but that this message had not conveyed properly to some stakeholders, the result of misunderstanding and sometimes the use of language restricted to specific audiences. The most prominent example being UBL 2.x version(s), which were interpreted as new developments, while in fact they are ‘maintenance release(s)’, only intended to protect investments for those parties with implementations in UBL 2.0 e.g. by removing bugs. OASIS’ goal is to make release 3.0 of UBL a UN/CEFACT deliverable, in line with the MoU.[6]

He concluded that the meeting has achieved its objective of having resolving concerns and saw no need for another meeting.

5.2 Actions / next steps

Agreement on actions to be undertaken: (only names listed, for ‘constituency’ see ‘Participants’ table).

1. To build a document containing a mapping on the relevant activities (eInvoicing, eProcurement), relationships, expected deliverables and timing (with the help of Emilio Castrillejo).
2. To draft a document about the main items discussed and the main conclusions of the meeting (Antonio Conte, John Ketchell , Anders Grangard, Tim McGrath, Peter Potgieser)¹. This document is then reflecting the agreed position of the organizations involved and is to be used to inform parties concerned and/or interested of status and progress in developments.
CEN to set up an exploder list for managed e-mail distribution to support further discussion on the issues².

¹ This report/statement satisfies this action item.

² This action item has been carried out. The exploder list is:

MOU-UBL-UNCEFACT@LISTSERV.CENORM.BE and it is only accessible for participants to the meeting

6. Participants

Remote

Tim McGrath	Vice chair OASIS/TC-UBL
Jamie Clark	Technical Director, OASIS
Mike Doran	UN/CEFACT Forum Chair
Rúnar Már Sverrisson	CEN ICT rapporteur and Chair, CEN/ISSS Forum
James Whittle	APACS, UN/CEFACT TBG5 Secretary

Present :

Costas Andropoulos (chair)	DG Enterprise and Industry, Unit D4, European Commission
Antonio Conte	DG Enterprise and Industry, Unit D4, European Commission
Anders Grangard	GS1, Vice Chair UN/CEFACT Forum, MoU Coordinator
Martin Forsberg	CEN/ISSS WS/BII WG2 Convenor
Alain Dechamps	CEN Management Centre
John Ketchell	CEN Management Centre
Klaus Förderer	GS1, UN/CEFACT TBG1 Member
Peter Potgieser	CEN/ISSS eBIF Chairman, UN/CEFACT Coordinator
Jean-Pierre Henninot	French Ministry of Industry, UN/CEFACT TBG19 Chairman
Sylvie Colas	French Ministry of Finance, UN/CEFACT TBG19 Secretary
Pieter Breynne	DG DIGIT, Unit B4, European Commission
Joao Frade Rodrigues	DG DIGIT, Unit B4, European Commission
Peter Borresen	CEN/ISSS WS/BII Chairman
Mounir el-Khoury	CEN/ISSS WS/eBES Member
Emilio Castrillejo	DG DIGIT, Unit 01 (IDABC), European Commission
Anne Lehouck	DG Enterprise and Industry, Unit D4, European Commission

7. Meeting invitation

From: [Antonio.Conte@ec.europa.eu]

Sent: 10/06/2008 01:10 PM ZE2

To: <John.Ketchell@cen.eu>; <Alain.Dechamps@cen.eu>; <plb@ebConnect.dk>; <jostein.fromyr@edisys.no>; <martin.forsberg@ecru.se>; <Kevin.Ginty@sunderland.ac.uk>; <bernard.longhi@bhc-consultants.com>; Peter Potgieser; <Mike.Doran@cern.ch>; <anders.grangard@gs1.org>; <Jean_Luc_Champion@yahoo.com>; <Coen.Janssen@gs1.nl>; <dvankemmel@wanadoo.fr>; <STK@finansraadet.dk>; <jean-pierre.henninot@industrie.gouv.fr>; <sylvie.colas@finances.gouv.fr>; <tim.mcgrath@documentengineeringservices.com>; <mhb@itst.dk>; <kvp@itst.dk>; <Erkki.Poutiainen@nordea.com>; <Bo.Harald@tietoenator.com>

