



eGovernment in Europe: The State of Affairs



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This article outlines the state of affairs in eGovernment in Europe in the light of both an EIPA study¹ and the 2003 eGovernment Conference in Como 7-8 July², jointly organised by the Italian Presidency and the European Commission, at which the study was presented. The 2003 eEurope Awards for eGovernment, managed by EIPA, were presented at the Conference.³

A turning point

The results of the conference⁴ appear to confirm that eGovernment has reached a turning point in Europe: The question is no longer simply whether to be online or not. The socio-technical and institutional transformations which future eGovernment solutions will both enable and entail go far beyond serving citizens and the economy by merely offering online services. Data-sharing and back office integration will yield substantial benefits. The major issues identified in Como are not technical, but concern human resources, i.e. (re-)training of staff, the legal framework, and changes in approaches to management, the content of tasks and practices.

At the Como conference, European Commissioner Erkki Liikanen and Minister Lucio Stanca stressed eGovernment's crucial role in European competitiveness in helping to remove the bureaucratic red tape that is hampering European business. Investment in the reorganisation of the public sector and in the skills of its employees will ultimately pay off for citizens, businesses and governments alike. Moreover, eGovernment is considered a key enabler for citizen-centric, cooperative, "seamless" and polycentric modern government. However, in order to truly become a meaningful agent of modernisation for public service delivery and modern governance, the current technology bias must be replaced by a focus on socio-cultural transformations.

Issues at stake

European decision-makers, academics and industry representatives identified the need to address the following issues:⁵ (1) The mismatch between supply and demand in ePublic services requires monitoring of user's needs and expectations and tailoring of systems to suit these; (2) Interoperability and standardisation⁶ are key requirements for multi-level, pan-European and cross border services; much remains to be done with regard to the exchange of experiences and best practice at a European level; (3) Re-engineering of back offices

will increase productivity and allow universal services at affordable cost; (4) The use of common platforms enhanced by sound technology and a robust security layer can reduce costs through partnership and information sharing. To safeguard security, trust and privacy is considered a matter of priority.

The EIPA study⁷, "eGovernment in Europe: The State of Affairs", presented in Como, outlines the following principal trends: (1) eGovernment is becoming a meaningful agent of transformation; (2) its real potential lies in enabling *qualitative gains* in work processes, results and efficiency; (3) if implemented properly, it will help consolidate *principles of good governance*, such as democratisation, coherence, effectiveness, transparency and accountability; (4) a *new architecture of service management and delivery* is emerging, which separates customer-centred front offices from back offices, building on seamless connections between organisations with different traditions. Progress has been demonstrated in horizontal and vertical integration of services as well as in cooperation among administrations, agencies and with the private sector⁸.

Critical factors for eGovernment implementation

Key elements are service quality, effectiveness and efficiency, whereby a balance has to be found in sharing administrative tasks among the stakeholders. Multi-channel interaction systems with administrations are required. Putting people first is a precondition for success: the interests, expectations, fears and dangers which eGovernment solutions give rise to must be addressed proactively.

We have identified five critical factors for eGovernment implementation⁹: (1) adequate use of tailor-made IST¹⁰ resulting from cooperative processes involving vendors and users; (2) sufficient funding, possibly requiring public-private partnerships; (3) strategic frameworks based on cost/benefit analyses and demand; (4) a well suited legal and regulatory framework; and (5) adequate change management schemes anticipating psychological resistance and factual obstacles.

Main challenges

The cases submitted for the 2003 eEurope Awards for eGovernment¹¹ are indicative of far-reaching changes in governance, but does eEurope 2005 provide sufficient guidance?

Given the above developments, the concept of eGovernment has to be broadened to embrace the full potential of IST and the entire spectrum of public governance and public sector activities. Commission initiatives, e.g. the actions proposed in the recent Commission Communication on eGovernment¹², the planned EIF¹³ and specific EU programmes¹⁴, as well as the actions set out in the Como Ministerial Declaration¹⁵ will certainly contribute to meeting some of the challenges ahead. Cooperation among stakeholders, including at the European level, is a prerequisite in this process. eGovernment must not be confined to information processing within the modernisation of administrations, but should be geared towards knowledge management and good governance. Naturally, in this process of transformation public service ethics must be revitalised. While government may learn a lot from business management, work organisation and personnel practices, its difference also needs to be recognised.

