I. Introduction

Greek librarians share in a very conscious way the concern of their colleagues all over Europe and -I think- all over the world about the continuously increasing periodical prices. Greek libraries are ill-funded and the first ones to be sacrificed by their parent institutions in times of financial constraints. In the last years in Greece there have always been financial constraints. Consequently, library budgets are cut off instead of being increased and librarians are balancing on a razors edge, confronted with the dissatisfaction of both, their patrons, because of unfulfilled demands, and their periodical suppliers, because of outstanding invoices. This situation in the academic libraries is getting worse every year.

One of the biggest international agencies for the supply of periodicals, Faxon (1), predicts for 1997 an increase in the prices of periodicals of about 9.8% - 11% for Europe (with the exception of Great Britain), taking several parameters into consideration, such as inflation rate, publishers' price increases, postal charges etc., but relying on a very strong American dollar. We, in Greece, have to count with a higher inflation rate (officially 8%), weak currency with falling tendency and with higher shipping costs due to our remote geographical position. It seems that even the youngest librarian in Greece is aware of these problems, only the Ministry of Education and all other relevant authorities not. The consequences of course are shrinking collections and millions of debts.

The steps that were taken in Greece, after the extent of the problem was recognised, were very much the same as in the rest of Europe, although with several years of delay. The cancellations of subscriptions could not be avoided, the provision of better interlibrary loan and document delivery services became a necessity, as well as the development of networks. The new era of co-operation in Greek libraries started by using the conventional means mail and telephone, later fax equipment and very recently computer interconnections.

In our Library, since 1989, when we took a decisive step towards new and better services, the ILL department is one of the most active ones. Our main concern is to provide our users with the cheapest at the first place and -when needed- the fastest document. We usually work with other European libraries and we avoid expensive commercial suppliers. Although our users cover a part of the expenses, today, with the exorbitant amount the banks require as provision for the payment of a single invoice, this part comprises only the 1/10 of the library expenses. Till now we have been extremely hesitating in opening deposit accounts abroad, since this practice does not fit well in the logic of the Greek public financial authorities.
We have always been receptive for proposals offering us opportunities and means that would allow us to improve our services. We were never content with the fact that a large number of our users were satisfied to get the document they needed even in two weeks time. That is why we were promptly interested to participate in the FASTDOC project.

II. The Associated Partners

As provided in the Technical Annex each of the University Libraries had to find four Associated Partners in the own country to function as end-users for the beta-testing period of the project, with the infrastructure and equipment they already used to offer similar services to their patrons. The focusing of the project on chemical literature and the situation in Greece about three years ago offered not a great variety of choices: They had to be libraries who served the sciences and had reached a considerable stage of automation and services. The National Hellenic Documentation Centre, the libraries of the Chemistry Departments of the Universities of Thessaloniki and Ioannina and the Library of the University of Crete were the ones addressed.

The National Hellenic Documentation Centre has its seat in Athens, by the National Research Foundation, and is the main provider of documents for the Greek scientific community. Until 1993 it had to bear alone the burden of thousands of requests for bibliographic searches and document orders from all over Greece. In 1993 the NHDC founded five Focal Documentation Points in five peripheral Universities aiming to decentralise the provision of bibliographic information and facilitate the access to it for scientists and researchers of the province. The NHDC houses the Greek host HERMES, where among others, the database for the periodicals' holdings in Greek scientific libraries is mounted.

The University of Crete Library is the pioneer for library automation in Greece and cherishes a very good reputation among the members of the academic community. It is a very early example in Greece of a Library working in close co-operation with the Computer Centre of the University, where a team of specialists support the library automation system PTOLEMAIOS and develop software for library applications. They have a good working experience with European projects, since they were the first Greek Library to participate in one, the project HELEN, which dealt with the on-line conversion of the Greek into Latin characters.

The Library of the Chemistry Department of the University of Ioannina is a well organised departmental Library with active participation at the exchange of documents between Greek Libraries. For the purposes of FASTDOC they are supported by their local Focal Documentation Point, which acts as the University Unit for bibliographic searches and has considerable experience with on-line retrieval.

The Library of the Chemistry Department of the University of Thessaloniki was very willing to participate at FASTDOC, because they regarded it as an experiment which could lead to useful conclusions and offer potential alternatives for servicing the users in a timely and more cost-effective way. One must not forget that chemistry collections belong to the most expensive ones in a University Library.

