

28 OCTOBRE 1976

INITIAL PRESENTATION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD
(Thursday 28 October 1976)

Before the technical aspects of our Data Bank are discussed, I should like to recall its objectives and briefly discuss its development.

The aim was to protect the capital represented by the Documentation assembled at ITA by maintaining good possibilities of data retrieval despite the growing amount of information on file, and to increase its value by giving possibilities of new or improved utilisation of this data. We had reached the stage when conventional filing and utilisation techniques were at saturation point and the use of data processing was becoming an imperative.

In adopting the use of a data processing technique, we have tried to provide our Members with a better quality of service.

In 1974 we conducted a preliminary study aimed at defining what could be done and what it would cost. In the autumn of that year we consulted our Members in order to assess how we could help them most efficiently. We had to strike a compromise between the wishes expressed by our Members and our own possibilities, but we consider that, thanks to an exchange of views, the approaches taken have been satisfactory.

The preliminary study led up to positive conclusions and a number of choices.

The first choice we made was that we would deal with data and not documents. For the time being we have abandoned any idea of procedures for the automatic retrieval of documents or references, with methodological analysis of texts. Certain difficulties are still being encountered in implementing an "Automatic Documentation" system. It is figures and precise data which are incorporated in the Base.

We then chose a modern specialized management system - the very powerful Socrate system of CII - which offers great flexibility of use and a high storage capacity. This system gives:

- savings on resources, as every piece of information appears only once in the Base and we always know where we find it;
- a tremendous working capacity owing to the multiple links created by the Base structure between the categories of data;
- subsequent development possibilities.

We also selected a number of fields to be covered, i.e. 7 for the time being, and developed the appropriate methodology.

In March 1975 we submitted our programme and financing arrangements to the Annual General Meeting.

After their approval, the initial development phase - providing for the maximum possibilities of future adaptation and improvement - was launched.

Starting in April 1975, we worked closely with CII to set up the Base, define its structure and the processing procedures, load the data, test the results and develop updating methodologies and a number of programmes corresponding to the items in the Catalogue which we circulated in October 1975.

The Data Bank became operational on 1 March 1976 with the use of a CII computer, and since 1 September we have had a console at ITA permitting remote interrogation of the Bank and the almost instantaneous display of answers. We can now very rapidly meet demands for information, with the questions being formulated as stated in the Catalogue.

The operation of the Bank should gradually achieve a financial balance, which supposes that its specific revenues will be developed. But the cost of initial investment and the cost of subsequent developments require exceptional financing possibilities. We have obtained the support of the Ministry of Industry Data Processing Authority, of the Civil Aviation Department and considerable help from CII which, on several occasions, has given more assistance than actually provided for in the contract.

The total development cost, including the cost of the preliminary study, can be put at a million French Francs or US \$ 200 000, spread over the three

years of 1974, 1975 and 1976. This is a modest sum for a project of this kind, to the extent that it is the total cost of the operation and not only the computerization cost.

Our staff is limited to an engineer who is in charge of the project, an engineer who heads the data processing department and an assistant for this department. However, the project also involves other specialists who, within ITA, have had to modify their working methods and have cooperated in the definition of the new procedures.

The total expenses of the Data Bank in 1976 will be about 550 000 French Francs or around US \$ 110 000, over half of which represents investment expenses. In 1977, the proportion of operating expenses will be higher.

We offer some services free of charge which are covered by a moderate proportion - 5% - of subscriptions. We also hope to obtain revenues from special data processing subscriptions and fees for access to the Data Bank.

The paying services may be for:

- periodic notes, at very low cost, which are intended for delivery to a sufficient number of subscribers,
- answers to the pre-programmed questions in the Catalogue,
- on-request operations which require special programming and estimates.

The console at ITA makes it possible above all to answer the questions free of charge very rapidly.

Our current priorities are:

- the updating of stored information,
- the development of improved procedures for information acquisition.

We are also thinking of preparing certain developments and improvements but we must absolutely maintain for at least a period of two years some

stability in the structure and programmes already set up; the years 1977 and 1978 will therefore be a kind of technical pause from the operational viewpoint, although we shall not lose sight of the subsequent prospects.