Report on the Joint Task Force on the RIS Index

Background

Precondition for interoperable and open RIS are Standards for RIS technologies making extensive use of internationally standardised messages and codes. These codes can be summarised by the term "RIS Reference Data". Among the many RIS reference data the encoding of locations (e.g. objects along the waterways, in ports, etc.) by means of location codes establishes a link between the various RIS technologies, ensuring the highest level of unambiguousness for the encoding of locations.

Location codes are utilised by Tracking and Tracing technologies, Inland Electronic Navigational Charts, Notices to Skippers and Electronic Ship Reporting. Until now only the international Standards and Regulations regarding the technical specifications for Electronic Ship Reporting in inland navigation contain a definition of the locations codes, also referred to as ISRS location codes (ISRS, International Ship Reporting Standard). Although a definition of the ISRS location code exists, a uniform encoding scheme for the ISRS location code has not been introduced into international RIS Standards and Regulations yet.

In June 2010 during the meetings of the Notices to Skippers Expert Group and the Electronic Reporting International Expert Group, the Joint Task Force on RIS Index was established based on the input of the PLATINA project.

The Directive 2005/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on harmonised river information services (RIS) on inland waterways in the Community describes in its Annex I the "minimum data requirements" in order to supply to RIS users all relevant data concerning navigation and voyage planning on inland waterways. These data shall be provided at least in an accessible electronic format. As referred to in Article 4(3)(a) in particular the following data shall be supplied:

- waterway axis with kilometre indication,
- restrictions for vessels or convoys in terms of length, width, draught and air draught,
- operation times of restricting structures, in particular locks and bridges,
- location of ports and transhipment sites,
- reference data for water level gauges relevant to navigation.

The RIS index has been established and created to collect these data in one Excel file per country. However, currently there is a lack of EU-level regulation for the formalization and the utilization of the RIS Index as the electronic format as prescribed in the RIS Directive.

Therefore, in the framework of the PLATINA project, several documents have been elaborated to support the European Commission on issuing such a regulation and recommendations which actions should be taken to improve quality and uniformity of data in the RIS Index. To check, validate and amend these documents and come up with recommendations a Joint Task Force (JTF) was established at the Notices to Skippers and ERI Expert Group meetings in Budapest in June 2010.

Work Progress

Inland ECDIS, Vessel Tracking and Tracing, Electronic Reporting and Notices to Skippers require an unambiguous coding of the locations of objects. A location code is the machine- readable link between RIS key technologies and services. The location code is a unique identification for each RIS-relevant item of infrastructure. The (ISRS) location code used is a 20 digit alphanumerical code, which is defined in the Commission Regulation (EU) 164/2010 of 25 January 2010 on the technical specifications for electronic ship reporting in inland navigation referred to in Article 5 of Directive 2005/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on harmonised river information services (RIS) on inland waterways in the Community. The RIS Index is a list of (ISRS) location codes with additional information on the objects like their characteristics (name, fairway….), restrictions (available depth, clearance….), operating times etc.

The codification for the RIS Index has been prepared under the responsibility of the Notices to Skippers Expert Group, which resulted in a guide for the codification, the so-called "Encoding Guide for the RIS Index". In February 2010, the Expert Groups decided a Joint Task Force (JTF) should be established to discuss the content and maintenance of a revised RIS Encoding Guide. The JTF chairman is Robert Rafael of RSOE (also chairman of the Notices to Skippers Expert Group). Experts participating in the various expert groups take part in the discussions of the JTF. The final result of the work of JTF will be presented to the Notices to Skippers Expert Group. To kick-start the work of the JTF, PLATINA in co-operation with members of the expert groups, prepared a proposal for a revised RIS Index Encoding Guide in 2010.

On its first meeting, on 18.2.2011 in Prague, the JTF discussed a general restructuring of the RIS Index Encoding Guide and agreed on the objects of the RIS Index. A small working group was installed and requested to draft uniform instructions to describe and encode the selected objects and advise whether additional objects should possibly be added to the agreed list of objects.

A Quality Management Team started its work to elaborate the updated version of the RIS Index Encoding Guide included appropriate definitions for the above objects and their encoding.

Feedback of the relevant experts, which has been received during August-September 2011, is planned to be consolidated by the beginning of November 2011. Intermediate results and planned next steps will be presented at the meeting of the Notices to Skippers Expert Group mid November 2011.

A separate site has been set up for the Joint Task Force under http://eg.ris.eu/jtf-ris-index/dashboard available for the members of the JTF with username and password.