Keynote speech by Paul Timmers, Director at DG CONNECT, Directorate H 'Digital Society, Trust and Security' in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg on December 2nd 2015 on

"Cross-border digital public services in Europe – Quo Vadis?"

[Check against delivery]

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege to address such a distinguished audience.

It is not often that one has the opportunity to address so many eGovernment decision makers at a conference that covers so many of the issues presently high on the EU agenda.

I would like to thank the Luxemburg Presidency for giving me this opportunity.

Such conferences are of the utmost importance as the issues to be addressed are European and as such require a common understanding, a common approach and a strong common commitment.

Without a strong commitment from each and every Member States we will not be able to continuously modernise the public sector and to create and deliver public services across borders to the benefit of citizens and businesses.

The fact that you are here to discuss the Digital Single Market Strategy, the new eGovernment Action Plan, the revision of the European Interoperability Framework, eIDAS, the Once Only Principle etc. vouch well for your engagement.

As you will know, digitalisation remains a strategic priority in the modernisation of the public administration in Europe – as the Digital Single Market Strategy sets out.

Digitalisation of public administrations and of public services is obviously a precondition for the seamless cross-border delivery of public services – and public services are of course cross border by default.

It is this process and the cooperation between Member States that gradually will enable EU citizens to access health services wherever they are in Europe, based on a common language for exchanging patient data, all in just a few short clicks. Soon patient summaries will flow across borders when needed. Soon citizens will be able to get the medication also abroad through ePrescriptions.

It is likewise this process that will introduce cross-border digital public Procurement allowing businesses, inter alia, to make bids electronically for public sector contracts across borders.

Such actions we support through the Connecting Europe Facility, in short CEF.

The CEF supports the establishment of transport infrastructure, energy infrastructure and telecommunications infrastructure which consists of – on the one hand – broadband and – on the other hand – Digital Service Infrastructures (DSIs).

It is the DSI part that we call CEF Digital.

Other DSIs supported by CEF Digital are for instance

Public Open Data, i.e. services providing facilitated and harmonised access to data sets created and managed by public bodies across Europe.

Business Registers Interconnection System (BRIS), i.e. services to interconnect business registers in all Member States to enable the exchange of information.

Safer Internet for Children, i.e. services ensuring that children, parents and teachers have access to the right tools and information for a safe use of the internet and new technologies.

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) and a number of other DSIs.

All of these DSIs, i.e. Digital Service Infrastructures, are domain-specific and will consequently provide cross-border services in a specific policy domain or sector.

Opposite to these DSIs stand the so-called building block DSIs. These DSIs are basic digital service infrastructures intended to be re-used in domain specific digital services.

By re-using the building block DSIs, the service provider will reduce costs and shorten time-to-market while at the same time make possible future interactions between various domain-specific DSIs easier.

The CEF building block DSIs presently promoted widely are interoperable eID, eSignature, eDelivery, eInvoicing and Automated Translation.

eID and eSignature are services enabling cross-border recognition and validation of electronic identification and electronic signature while eDelivery are services for the secured, traceable cross-border transmission of electronic documents and/or data.

As you might have noticed, these are all eIDAS solutions, i.e. covered by the Regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market from 2014.

However, the CEF solutions go beyond the eIDAS requirement containing many more features and functionalities – but they are of course eIDAS compliant.

Many of you will no doubt recognise these building blocks. Some of you may even have been involved in their development.

Some of them are namely solutions developed by the five CIP Large Scale Pilots PEPPOL, STORK, SPOCS, epSOS and eCODEX and then consolidated in the Large Scale Pilot e-SENS.

All Member States have taken part in at least one of the first five Large Scale Pilots. Indeed, some Member States have taken part in all of them.

And as you heard this morning, you now get the chance once again to participate in a Large Scale Pilot, this time under Horizon 2020. I am of course referring to the new large-scale pilot in the area of "once-only". We are of course looking forward to receiving a proposal.

The consortium of the sixth Large Scale Pilot launched under the previous CIP programme, i. e. the e-SENS consortium, consists of more than 100 organisations or entities from 20 countries and has done a marvellous job. More countries and more organisations still want to join.

CEF is building on e-SENS' work and taking e-SENS results further, with the support of e-SENS that is still piloting the building block DSIs in new domains.

The cooperation is quite unique – and that is what makes the resulting building blocks so strong. They are made BY Member States FOR Member States – and now made available to Member States by the Commission under CEF Digital.

But it is not enough that they are available. They also need to be used.

So we must work on rolling out these building blocks to ensure the take up all over Europe.

The CEF will do its part. It will promote the building blocks towards both the public and private sector and provide the support needed for installation. It will also provide grants for the integration and use of the building blocks and try to convince software vendors and service providers to cater for the CEF solutions.

