



Eighth European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI Conference), Prague, 16 March 2006

Status Summary

On 15th and 16th March, the Eighth European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies (EPRI Conference) took place at the Czech Senate in Prague.

Following the invitation of the Speaker of the Czech Senate, Mr. Premysl Sobotka, nearly 80 participants, amongst them 42 delegates from the parliamentary assemblies of 20 EU member states, met in Prague for the eighth European Conference of Members of National Parliaments on Information and Communication Technologies.

The aim of the conference was to maintain the exchange of recent experiences and their visible consequences on the implementation of new ICT standards, by looking at single actions as well as long terms strategies.

A portfolio of experiences and requirements as to how European governments can foster the role of the public sectors and influence the setting of ICT standards has been presented. Best practice cases as well as experiences made by different countries were represented at the conference.

It was summarised from the former EPRI conference and from intermediary EPRI activities that an efficient and effective government must include enhancing democracy and transparency. The ICT inspired public sector reform and transformation which is taking place, should apply to democracy and transparency.

It was underlined that, as a key actor in the governance sphere, Parliaments need to be included in the evolution of the 'e-government' sector, particularly where they can benefit as public administrations in delivering better services to citizens.

The discussion focused on the following major themes:

1. Assessment of eDemocracy applications
2. Implementation of eDemocracy as a complementary to eGovernment
3. Fostering and creating eDemocracy in the future
4. Processing eDemocracy

Assessing eDemocracy

At the conference the Head of Government Affairs of Cisco Systems, Ireland and UK was represented. In his keynote he was referring to the possibilities to assess the effectiveness of eDemocracy applications. In the end, his keynote reflected a framework which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of eDemocracy initiatives. In this respect the participants were enabled to request their own local activities and to set them in a critical context.

In consideration of the turnout of voters the participants agreed on the fact that there is a need to concentrate even more on the communication towards the citizens.



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Implementation of eDemocracy as a complementary to eGovernment

Parliamentarians as key actors in eGovernment need to be more included in the evolution of the eGovernment sector. Besides technological basic requirements such as to expand the high-speed broadband it is important to prevent the enlargement of a social gap between ICT-users and non ICT-users and thus to prevent the problems and the interferences that non democratic forces bring to parliamentarians political work.

Attention should be paid, not only to equal access to ICTs, the design of public services online, digital literacy and the geographic and social digital divide, but also prioritize the creation of new opportunities and mechanisms for citizen participation in government and parliamentary policy and decision-making processes. As a corollary, this also means that public administration reform must include the necessary internal reform, to make it ready to be able to cope with and respond to inclusive, citizen-centred and democratic services.

Best practice examples were shown by presentations from Mr. Aarna from the Estonian Parliament and from Mr. Oberfalzer from the Czech Senate.

Dr.h.c. Susanne Kastner, vice president of the German Bundestag proposed a European Forum about the influence of eDemocracy on the role and the value of Parliaments.

Fostering and creating eDemocracy in the future

Mr. Millard from the Danish Technological Institute examined the current relationship between eGovernment and eDemocracy in Europe. He analysed the present relationship and differences around Europe and addressed current and future challenges, especially the so called democratic deficit and the need to create a future around a new understanding of citizen empowerment, openness, transparency and trust. He further outlined the possibility to develop an eDemocracy "value chain" that links actors and also builds on Europe's traditions and values.

Processing eDemocracy

The Panel discussion at the end of the conference multiplexed the information gathered during the day. Panellists were mainly Parliamentarians but also representatives from industry and research. The open discussion, was mainly concentrating on the role of Parliaments as well as on their challenges to take up ongoing developments of ICTs.

Conclusion and Follow – up

The participating Parliamentarians understand the EPRI initiative as a continuous process accompanied and enriched by appropriate actions between the conferences. EPRI provides a platform to exchange experiences, to create and scrutinize eDemocracy visions from a perspective of representatives and political decision makers. Supported by manageable actions, EPRI is able to take leadership in the development of eGovernance as a weighted and balanced equilibrium between eGovernment and eDemocracy.

EPRI may and will provide an up-to-date inventory of eDemocracy applications and will contribute to scrutinize and benchmark such applications from a specific perspective of representatives and political decision makers.

Especially in the view of national elections as well as the next European elections in 2009 the participants expressed their wish that new ICT should be used accordingly in order to involve the citizens more in the democratic process. It was further recognised that participation as well as information have to be regular updated and adjusted.