

**At the cross point of eGovernment & eDemocracy: How ICT in the parliamentary environment is setting standards in participation and usage**

The development of the Information Society receives its dynamics from the continuous impacts of a demand pull for new contents and services, and a technology push through new devices, systems and applications. The forces of the market are strong and fast: strong enough, for example, to convert small IT-companies to world leading industrial groups, and fast enough to completely change within a decade our traditional ways of storing, retrieving and consuming sound and images (e.g. Audio-CD/MP3/digital photography versus LP/Music Cassette/traditional photography). Most areas of daily work and living, particularly our mobility and availability pattern, have been substantially influenced and changed by advanced information and communications technologies and services.

Shaping the markets of information and communications technologies and services means shaping the development of the Information Society. On the other side, governments and parliaments do their best to use the dynamics of the development of the Information Society for the social and economic development of their countries. They exercise leadership with their classical means: by regulating, and by giving good example through good practice.

There are numerous and prominent examples of how the policy for public investment and usage of ICT equipment and services have heavily influenced the development of the Information Society and the accompanying markets. Finland's leading role in ICT, for example, has been heavily triggered by the ICT usage in the public sector. Starting 1993, first students, then schools and pupils, and then public sector employees were provided an e-mail account "by force" and for free. Another prominent example is the decision of some European Parliaments to actively invest into Open Source-Software in their Parliaments, which triggered a Europe wide discussion on the Pro's and Con's of Linux and its applications.

Despite the implementation of Information and Communication Technologies within the public sector and thus the efforts to realise and to bring eGovernment and eDemocracy a bit forward, there is still a lack of ICT usage standards. On the one hand eGovernment & eDemocracy tools already exist and have been successfully involved in the interaction between public services and the wider audience, but nevertheless there is a need for defining ICT usage standards in order to avoid interface problems.

It is not enough to give online access to a variety of public services moreover it is necessary including new approaches to define the relationship between citizens and public authorities. As a study set up by Accenture<sup>1</sup> shows, most of the citizens using eGovernment tools in order to gain information about their field of interest. The reasons for not using respective eGovernment tools as an assistant

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<sup>1</sup> Accenture study „Leadership in Customer Service“ April 2005 [www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com)

processing tool are as simple as understandable. Most of the time the handling of such tools are perceived as being complicated and thus they do not lead to the resulting time savings. Additionally and the more important obstacle is the missing trust in the guarantee of data security. These facts also influence the development of eDemocracy and eParticipation.

This scepticism and reservation towards eGovernment tools reflects the lack of a basic citizen's orientated strategy. It is up to the governments to bridge this gap and hence to prepare the basis for new possibilities for eGovernment and eDemocracy beyond state borders.

As a matter of fact not only Information Communication Technologies, but also the textual quality of the communication between citizens and public authorities has to be scrutinised and improved. The basic problem beyond ICT and thus the main reason for citizens of being unsatisfied with public services is the missing vertical integration of public authorities among each other. The benefits of ICT can not effectively be used if the essential and basic information are not converge at one central point. As a result citizens have various sources of information or contact persons, which are not connected to each other. Interface problems such as the speed of delivered information as well as the availability of information occur. To avoid these interface problems it does not only need further technological development, moreover it needs rethinking and a new definition of the role of public authorities.

The EPRI conference could review some of the recent experiences and their visible consequences on the implementation of new ICT standards, by looking at single actions ("German Bundestag purchases Linux") as well as long term strategies (e.g. development of purchase standards for harmonising the multiple IT platforms in public administration). The following chapter contains a number of examples where governments heavily shape the national ICT market and the ICT usage. The conference could then summarise experiences and requirements as to how European governments can foster the role of the public sector and its influence on setting ICT usage standards, and thus in order to develop the Information Society and in the end to prepare the way towards a knowledge society.

## Examples:

- SAGA (Standards and Architectures for eGovernment Applications)
  - [http://www.kbst.bund.de/download/SAGA\\_2\\_1.pdf](http://www.kbst.bund.de/download/SAGA_2_1.pdf)
- Introduction of Biometric identification
  - Examples of European Projects
    - VIPBOB – Virtual Pin based on Biometrics
    - Digital Passport – Next Generation European Digital Passport with Biometric Data for secure and convenient Boarder Passage
- Electronic Toll Systems
- Bill of health
- Electronic call for tenders
- Microsoft offers Office Document Formats to Ecma International for Open Standardization
- Linux
  
- Examples of Open source e.g.
  - In Spanish municipalities<sup>2</sup>
  - By the French Government<sup>3</sup>
  - In the public sector of the UK<sup>4</sup>
  - German Bundestag decided to combine Microsoft and Open Source software<sup>5</sup>
  - European Projects:
    - CALIBRE – Coordination Action for Libre Software Engineering for Open development Platforms for Software and Service

Other examples of projects funded by the European Union:

- *Developing a secure electronic signature*
  - NESSIE – New European Schemes for Signature, Integrity and Encryption
  - DIGISEC – Digital Signature infrastructure for administrative simplification and e-commerce development
- *eGovernment: User friendly and efficient public services*
  - QUALEG – Quality of services and legitimacy in eGovernment

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<sup>2</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/360>

<sup>3</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/360>

<sup>4</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/chapter/360>

<sup>5</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/idabc/en/document/4596/194>