Cc: <Costas.Andropoulos@ec.europa.eu>; <Anne.Lehouck@ec.europa.eu>; <David.Ellard@ec.europa.eu>; <Karel.DE-VRIENDT@ec.europa.eu>; <Emilio.CASTRILLEJO@ec.europa.eu>; <Zuzana.MAZANOVA@ec.europa.eu>; <Angelo.Tosetti@ec.europa.eu>; <Pieter.BREYNE@ext.ec.europa.eu>; <Jean-Francois.Junger@ec.europa.eu>; <Maria.GERONYMAKI@ec.europa.eu>; <Philippe.CALUWAERTS@ec.europa.eu>; <Gerd.HEINEN@ec.europa.eu>; <Catherine.Matthews@ec.europa.eu>

Subject: Informal meeting on the convergence between UN/CEFACT and UBL

Dear All,

CEN/ISSS launched the BII Workshop in May 2007. Its Business Plan mentions the UN/CEFACT-OASIS collaboration aiming at building a common set of UN/CEFACT document standards fully compliant with UN/CEFACT and under the UN/CEFACT umbrella organisation. The Business Plan states that "one of the main objectives of the Workshop will be to contribute to UBL-UN/CEFACT convergence by providing a standardized approach to the practical implementation of the relevant specifications. This will help measure the consequences of this convergence on current projects."

Some stakeholders are claiming that the Workshop is not really pursuing such convergence, and thus appropriate measures should be taken to redress the situation. The debate on the convergence is also relevant to the work of the Expert Group on e-invoicing that was set up by the European Commission at the end of October 2007.

On behalf of Costas Andropoulos, Head of Unit DG ENTR/D4 "ICT for Competitiveness and Innovation", I am pleased to invite you to participate in this informal meeting that will serve to get a clear picture about the current status of the convergence, and on its implications and progress. The Draft Agenda is as follows:

Introductions and meeting arrangements

Background – how CEN/ISSS work on eBusiness standards is organised

Background – UBL and the OASIS-UN/CEFACT Agreement

Relevant work of UN/CEFACT and related work in WS/eBES

- Cross-Industry Invoice v.2.0

- TBG1, TBG3, TBG5, TBG6, TBG19

Work of CEN/ISSS WS/BII - presentation of the WS and its work programme

- WS/BII deliverables - relevance to work of:

- * UN/CEFACT
- * ISO TC68
- * others (PEPPOL project, IDABC e-Invoicing & e-Ordering for Public Procurement, ...)

Agreement on any possible actions, etc.

AOB

The meeting will take place on 15 October 2008 from 15:30 to 17:30 in the DG Enterprise and Industry premises (Breydel building, Avenue d'Auderghem 45 - 1040 Brussels), room BREY 8/138. Those of you who are not able to come to the meeting, may join it through an audio conference service by dialling +32 2 6008837.

You are kindly invited to confirm your physical or remote participation to Catherine Matthews (who is in copy). Meanwhile don't hesitate to contact me if you need further assistance.

Best regards,

Antonio Conte

Principal Administrator

European Commission - DG Enterprise and Industry

Unit D4 "ICT for Competitiveness and Innovation"

8. References

Quoted:

[1] <http://www.unece.org/cefact/>

[2] <http://www.oasis-open.org/home/index.php>

[3] <http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/ubl/faq.php>

[4] http://www.cen.eu/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/iss/activity/ws_bii.asp

[5] <http://www.nesubl.eu/>

- [6] http://www.unece.org/oes/MOU/mou_OASIS.pdf
[7] <http://documentengineeringservices.com/presentations/UBLandUNCEFACT.pdf>
[8] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/ict/policy/einvoicing/einvoicing_en.htm

General

<http://www.efta.int>
http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm
<http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/e-business/mou/>