III. The first stage: infrastructure and user demand

Our first task at the very beginning of the project was to carry out an investigation about the technical infrastructure on the local and on the national level. This was an easy job to accomplish, since it could be carried out even with mere telephone contacts.
All test sites, was found out, fulfilled the minimum requirements set out in the Technical Annex. They were all equipped either with PCs, stand alone or in a LAN, or UNIX terminals, they had X.28 or X.25 connections to the Greek Telecommunications Organisation as well as access to Internet, modems, CD-ROM drives and fax-machines of the third generation. Most important was the fact that they were all familiar with online bibliographic searches and ordering.

A user demand survey was planned as well for the first stage of the project in order to get better knowledge of the practice and expectations of people involved in electronic document ordering in the three countries, Germany, Spain and Greece. The survey was to be based on a questionnaire that had to be filled either during an interview with the sample or be sent per mail.

We, in Greece, confronted the first problems, when we tried to identify our sample, that was supposed to provide us with useful suggestions for the future exploitation of the FASTDOC system. Our target was two different kinds of end-users, librarians, as intermediaries and providers of documents on one side, and academic or individual researchers/scientists from the chemical and pharmaceutical branch. Librarians and scientists we had enough in our institution and by the Associated Partners, but we soon found out that people from the industry were unwilling to fill up questionnaires and turned us down with excuses, such as "we are not allowed to give data for our company to third persons", or "we're only a branch of the so and so company and we get all information needed from abroad". This situation is quite characteristic. There is no large-scale chemical research and production in Greece and most of the biggest companies act only as packer of imported products. One must take on the other hand into account that our contacts with the companies were made in August, when most Greek people are on holidays.

Anyhow, the questionnaires collected in Greece, even if only deriving from librarians or academics, are quite indicative. Researchers as well as librarians were familiar with the idea that value added services, such as those FASTDOC intends to offer, must be duly paid, although quite a number of them would be content with delivery times that extend 24 hours, but do not extend one week. An important factor for FASTDOC is their prediction, that in the next years, there will be an increase in the demand for chemical literature, because of various reasons, that extend from the increase in the number of the postgraduate students (from the academic side) to the anticipated cancellation of chemical titles (from the librarians side).

IV. The alpha-tests phase

Bad luck struck just at the moment when we were about to start the test implementation of the PC-ordering, in month ten of the project. We were supposed by that time to have brought together all connections needed and all equipment necessary (CD-ROM drive, fax-machine) to start testing using bibliographic references out of the Beilstein Current Facts disc. During an uninvited night visit all equipment we had, such as CD-ROM drive, laser printer, software and manuals were stolen. Since the PCs couldn't go, they were in a professional way deprived of their "internal" life: hard disks, memory chips and cards were taken as well away. We were shocked, because this was a delay, that would cause to the project. Actually, it took us about three months, till we were able again to replace through very tiresome procedures the minimum configuration for the system and ready to start.

The installation of the first version of WinOrder was successful. The Beilstein help-desk was only once called to help us with a minor adaptation of the Windows software we used, to enable us to install Current Facts for Windows. It was a long call, but we fixed
the problem without any other technical assistance. A dedicated librarian undertook the testing and the registration on special forms of the outcome of each order, as it was foreseen. She was in almost the same day familiar with the CD-ROM searching and ordering as well as some days later with the searching and on-line ordering through the STN. The testing period started in the third week of March and lasted till the third week of June 1995.

One hundred eighty two test-orders were made in this period. Of them, one hundred sixty nine were performed through PC-ordering and thirteen through STN. The test result was scaled as "successful" in 78 cases and as "not successful" in 106. The "not successful" ones had to do with the modem connection, with the restrictions of copyright or with the uncompleted delivery of articles. In the cases of the successful deliveries as in the cases when the document was unable to be shipped due to the copyright restrictions, the cover sheet that the system prepares, appeared in our fax machine in about 6 minutes. The smooth execution of the tests after the first weeks was very much hindered by the performance of the fax equipment. There were continuous paper jams, but even the company service could do nothing about it. On the other side we have to admit that the quality of the faxed documents was superb, sometimes better than the original print, as our comparison tests proved. The problem was partly solved quite recently, when we got the tip from Beilstein to use a lighter paper. Now we are using a paper of 65 grams weight with fairly good results.

In the same period we invited a small number of postgraduate students of the chemistry department, instructed them to use the Current Facts disc and made demonstrations for them. Their opinion was that the system was very good, although we had to work with a very small number of journals and our own collection of chemical titles covered their actual needs.

