Speech of Vice-President Andrus ANSIP at the eGovernment conference "Simple, secure and transparent public services" in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg on December 1st 2015

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Ladies and gentlemen

The digital revolution around us reshapes how people go about their daily lives and business. The public sector cannot pretend it is not concerned by this.

If public administrations are to remain relevant, responsive and accountable to their citizens in the 21st century, they need to change – to transform – by making more and better use of ICT.

Digital has to become the 'new normal' for government.

My vision for public administration in Europe is this:
- open, transparent and collaborative governments that make life easier for people and businesses. Designed around digital delivery of public goods. No more borders.

To achieve this, the public sector must modernise internally as well as in its relations with the public.

Many people think this is a niche area, something just for specialists; remote from the policy priorities of the day. It is not.

Government can be as much a barrier as an enabler. Government can be exclusive or inclusive. Government can be expensive or efficient.

Digital is the means to make government inclusive and efficient, an enabler for private enterprise.

Transforming government is not a one-off exercise; it is never "complete". It must be a permanent process built into an administration's source code.

Our work is guided by three main principles. I want the public sector to be: Digital by default, open by default and cross-border by default.

Here is how I understand them:

Firstly, 'digital by default' means that all interaction with public administrations – and between them – is done electronically.

Online services can save a great deal of time and money. They offer more accountability and reliability. They offer greater flexibility for many transactions.

The problem is that administrations are afraid of investment risk. The problem is also that not enough people are using them.

Nearly 40% of the EU's regular internet users choose not to access public services digitally. Why? Poor usability and lack of transparency, they say. We need to reverse this.
The major underlying issue is trust. Or rather, the lack of it.

We cannot get the best out of what digital tools and online networks can offer if we do not trust them.

People will hesitate to use e-services if they are not confident that they are reliable, safe and secure. They may choose not to use them at all.

This is why our DSM strategy has a clear focus on strengthening online trust and confidence, particularly when it comes to protection of personal data and cyber-security issues.

We also need to reinforce what we have already achieved.

Last year's eIDAS regulation is a good example. It is one of THE major building blocks to achieve trusted cross-border digital transactions.
Private as well as public.
But progress is slow. I want faster uptake of digital identities, signatures and trust services.

Hidden behind all these mixed statistics on use of digital services are, however, some real European success stories:

- the UK saves 1.8 billion pounds a year thanks to its 'digital by default' strategy;

- Denmark has got rid of paper forms completely and 90% of Danes use the internet for all transactions;

- in Estonia, the use of digital signatures saves the country 2% of GDP per year.

My second point of principle is openness and transparency.

As public bodies, we should stress the public "service" element. We should open our doors - and our minds - to citizen and community involvement; Not only to other similar administrations, but also to civil society, to businesses and private individuals.
The public sector produces and gathers a wide range of information.
If this is made accessible, made available as open data – free for use and re-use – then the community, individuals as well as companies, can benefit hugely. And the public sector benefits in return.

The more we share, the more we gain. Studies expect billions of euros of economic gains from open data.

Openness of course means supporting and using open standards and open source tools. In procurement and development of services.

Openness also means working together in the design, production and improved provision of public services across borders.

This way, the public becomes more involved in the decision-making process.

To an extent, all this is already happening. But it could happen more.

- in Scotland, 8,000 people co-designed the government health services website. - Iceland used social networking sites to gather views for provisions to its new constitution.

- Cities like London or Lyon make public transport data available to third parties – and benefit largely from better uptake and development of services.

Open government makes political and social sense. Digitally supported public involvement is good for legitimacy, accountability and trust in government.

It also makes good economic and business sense, particularly in times of austerity when there is pressure to do "more with less".

Another good example is the German Federal Labour Agency, which cut spending by 10 billion euros a year partly thanks to analysing the historical data of its customers.
Doing this allowed the Agency to provide more personalised, targeted services.

My last point of principle, cross-border services by default.

It makes no sense to have digital barriers between EU public services.
People and businesses interact with each other all over the world, in every way, every day.

How can you have a fully functioning internal market if public services do not work across borders?
This is at the core of our project to build a connected DSM.

For that to happen, of course, there needs to be compatibility between national public services.

Here, the European Interoperability Framework is a key building block.

We need a flexible instrument that helps us ensuring interoperability over time – giving freedom to each actor to cater for their needs and avoiding lock-in in today's technologies.

Also the new ISA² ('ISA squared') programme – Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations - will help a great deal.
It has €131 million earmarked for modernising EU public administrations and providing interoperable digital services. Practical help to public administrations and reducing investment risk.

So far our line of thinking; now concretely, what is our way forward?

As part of the DSM strategy, we will draw up an e-government action plan for the next five years.
We will consult views from all sides while it is being developed.

Our ideas include:
-       piloting the 'once only' principle for businesses across the EU;

-       accelerating EU countries' transition to full e-procurement and interoperable e-signatures;
-       reforming the EU institutions' own digital set-up and procedures;
-       supporting interoperability for public administrations;
-       making interconnections between business registers a reality by 2017 and helping access to digital services in Member States;

- we will also look at specific areas, such as transport, health and the judiciary.

Ladies and gentlemen

Everyone here has a role to play in transforming our society and economy to become fit for the digital age.

- you can all contribute significantly to the quality of data produced by public administrations;

- you can facilitate data circulation around administrations, researchers, companies and individuals;

- you can help to develop strategic data policies so that Europe does not fall behind in its digital transformation.

Nobody can carry out this digital transformation alone.

We need to hear from you – so please take part in our ongoing public consultation on e-government. We want to hear your experiences, about what works and where we need to focus.

Too often we use the word government in conjunction with red tape, with hassle, with making life complicated.

As a liberal, as a citizen, I want government to be anything but complicated. Digitising government is the key to making it open, efficient and accountable at the service of our communities.

For me, e-government is about creating value, and using innovation to do so.

Firstly, monetary value in actual cash savings, for everyone.

Far more important is the social value that we derive from applying digital technology where and when it is needed, in creating a true e-society.

Above all, it is about people: creating a society where people can spend less time on administration and more on what they want in their daily lives.

Thank you.