

Major Trends for E-Government in Europe

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***Abstract.** After the EU services directive was put into force on December 29th, 2009, the EU became one of the most important drivers in e-Government. A Single Point of Contact (real and in the Internet), several large scale projects like e-document and an e-Government Action Plan are notable activities. The roll-out of the Internal Market Information System to now more than 6.000 competent authorities shows how communication between the European member states is working electronically. EU ranking of e-Government will be changed, as the many EU applications of the ISA-program give all member states similar values. A drawback is the lack of homogenous eID services across Europe.*

Many member states see a necessity for open government: valuable knowledge bases and a real participation of citizen in an overall transparent political decision making process becomes vital to achieve economic success.

The example of Germany shows the advantage of establishing e-Government in the constitution. Across the German states e-Government projects are planned and brought into production. Nationwide standards adopted to EU e-Government standards make development and/or provision of services easier and faster.

Further development would be helpful, like e.g. a government cloud for standardized services or an open source office communication product for European citizen to download.

Keywords. e-Government, single point of contact, standards, economic success, open

government, transparency, government cloud, open office product line, myths

1 Understanding E-Government

In this paper e-Government is understood as the overall use of information and communication technology (ICT) in public administrations and governments. A restriction to Internet services is not helpful as today almost all administrative services can be provided as online services if adequate organizational, legal and technical efforts are made. Thus e-Government very often contributes to an improved and simpler administration process.

As a political decision stands mostly at the beginning of e-Government projects, some specialties are to be accepted: (1) Political defined e-Government projects will be brought in production only after a high quality of the electronic administrative service is achieved. (2) Politics does not accept to be pushed by a project milestone. Project managers should define their timing according to political milestones and not consider technical or other considerations as a priority.

Politics is successful with e-Government if political subjects like less bureaucracy, faster authorizations, better development of a region, helpful for creating jobs are addressed. An economic proof that these objectives are met, is seldom possible, thus there is some reasoning with myths [1].

Details about how to bring online services for citizen and enterprises to the Internet are found in [2]. Examples for up to date online services are described in [9].

2 Status of European E-Government

The European Commission started a courageous and ambitious project to improve the internal market: (1) All services for citizen and enterprises specific for attaining authorizations for service providers shall be provided in an electronic way, too. (2) All informations necessary to understand and use the administrative processes shall be on the Internet. (3) No original papers e.g. for proving professional qualifications shall be submitted; scanned papers shall be sufficient. To assure high quality administration anyway a European wide Internal Market Information system (MI) was set up. (4) Large scale projects for technical problems were started and all European member states can participate and get the results to improve their applications.

Another motor for e-Government was the long-term program for administration applications like ANIMO (animal movement) of the IDA, IDAbc- and now the ISA-program. These programs standardized the EU-wide applications of ICT and helped them attain high quality. One important factor was the implementation of modern language management.

3 Current EU Initiatives

The EU Commission resp. the EU Council started several important initiatives based on the objectives of the Lisbon treaty: (i) A Digital Agenda for Europe [3], (ii) the Malmö Ministerial Declaration [4], (iii) e-Government Action program for 2011 - 2015 and the Interoperability of Public Services [4] and (iv) the initiative for open government and open data [6]. "The overall aim of the Digital Agenda is to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra fast internet and interoperable applications." [3, p. 3]. The key objective is to help solve the problems raised by the financial crisis, the demographic ageing and global competition. The Digital Agenda is one of the seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy. [7].

The Digital Agenda is of course not only about e-Government but mostly about the development of ICT use and ICT technology and enterprises in Europe. Nevertheless government activities being considered part of e-Government are vital to support the Digital Agenda: interoperable eID services, trust in networks and a minimum of cybercrime, better education of advanced ICT skills as well as open and transparent delivery of public services by electronic means are key objectives of any e-Government policy.

The European e-Government Action Plan 2011-2015 (Harnessing ICT to promote smart, sustainable & innovative Government) [8] is based on the i2010 Action Plan and now focuses on a broad set of

objectives written down in the Malmö Ministerial Declaration [4] and included later in this Action Plan:

(i) Citizens and businesses are empowered by e-Government services designed around users' needs and developed in collaboration with third parties, as well as by increased access to public information, strengthened transparency and effective means for involvement of stakeholders in the policy process, (ii) Mobility in the Single Market is reinforced by seamless e-Government services for the setting up and running of a business and for studying, working, residing and retiring anywhere in the European Union, (iii) Efficiency and effectiveness is enabled by a constant effort to use e-Government to reduce the administrative burden, improve organisational processes and promote a sustainable low-carbon economy, (iv) The implementation of the policy priorities is made possible by creating the appropriate key enablers and by establishing the necessary legal and technical preconditions.

4 Suggestions for further Action

If the above mentioned targets will ever be met in time and volume the way they are described in these political initiative papers remains to be seen. What slows down the innovation process are the following obstacles:

(i) The conditions are rather different in the member states. Excellent education, technical infrastructure and financial power accelerate the use of ICT.

(ii) The interoperability framework [5] addresses only sectoral projects and no horizontal projects. So the standards of e-Government are harmonized within each area of ICT application ("sectoral view") whereas it should be harmonized on a horizontal level for all areas of ICT application. E.g. to help the citizen, enterprises and the authorities in the member states, that have more financial problems, the free and open distribution of a European open office product line for the use of e-Government services would be an accelerator. This product line should not be developed by the EU Commission but procured from the market. So any company marketing office communication software could have an equal chance to get a contract. The open and free components could be supported with licensed components having more functionality. But basic functionality should be free and open.

(iii) An optional European eID solution should be delivered to all stakeholders of e-Government (citizen, enterprises, authorities). It could come with the open office product line proposed above, but could be marketed and delivered in a separate way, too.

Another infrastructure should be build: The e-Government Action Plan (and the Digital Agenda for non-governmental services) creates administrations that depend very much on ICT use. So many registers

like that of the property owners, citizen registration, birth registers, health related documents on citizen, company registers, professional qualifications registers are currently decentralized and thus vulnerable to malfunction of ICT in the administrations. Many administrations do not have the budget to build up secure storage for such data. So in the case of power failure, e.g. electricity shutdown due to hot summers or other incidents, these registers will cease to work properly. Economic development might be affected. The solution is an overall risk management in national and optional European government cloud computing solutions.

5 Example Germany

In 2009 the German parliament decided a change in the constitution in the framework of a federal reform II in Germany. Among other changes an article 91 c was added to the constitution (“Grundgesetz”) that guides the work of an “ICT planning council” (“IT-Planungsrat”) of federal and state governments working on the political level of secretaries of state and meeting about three times a year. Details are in a state treaty on ICT co-operation. To build a network to interconnect federal, state and local government networks a special law (“IT-NetzG”) was passed.

One of the first activities was working out a National e-Government Strategy (“NEGS”). Currently in the beginning of 2011 appropriate projects are defined. The ICT planning council is supposed to decide on these projects late in 2011.

The ICT planning council set up a standardization group for it’s work in the city of Bremen. IT is financed by all members of the ICT planning council. Currently the ICT planning council focuses on ICT security, too.

For more details and the relevant documents see <http://www.it-planungsrat.de/>.

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