However, Member States need to do their share. They must promote the use of the CEF building blocks nationally – towards all possibly users, including colleagues in other ministries, agencies, public bodies at national, regional and local level.

Only together can we turn our common achievements into a real success and support interactions across borders between citizens, businesses and public administrations.

So what are these building blocks then actually? What are our common achievements? What is it that makes them so special?

Well, in essence they are nothing but standards and technical specifications. However, they are commonly agreed – by a large number of Member States working closely together in Large Scale Pilots, in Expert Groups established under eIDAS, in the European Multi Stakeholder Platform on ICT Standardisation and in many other expert groups and committees established in the various policy domains covering the sector specific DSIs like eHealth and eProcurement.

But they are more than 'just' standards and technical specifications. They are architecturally aligned building blocks making up an eco-system of building blocks – an eco-system that hopefully will grow over time and comprise additional building block for the common use across borders.

And they are not static but rather dynamic constantly being adapted to meet new requirements from existing or new users interacting in a quite comprehensive governance structure that, whenever appropriate, involve Members States through already existing Expert Groups.

However, we do not stop at that. We also provide reference implementations of the building blocks. These are freely downloadable open source software against which software vendors and service providers can measure their own solutions.

They can, as anyone else, of course also just download the software and integrate it in their offers. To support them and for instance any Member State that might want to use the building blocks, the CEF provides a helpdesk and can even dispatch experts to help installing or integrating the software in their solutions.

Obviously this support is also available for software vendors or service providers as well as Member States that want to cater for the underlying standards and technical specifications in their own solutions.

In both cases the goal obviously is to prevent Member States from opting for mutually incompatible solutions that will build new barriers to delivery of cross border public services.

As such the standards and technical specifications of the CEF building block eco-system make up a small catalogue of standards that should guide public procurers and accelerate standards adoption on national market and at the same time at the European market.

Member States have already created such national catalogues of ICT standards and technical specifications for the national market.

To avoid market fragmentation at EU level the Digital Single Market Strategy foresees a federation of such national catalogues in a European catalogue of standards and specifications.

The CEF building block eco-system obviously is a subset of such a European catalogue guiding public procurers all over Europe.

This catalogue approach is actually quite self-evident.

The Single Market has been built by aligning rules and regulations across border and sectors to ensure the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital across borders. These rules and regulations are mainly legal acts agreed at EU level and applied across all Member States.

The Digital Single Market is basically built in exactly the same way, that is through alignment of rules and regulations such as the eIDAS regulation or the eInvoicing directive, but also through the alignment of rules and regulations in the form of standards and technical specifications that will allow the free movement of digital public services across borders.

The impact of a European catalogue of standards consistently applied in all Member States would be immense and bring Europe closer together digitally that any previous measure.

Again a common understanding, a common approach and a strong common commitment is needed. And again Member States need to do their share.

In relation to the delivery of public services across borders Member States' commitment is so much more important as due to the very nature of many or most public services, subsidiarity kicks in.

So 'Quo Vadis'?

I feel certain that we in a concerted effort are going towards cross border delivery of and cross border access to public services –

Services that are based on commonly agreed rules and regulations,

Services, the implementation of which is secured by promotion and use at national and EU level both by Member States and by the Commission.

Some of these cross-border public services have already been defined, such as eHealth, Online Dispute Resolution and eProcurement.

Others still remain to be defined – through EU legislation and/or through inclusion in yet another initiative under the Digital Single Market Strategy, namely the new eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020.

This new Action Plan was announced in May 2015 as one of 16 initiatives to create a Digital Single Market in the EU. As you will already have heard during this conference, the new Action Plan will be adopted in 2016 and should encourage the further development of cross

border public services, based for instance on the Once-Only principle that was addressed in the Thematic Track of this morning.

In order to identify further actions under the new eGovernment Action Plan, the Commission launched in October this year a public consultation which closes on 22 January next year.

It is of course essential that – apart from citizens, businesses and private organisations – also national, regional and local public administrations reply to this consultation and/or provide input directly through the relevant expert groups or workshops.

Actually it is a must – as we need to better understand where the real needs are, where the most promising potentials to encourage the use and take-up of the existing building blocks are and where new DSIs could make the greatest impact on businesses and citizens.

So, ladies and gentlemen, let us continue the journey towards the Digital Single Market with a wealth of cross border services benefitting citizens and business in their interactions with public administrations.

Let's do so together through a strong commitment to promote and use our CEF building blocks, i.e. our common standards and technical specifications, and through implementing these in agreed actions under the new eGovernment Action Plan.

Thank you very much for your attention.