



Updates from the 12th e-APP Forum

I. Introduction

- 1 On 4 October 2021, the PB hosted the 12th meeting of the International Forum on the electronic Apostille Programme (e-APP). The Forum was held via videoconference for the first time, divided into four sessions in time zones that were accessible to all HCCH Members. Over 300 participants registered, with each session attended by over 100 participants.
- 2 The Forum is primarily an opportunity to exchange information and experience in relation to the e-APP. Fourteen Contracting Parties,¹ at various stages of the e-APP implementation process, gave presentations on the status of e-APP in their country and participated in panel discussions canvassing a variety of subjects.
- 3 The PB would like to thank all the speakers who were involved for their contributions.
- 4 The following is a summary of the presentations, panels, and questions from participants.

II. Summary of Discussion

- 5 A number of speakers noted the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the Apostille Convention and, in turn, the e-APP. Specifically, the number of (e-)Apostilles that were requested and issued decreased. Front-facing services were impeded by restrictions, encouraging a transition to online services. Contracting Parties that had already implemented the e-APP, specifically the e-Apostille component, reported lesser disruptions.
- 6 Relatedly, there has been a transition towards “digital by default” as more domestic systems adopt e-Government solutions. However, moving from paper to electronic format requires a significant shift of mindset for both users and authorities. Within the e-APP, this shift will hopefully lead to increased automation, by which an e-Apostille is issued when an underlying electronic public document has a digital signature that can be automatically authenticated.
- 7 Almost all speakers noted the benefits of engaging with Contracting Parties that had already implemented the e-APP. This sharing of policy and technical experience occurs bilaterally and through the e-APP Forum, facilitating the development of e-APP components. As an increasing number of public services are offered online, Competent Authorities can take advantage of already digitised services at the domestic level and the expertise of other government agencies.
- 8 Noting that Contracting Parties have taken a variety of approaches to the matter, there were comments on the benefits of a harmonised approach when there are multiple Competent Authorities within a Contracting Party. Specifically, having a coordinated e-Register for all Apostilles, a single model certificate, and one interface for requesting apostillisation.
- 9 Implementation of the e-APP may require internal legislation or policy frameworks to be introduced or revised. Contracting Parties should consider domestic requirements, and limitations, first to ensure that they are able to develop the e-APP, and secondly to account for the necessary changes in planning. Naturally, this necessitates the requisite political and financial support from across government.

¹ Armenia, Bulgaria, Chile, Guatemala, India, Israel, Luxembourg, Peru, Philippines, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela.

- 10 If a full implementation of the e-APP may not be achieved at once, some speakers encouraged a gradual approach, as developing specific elements of a solution is still a positive and meaningful step. This is also evidenced by those Contracting Parties which have implemented the e-Register in advance of the e-Apostille.
- 11 The Permanent Bureau, Contracting Parties, and the Special Commission should continue to promote global awareness of e-Apostilles and work towards ensuring their acceptance.

III. Looking Forward

- 12 The Secretary General spoke about the momentum that has been building in the space, and encouraged all Contracting Parties to consider implementing the e-APP. He noted that, based on the most recent Apostille Questionnaire,² approximately 10% of all Apostilles issued are e-Apostilles, and this figure is continuing to increase.
- 13 A number of Contracting Parties reported plans to begin issuing e-Apostilles and / or operating an e-Register in the near future. As such, it is likely there will be a greater number of e-Apostilles circulating within the next few years, underlying the importance of all Contracting Parties having systems in place to accept e-Apostilles.
- 14 The PB remains open to discuss the location and timing of the 13th meeting of the International Forum, noting the request from Contracting Parties to continue holding the Forum on a regular basis.

² See Prel. Doc. No 1 of January 2021; Prel. Doc. No 2 of August 2021.