Speech by Roberto VIOLA, Director-General at DG CONNECT, in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg on December 1st 2015

[Check Against Delivery]

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be invited to such an important event of the Luxembourg Presidency. I find it very encouraging to see so many of you working towards modernising our public administrations. As you well know, this is no easy task.

On the one hand government is considered a hindrance to economic recovery.

On the other hand, public perception of governments and public institutions is low, and likely to worsen.

Public services are under serious pressure: How to meet new societal challenges, such as demographic change, unemployment, mobility, security, the environment, when confronted with strict budget constraints?

Citizens and businesses expect better public services, more user friendly, less administrative burden, greater transparency and participation.

For these reasons it is essential that we get it right.

Despite our best efforts, modernisation attempts have been too slow. We need an overarching transformation of government.

The good news is that technology, in particular digital technologies, allow for doing things very differently.

And this needs to go far beyond the initial steps of digitising existing administrative processes. A complete transformation of the public sector and rethinking of processes is needed.

Indeed, government must open their doors (and their minds) to actively engage with third parties (citizens and businesses) in the design, production and implementation of online services and public policies.

Vice President Ansip has just made a compelling case for the strategic importance of the Digital Single Market. I would like to complement his intervention by highlighting the key role eGovernment plays in achieving a successful Digital Single Market.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine a Single Market where public services are not available across borders.

However, about the same time the EU physical borders disappeared, we unwittingly started to build new, Digital borders in the provision of public services to citizens and businesses.

Since 2007, the Commission and Member States have been investing financial and political capital to correct this situation by taking part in a series of Large Scale Pilots in key areas for the single market and eGovernment such as eID, eProcurement, eJustice, eHealth and business mobility.

These pilots have been a big success and we, Commission and Member States, can rightfully feel proud of them.

Thanks to their results, we have now legislation in place relating to electronic identities and signatures (eIDAS), new legislation on eProcurement, and of course the Connecting Europe Facility for Digital Service Infrastructures, which will help scale up and roll out across the EU the solutions tested in the pilots.

It is now time to capitalise on these efforts. To use them as a launching pad for a new generation of eGovernment services that contribute to growth and jobs, the Digital Single Market, and rebuilding trust in government. Services that are open, transparent and collaborative

This is the time to launch a new eGovernment Action Plan.

The DSM Strategy already identifies a number of actions to be included in the Action Plan:

- making the interconnection of business registers a reality by 2017,
- launching in 2016 an initiative with the Member States to pilot the 'Once-Only' principle;
- extending and integrating European and national portals to work towards a 'Single Digital Gateway' to create a user friendly information system for citizens and business and
- accelerating Member States' transition towards full eProcurement and interoperable eSignatures.

These actions are just the beginning. Right now we are in the process of identifying additional actions that comply with a set of principles and serve our key policy priorities.

We have shared these principles and policy priorities with Member States. I'm pleased to say that they have expressed their support for our plans.

Let me now give you an overview of our initial thoughts and some of the key steps in the process.

I start with the underlying principles to which future actions will need to conform:

- digital-by-default: actions should privilege online delivery of services while still enabling other channels for those who are disconnected by choice or necessity, to ensure inclusiveness
- cross-border by default: actions should not create new barriers to the internal market
- once-only principle: actions should require citizen / business data information only if not yet in possession of another administration.
- inclusive by default : actions should enable all citizens and businesses to interact with the administration
- privacy & data protection: all digital public services must be designed with full respect for the protection of personal data as a fundamental right.
- Openness & transparency by default: actions should be open for reuse or transparency.

The new eGovernment Action Plan will address the problems faced by citizens, businesses and public administrations through the strategic objectives set out in the Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe. These are:

To modernise public administrations: Digital public services should reduce the administrative burden on citizens and businesses and improve efficiency and effectiveness of public administrations. In addition, the public sector can contribute to innovation and growth, for example by continuing efforts to open up data and services for re-use and by innovating itself or helping innovation reach the market.

