WORKING PAPER

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON MACHINE READABLE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS (TAG-MRTD)

SEVENTEENTH MEETING

Montréal, 20 to 22 March 2007

Agenda item 2:   Implementation of ePassports
Agenda item 2.1: Progress and issues

PROCESSING TRAVELLERS PRESENTING ePASSPORTS THAT FAIL TO READ

Presented by the New Technologies Working Group (NTWG)

1.   **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   With increasing numbers of e-passports being issued, plans for reading of documents going forward and the establishment of the PKD moving forward, there is a need to reach agreement on a formal protocol on how to handle travellers whose e-passport fails to read or where there is a mismatch with the PKD and to provide guidance to control authorities and others on how to deal with travellers in such situations.

2.   **BACKGROUND**

2.1   There has only been limited discussion of the action that should be taken if a chip fails to read. In the discussions that have taken place up to now on e-passports, there has been a general acceptance that if the chip fails to open/read properly, then the passport should be treated as still valid. The purpose of this paper is to reach such an agreement that can be ratified by TAG/MRTD and to obtain approval for a guidance paper on how to handle travellers who hold documents that may fail to read.

2.2   The e-passport may be read at various points in a journey: on arrival at border control, on the border control exiting a country, in transit between countries. This list could be expanded to include at point of application for a visa. At any one of those points, the chip could fail to read (possibly having been read successfully at a previous inspection point) or mismatch with the data on the PKD. Apart from border control, this might at some point involve carrying companies who may want to read the chip to confirm the authenticity of the document.

2.3   It is therefore of significant importance for both the user of the e-passport and those who may want to read the data on the chip, that there is a clear policy and guidance on the action to be taken

when the chip fails to read. This will then help ensure that there is a consistent approach taken in such circumstances

2.4   **Reasons for chip failure to read or failure to match data**

2.4.1   It is important to recognise that countries who issue e-passports take care to ensure that when these documents are issued to the holder, the chip is in working order. Quality control processes vary between countries but are essentially designed to ensure that the passport is fit for purpose. This should substantially reduce the chances of the passport being issued with a malfunctioning chip.

2.4.2   There are a number of reasons for chip failure to read/failure to match the data:

      a)   Damaged antenna (intentionally/accidentally)
      b)   Damaged chip (intentionally/accidentally)
      c)   Reader problems - eg reader is temporarily off-line (not able to communicate with the local PKD[1] or the ICAO PKD), software glitch.
      d)   Others

2.4.3   The problem with most of the above is that the person holding the e-passport may be totally unaware that there is a problem until they reach an inspection point in their journey. Although some countries are making available e-passport readers to the public, these are generally not at airports etc. The point at which the problem is identified could result in different courses of action – for example at border control on arrival the passenger may be subjected to more intense questioning. If carriers began checking e-passports at check in, the company may be unwilling to carry the passenger.

2.4.4   Having developed an e-passport to make the document more secure and to enhance overall travel security through the use of biometrics, it would be perverse to penalise the genuine traveller as a result of something of which they may be totally unaware. It would also be perverse, as a result, to provide easier facilitation for passengers without e-passports. However it is acknowledged that if a chip problem is encountered, it may give rise to more probing questions of the traveller, more thorough inspection of the document etc., but on its own, such a failure should not result in the document holder being refused entry, or refused boarding. An analogy may be drawn with the introduction of the MRZ. It is well known that there are plenty of instances when the MRZ does not read. This may be due to poor MRZ alignment on the page, a problem with the reader etc. This does not result in the traveller being refused entry/refused boarding on that ground alone.

2.4.5   If it is accepted that in principle holders of e-passports should not be penalised where a chip fails to read etc, and should be allowed to enter/depart, or board, this needs to be formally ratified and communicated.

2.4.6   At present it is mainly border control authorities that are affected and indeed it is their lead that carriers will follow if they start to read e-passports at check in. If a State decides that being unable to read the chip data would be a reason on its own to refuse entry it needs to be alert to the possible consequences. There is a delicate balance to be achieved so that the (probable) small numbers of e-passport chip problems that are bound to occur do not have a disproportionate and adverse effect on

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[1] Local PKD = the PKD distributed internally by the country (or airline/other entity) for its own border control/check in applications and comprising data from the latest ICAO PKD as is, or the latest ICAO PKD re-validated by the country against the Country CA Root Certificate.

genuine travellers. It is important to avoid damage to the e-passport's reputation (and that of ICAO and those who issue e-passports) and reduction of its value as a powerful security feature.

3.   **ACTION BY THE TAG/MRTD**

3.1   The NTWG invites TAG/MRTD to:

a)   Recognize that there can be a number of reasons why a chip should fail to read and that this could pose a significant problem for both holders of e-passports and those who inspect them;

b)   agree that the holder of such a document should not be penalised where there is no evidence that the chip/antenna has been deliberately damaged. It should furthermore agree that in such cases where there is no evidence of deliberate damage, the document should be treated as valid for travel; and

c)   approve the production of guidelines for border inspection authorities and others explaining the reasons why the chip in a passport might be unable to be read and suggesting action that should be taken in the event of a traveller presenting such a passport. The guide will also address staff training issues.

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