

eGovernment conference “Simple, secure & transparent public services”

Speech “Real and profound transformation, not only digitisation of the status quo”

Luxembourg / Esch-sur Alzette – December 1st 2015

Dear Vice-President Ansip,

Dear eGovernment professionals,

I am pleased to have the unexpected opportunity to address you this morning on behalf of Dan Kersch, our Minister for the Civil Service and Administrative Reform, - who is unfortunately not able to be with us today due to other commitments.

Minister Kersch is in charge of eGovernment and it is therefore my honour to wish you a very warm welcome to Luxembourg and to the brand new “Maison du Savoir”, the main building of the campus of the University of Luxembourg, which is kindly hosting this conference organised by the Luxembourg Government IT Centre in the context of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

More than 150 eGovernment professionals from all over Europe will be gathering here today and tomorrow in order to learn from each other, to exchange best practices and ideas, to debate and to network.

The four topics we choose to cover during the conference

- eIDAS, citizen engagement, the Once Only Principle and Open Data –

all contribute, -if correctly interpreted and implemented-, to the fundamental and overarching objectives we should all seek to achieve in our eGovernment practices: transparency and openness, participation and inclusion, simplicity and user centricity, security and data protection, efficiency and effectiveness.

The topics we choose to structure this conference are clearly aligned with the eGovernment principles recently adopted in July this year by the Luxembourg Government.

The keystones of this national strategy are:

- a clear commitment to a Once Only Principle that, by design, takes into account data protection and security,
- as well as a commitment to transparency that empowers citizens and gives users the possibility to track access to their data and monitor the state of advancement of their administrative procedures and files.

Beyond our national agenda, the themes of the conference are also well aligned with discussions going on at EU level and the priorities set by the European Commission together with the Member States. eIDAS has become an even more pressing matter since the adoption of the corresponding EU regulation and Citizen engagement in the design of public services and policy making, as well as cross-border solutions based on the Once Only Principle and a generalised open data approach, are also key objectives of the European Union that are shared by the vast majority of the Member States.

This similarity and overlapping between the strategic objectives that we will be discussing during the conference, and those defined at EU or national levels, should not come as a great surprise:

Anyone familiar to the subject knows indeed that the general goals of eGovernment policy have not changed fundamentally during the last 10 years, and that there has rarely been any fundamental disagreement between the Member States or between the Member States and the European institutions on these goals.

Those who have any doubt about this only have to take a look back at the Manchester Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment of November 2005, or the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment of September 2007. They will notice that, even if the wording may have changed over time, and the focus sometimes shifted from one topic to another, all-in-all, the objectives and the main areas for action remain the same.

Even the practical measures and solutions proposed to achieve these goals, have barely changed over time:

Interoperable cross-border secure eID for instance was one of these solutions. Through the STORK Large Scale Pilot, and now the eIDAS regulation, we are now, 10 years later, close to implementing this solution.

The Once Only Principle is another example. The idea was already mentioned in the Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment of November 2009, and in the EU eGovernment action plan 2011-2015.

And no later than tomorrow during lunch time, our Estonian colleagues, together with other colleagues, will be holding a meeting aimed at bringing together a first group of Member States willing to cooperate on identifying an initial set of use cases and data types that could be used in a Once Only Principle Large Scale Pilot to be launched in 2016 in the context of the 2020 agenda of the European Commission.

All of these examples tell us that even though it may take time to get even good ideas implemented, we can still take comfort in the fact that if an idea really makes sense and stands for progress, it will last and prevail.

It seems slightly puzzling and intriguing that we have decades of broad continuity and stability in the political and strategic objectives for eGovernment in a domain that is otherwise in constant move.

Where technological evolution is fast and furious, where every month, or even every week, yet another person claims to have reinvented the wheel, and where each month produces yet another new buzzword, most of which do not even live long enough to be truly understood, the contrasting stability of the more strategic objectives may be due to the fact that eGovernment is no longer to be considered as an expression of great innovation but has simply become an integral part of good and regular public governance.

Good eGovernment has to be aligned with the objectives of good governance in general, and good governance has to be committed to the fundamental principles of democracy, such as the rule of law and human rights.

Therefore we should hope that the continuity regarding to the general political and strategic goals pursued at eGovernment level will last and be assured also over the next years. Because a disruption at *this* level could be a dangerous sign, a slippery slope, and the beginning of a journey to a darker side of eGovernment and IT.

The fact that eGovernment is part of public governance in general and that the challenges in this field are not just technical but much more fundamental, stays

unfortunately still too often unknown or, if known, too often not followed by the necessary actions and consequences.

Therefore it still occurs that IT projects are reduced to not more than a simple digitalisation of the status quo, a kind of technological coat to hide and make up old obsolete procedures, processes, laws or ways of thinking.

The people tasked with implementing eGovernment solutions - developers, project managers, solution designers, etc. – are still too often left alone and don't always find the necessary support from their clients or from top management in administrations or public agencies in order to implement thoroughly transformative solutions.

Good sustainable solutions should not only take into account technical requirements, but should above all address the whole range of organisational and legal challenges needed in order to enable the creation of really innovative, streamlined and user centric solutions.

In order to break down silos and achieve true administrative burden reduction, many efforts still have to be made especially when it comes to recruiting the right people for the right positions. Highly skilled developers or technicians are necessary but not enough. We need these highly competent people to develop something at least as important beyond their technical skills and that is a deep understanding of the organisational and legal context and challenges at play in eGovernment.

The major challenge for these people is to be able to bridge and mediate between those who have mainly or only technical skills, and those from the “non-IT” world, who have no clear understanding of the huge opportunities and possibilities for real and radical change that IT can offer.

Within the programme of this conference, we have several examples of highly complex topics which require this unique combination of skills.

Once Only is a good example. A recent study we commissioned in the context of the Luxembourg Presidency on *“Security and data protection measures in the context of ‘Once-only’ and reuse of existing data approaches”* comes to the conclusion that organisational, semantic and legal barriers are more numerous and complex to overcome than purely technical ones.

The same is probably true for eIDAS and Open Data. And even actions like the European Citizen Initiative (ECI) do require, first and foremost, a good and really effective legal, organisational, communicational and societal context in order to have a chance to be really successful. A mainly technical approach would inevitably drive such projects into a death end.

eGovernment initiatives, actions, programmes and projects therefore have to get out of the ghetto and become fully mainstream. They have to be recognised as a central, and probably the most important means to achieve real, sustainable change in the ways Governments work, act and communicate, as well as in the way public services are delivered.

Referring to yet another buzzword, eGovernment simply has to become *holistic* with regard to the domains or levels covered, as well as with regard to the people involved.

If we manage to position eGovernment not just as a way to create digital copies of the old, but primarily to radically change the way public governance is run in our countries, we can really reap the fruits of our efforts and investments:

We will contribute to truly modern democracies that place the citizens, their needs and their fundamental rights at the centre;

And while doing so we can achieve substantial administrative burden reduction and meaningfully contribute to creating a brighter future for our children and for eGovernment.

It will be hard work, it will take time, battles may be lost, and errors will be made, but I'm convinced that all of you are eager to contribute and become the architects of such a brighter future, built on the fundamental principles of open, democratic, inclusive and efficient Government.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I wish you all a fruitful, inspiring and interesting conference and I hope you will truly enjoy your stay in Luxembourg.

Thank you for your attention.