Achieve cross-border interoperability: The past years of benchmarking eGovernment show cross-border services lagging significantly behind national services and that the availability and quality of services on offer to non-residents is inadequate.

For example, studying in another country in many cases still includes paper application processes and face-to-face encounters before being able to start the enrolment process.

Facilitate easy interaction with citizens: This priority objective aims to foster engaging users in the design, production and delivery of public services.

The aim is to offer personalised, location-based services but also to improve the relationship between citizens, businesses and their governments.

Open policy-making offers a basis for greater involvement of citizens. Next to better policy delivery, this can lead to productivity improvements in the public sector, increased transparency and reducing corruption.

The above three policy priority objectives will be supported by promoting the use of key digital enablers and - to the extent possible – by the sharing, re-use and interconnection of the existing digital infrastructures.

The digital enablers and facilitators include, but are not limited to, the following:

- European Cloud and digital infrastructures
- Open data and big data
- Building blocks, such as eID, eSignature, eInvoicing.
- Interoperability through architecture, standards and technical specifications
- General requirements: ICT security, cyber security, data protection.

Allow me to expand a bit on one fundamental enabler: the European Cloud and digital infrastructures.

In the context of the Digital Single Market strategy the European Commission is proposing a European Cloud Initiative starting from the European Open Science Cloud as a major enabler of the data economy and as a way to widening access to digital services by the society as a whole.

Commission President Juncker introduced this initiative at the occasion of the Franco-German digital conference in Paris on 27 October this year[1].

The availability of and access to high-performance infrastructures, including high-performance computing, networks and data infrastructures is the essential basis for the European objectives of the digital transformation of industry and modernisation of public sector.

In my view the Public Administrations, at all levels, should benefit from the digital infrastructure and should be enabled to actively participate in the definition of the advanced and rich services that citizens need. They must benefit from the open data available and the massive data processing capabilities it can offer. There are clear public responsibilities in sectors such as health, transport and mobility and sustainable and smart developments in all regions of Europe.

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[1] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5938_de.htm

Investments in the next generation digital infrastructure are required to strengthen the capacity to innovate while rationalising costs. The digital transformation of European Economy and Society will provide tools for better policy making and service design.

We cannot miss the opportunities digital infrastructures offer to improve the functioning of the public sector and to better serve the needs of citizens and businesses.

The Commission is targeting a Communication to the European Parliament and Council to be adopted early 2016 where the Cloud Initiative will be presented. All stakeholders, from individual citizens to public administrations, from service providers to industry and SMEs are essential to make it a success.

We want this Action Plan to be an exercise also in stakeholder engagement. We will be actively seeking stakeholders views both in the preparation phase, but also throughout the lifetime of the Action Plan.

Indeed, we aim to make it an example of Open, transparent and collaborative government.

The first important milestone in this process is the online public consultation launched in October. It is open until the 22 January 2016. I most heartily encourage you to reply to this consultation.

Next we plan to hold a multi stakeholder event in the early Spring to discuss the results of the consultation

After the adoption by the Commission of the Action Plan, we plan an official launch at the Dutch Presidency eGovernment conference in June 2016.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope I have been able to convey the importance of eGovernment for the European economy, to the Digital Single Market but also in terms of its societal impact.

eGovernment can be and must be a game changer in the sense that it will completely change the way governments work, and how they interact with citizens and businesses.

We all recognise however, that digital technologies are not the only ingredient to transform public services.

This transformation should be a shared objective of the whole of government, not just of one particular Ministry or Agency.

It needs a change in the working culture of our administrations. To move away from the silo mentality that creates so many inefficiencies, duplication and damages the perceptions citizens have of government.

It needs to be supported by capacity building of civil servants and appropriate awareness raising mechanisms for experience sharing and scaling up good practices.

I'm sure you all share this view, and are working hard to complete this transformation.

We hope the new eGovernment Action Plan will be a catalyst to make this happen, and we also wish to count on your active support and commitment in delivering it.

For the benefit of your organisations and for the benefit of the Digital Single Market.

Thank you for your attention