We were quite optimistic that the beta-testing phase, when the FASTDOC system would be installed at the Associated Partners, would meet with the same success.

V. The beta-tests phase

A new version of the WinOrder software was sent to us late in September and had to be installed at all test sites. However, already in August, after the summer holidays, we faced very often connection problems, such as we had never had in the previous months. This, at the beginning, was attributed to the new modem we used, but which worked in a very adequate way with our e-mail application on the same PC and on the same telephone connection. While we waited for the technician to appear and install the old modem again, a virus affected all our systems on the network and the FASTDOC PC as well. It took us weeks to localise the kind of it, because it was "immune" to all normal anti-virus programmes and we had to endure enormous delays, because we were depended on external help.

Even when the virus with the happy name "Patras Carnival 1995" was repelled, and the new order software was successfully installed on our PC, we could not establish a connection to Beilstein. Each time we managed to come through -and this happened not often- the connection broke down. A period of crisis followed. We tried every troubleshooting that appeared reasonable. We changed parameters, we changed modems, we changed PCs, we changed telephone lines, we changed Windows versions. The result was always negative.

We urged the Associated Partners to proceed to the installation on their sites. They succeeded in installing WinOrder, but they too couldn't connect to Beilstein. The situation was becoming irrational, especially after we were informed that all test sites in Spain were working properly.
When every hope of solving the problem by ourselves had expired, it was decided that Beilstein would send a specialist to help. This happened in the first week of the new year and three sites were visited, Patras, Ioannina and Thessaloniki. We were relieved to realise that it was not a one-minute-problem. A new piece of code had to be added to the order script, and the communication was again successful. The same solution was applied in Ioannina and in Thessaloniki. In Ioannina WinOrder was further adapted to the local needs. It was made to work on X.25 (Hellaspac) lines that were connected to the central computer of the University. The corrected order script was sent by fax to Crete and the NHDC in Athens who proceeded to the communication tests by their own.

The installation in Crete was made on a PC in the Computer Centre and a connection was established quite easily, but problems arose again when they tried to install WinOrder in the Library. Because time was getting short they decided to do the testing in two separate sites. The tests for the PC ordering were made in the Computer Centre, while STN ordering was done from within the Library via Internet connection.

The NHDC failed again to establish a connection. It was only in late January 1996, after a new version of WinOrder was installed by an experienced Beilstein person, that the testing in Athens could commence with success.

During the beta-tests phase, which lasted till the 15th of February, we were supposed to register only the "error" messages. Our Associated Partners made 84 test orders, of them 73 were successful and only 11 were registered as errors. The error messages had to do with the copyright or with delayed transmission. Patras, in the same time put 67 orders through, of which 30 were successful and 37 were qualified as errors. It is evident now, how the performance of the fax machine affected the testing, because the majority of our "error" registrations occurred during the suppliers comparative test, which suffered as a whole due to the repeated paper jams. The optimisation of the WinOrder software, which produces a pop-up window with a relevant message when a document cannot be shipped, or if the bibliographic data of the requested article are wrong, spares time and expensive connection costs. We were glad to see in the last weeks a better performance of the whole system in terms of time. The cover page of a requested article was in our Library in about two minutes time, after the order was sent.

VI. Conclusions

The FASTDOC system is designed to be installed and operated by librarians or researchers without technical assistance and this was as far proved in Spain. It is user friendly and works with considerable stability, after the communication problems are repelled. This is an issue that ought to be given more attention. Perhaps Beilstein should further investigate and try to identify and group the problems we had in Greece. Alternative solutions for the modem configuration should be offered in the User Documentation Manual and even be included in the installation software, so that the user could make the adaptation himself. Several types of modems should be tried out and some relevant information should be added as well to the User Documentation.

Another major problem for all of us librarians is the restricted list of journals. We understand the enormous efforts that have to be made, in order to persuade the publishers to give their permission for the delivery and sign the contracts, and we are aware of the legal implications, but as we are on the verging point now, we guess and hope, that with so many European projects addressing the problem of copyright, procedures will speed up.
So, we have good reasons to believe, that a system like FASTDOC, that combines CD-ROM or on-line bibliographic searching with electronic ordering, that is stable, easy to handle and reasonable priced, could appeal to end-users and give a solution to one of the most discussed topics in the libraries world in the last years: ownership of a title versus access to its contents, the just-in-time delivery of a real needed article versus the just-in-case use of an expensive title (2).
