

Open letter to the European Commission
 e-Government Unit
 DG INFORMATION SOCIETY & MEDIA

In response to the e-government Ministerial Conference hosted by the UK Presidency of the EU, held in Manchester in November 2005, the members of the European Parliamentary Network who attended the event would like to:

- Congratulate the UK Presidency and the European Commission for a well organised and interesting event, including pertinent presentations and discussions, and an informative and useful exhibition
- Express their interest in contributing to the overall orientation, the agenda and the content of the next European e-Government conference and exhibition
- Express their view that the Parliaments of the EU are also key actors in the EU 'governance' (rather than government) sector, and as such, have an important role to play in these discussions; and as a corollary, suggest that the term 'e-government' reflect the wider definition of 'governance' which includes the parliamentary system and structures
- Confirm that there is a strong interest among parliaments in the issues of e-democracy and the use of ICTs to enable citizen participation, and consider that these issues are central to the developing use of ICTs in and by public administrations, and should, as such be better reflected in the general e-government agenda

In the framework of the i2010 Action Plan, the European Commission is urged to consider the following:

1) e-Inclusion includes the ability of all citizens to participate in democratic and governance processes

In its aim to promote an inclusive European information society, the European Commission should pay attention, in the Action Plan, 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.

2) Efficient and effective government includes enhancing democracy and transparency

The ICT-inspired public sector reform and transformation which is taking place, should apply to democracy and transparency. Transformation in public administrations should include innovation in the area of transparency, to allow

for better scrutiny by both citizens and parliament. **‘Better government’ also means better *scrutiny* of government by the elected assemblies, an area where ICTs still have an under-developed role.**

3) Parliament as a key actor in the e-governance/ment sector

As a key actor in the governance sphere, Parliaments need to be included in the evolution of the ‘e-government’ sector (or more appropriately ‘e-governance’), particularly where they can benefit as public administrations in delivering better services to citizens.

This includes sharing resources, knowledge, best practices, standards, technologies, and supporting cooperation amongst Parliaments in particular, and public administrations in general.

4) EU institutions as a role-model

The EU institutions should serve as a role-model for democratic governance, with forward thinking and innovative opportunities for citizen participation, transparent governance and modern, representative and responsive public.

5) The importance on intermediaries in innovation in inclusive democratic practices

The European Commission is called upon to recognise the important role to be played by non-government and non-parliament actors in the democratic process – especially in terms of addressing inclusion, and providing for transformational innovations in the democratic arena. In the Action Plan, these ‘intermediaries’ must be recognised as independent actors which need support, both in terms of legitimacy and resources.

Given that with the i2010 Action Plan, the European Commission intends to take full advantage of the fact that “Europe is well-placed to achieve world-class administrations”, the European Parliamentary network welcomes the opportunity to assist and contribute in further reflection on this issue.

Submitted on behalf and with the consent of:

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Noel O’Flynn T.D, Chairman of the Communications, Marine and Natural Resources Committee, Irish Parliament