In our study, we consider the main challenges to be the following: (1) planning beyond short term objectives and leadership; (2) developing the capacity to cooperatively mobilise administrations, industry and academic research; (3) understanding the diversity of political and administrative cultures; (4) ensuring interoperability of systems and standards while avoiding brutal standardisation; (5) learning from each other within an effective and sustainable framework for the exchange of experience and best practice at all levels of administration.¹⁶

It has been widely acknowledged that, without a vision, eGovernment is “mission impossible”. *Integrated Government* is a vision which will help eGovernment achieve its full potential for innovative change.¹⁷ Comprehensive and fully integrated eGovernment solutions must target user needs and be linked with management and back office reorganisation. The time has come to stop navigating blindly and to learn from past mistakes, to review and share experience to create a space whereby limits can be acknowledged. To this end, governments must drop the “e” and build solid,

comprehensive and well integrated strategies for reform, based on the prerequisite principles of good governance.

NOTES

- ¹ “eGovernment in Europe: The State of Affairs”, Editor: Christine Leitner, Head of eEurope Project Management Secretariat, EIPA (European Institute of Public Administration, NL); Authors: Jean-Michel Eymeri, Klaus Lenk, Morten Meyerhoff Nielsen, Roland Traunmüller. The full text of the study is available on <http://e-europeawards.org> (“Results” section).
- ² At the Como conference, 65 best practices were presented, selected from the 357 cases submitted for the 2003 eEurope Awards for eGovernment. Three applications received the eEurope Awards for eGovernment. The eEurope Awards programme is an IST accompanying measure.
- ³ For details on the winners see also the eEurope Awards News Update in this EIPASCOPE edition.
- ⁴ See http://europa.eu.int/information_society/
- ⁵ This summary is based on the reports of the conference rapporteurs.
- ⁶ Related to data, processes, and technologies.
- ⁷ See note 1.
- ⁸ In the 2003 Awards exercise 26.67% of the cases referred to vertical, 27.02 to horizontal integration, and 27.68% to government private cooperation respectively. 11.76% dealt with pan-European issues. For more details, see EIPA study, chapter 6.
- ⁹ For details see EIPA Study, chapter 3.
- ¹⁰ Information Society Technologies.
- ¹¹ 357 cases were submitted under three themes, half of which came under theme 2 – “A Better life for European Citizens”. An analysis is given in the EIPA study, Part II, chapter 6.
- ¹² The role of eGovernment for Europe’s Future, COM(2003) 567 final, adopted on 26 September 2003.
- ¹³ European Interoperability Framework, see http://europa.eu.int/information_society/
- ¹⁴ e.g. IDA, IST, eTen, MODINIS (to be adopted shortly), etc.
- ¹⁵ See http://europa.eu.int/information_society/
- ¹⁶ See also EIPA study, Part I.
- ¹⁷ See also EIPA Study, chapter 4. □

eEurope Awards News Update

Final Results of the 2003 eEurope Awards for eGovernment

The three prize winners for the 2003 eEurope awards for eGovernment were announced by European Commissioner Erkki Liikanen, in a formal ceremony held in the presence of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Lucio Stanca, Italian Minister for Innovation and Technology. This ceremony was attended by some 30 Ministers participating in the European eGovernment Conference at Villa Erba, beside Lake Como in Italy, from 7-8 July 2003.

As reported in our previous EIPASCOPE edition, 65 applications representing “the best practices of public administrations in Europe” had been selected for exhibition at the EU’s Ministerial Conference eGovernment. All 65 best practices that had already been selected by an independent panel of experts from 357 applications to exhibit at the conference, received a “Finalist” certificate. The best practice cases provided evidence of the changes that public administrations need to make in their own organisation and in skills of employees in order for eGovernment to deliver its full

potential. Municipal, regional and national administrations from 14 Member States, from 12 Accession Countries, from Switzerland and from Norway responded to the call.

The winners are:

- *Bremen On-line Services*, Senator for Finances – Department for New Media and eGovernment, Germany (Theme 1).
- *HELP – virtual guide to Austrian authorities and institutions*, Federal Chancellery, Austria (Theme 2).
- *Tax information between public administrations*, Agencia Tributaria, Departamento de Informática Tributaria, Spain (Theme 3).

In addition to the winners, five Honourable Mentions were awarded. Full details of these, winners and nominees are available at the www.e-europewards.org website together with the Exhibition Catalogue and State of the Art Research Report. □



eEurope Award Winner: HELP – virtual guide to Austrian authorities and institutions, Dr. Elisabeth Dearing.



*EIPA eEurope Awards Team.
From left to right: Morten Meyerhoff Nielsen, David Huysman, Christine Leitner, Alexander Heichlinger and Niels Karssen.*