Towards interoperability for European public services

The European Commission has today adopted an initiative to encourage public administrations across the EU to maximise the social and economic potential of information and communication technologies. The Communication ‘Towards interoperability for European public services’ looks to establish a common approach for Member State’s public administrations, to help citizens and businesses to profit fully from the EU’s Single Market. Making full use of the Single Market often obliges citizens to deliver or collect information or documents they need to work, study or travel within the EU and send them to public administrations in another Member State. Businesses face a similar reality. That is why it is vital that administrations provide efficient, effective cross-border eGovernment services, as reflected in the eGovernment Action Plan just adopted by the Commission (see IP/10/1718), in accordance with the Digital Agenda for Europe (see IP/10/581, MEMO/10/199 and MEMO/10/200). The need for effective interoperability is a central part of the Digital Agenda, one of the flagship initiatives in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Commission’s Communication introduces both the European Interoperability Strategy and the European Interoperability Framework, which should guide ICT policy for public bodies across the Union.

Maroš Šefčovič, Commission Vice-President, said: “The European Union is about cooperating to create an environment in which citizens and businesses can thrive. European public administrations have to lead the way in working together. This cannot happen without real, effective interoperability between public administrations at all levels.”

The challenges of European electronic public services

More and more citizens and businesses are making use of the European single market's freedoms. However, citizens are often obliged to contact, or even to travel to, public administrations abroad to deliver or collect information or documents they need to work, study or travel within the EU. The same applies to businesses that want to establish themselves in more than one Member State.

In order to overcome these constraints (so-called “e-barriers”), public administrations should be able to exchange the necessary information and cooperate to deliver public services across borders. That requires ensuring interoperability among public administrations.

Many public administrations in the Member States are already taking steps to improve interoperability for public services at national, regional and local levels, but unless Member States and the Commission act together, interoperability at EU level will lag behind. That is why the Commission has over recent years worked out a common strategy and built a common framework with Member States.
European public services will often be the result of aggregating existing public services provided at various levels of government within Member States. Setting up European public services will only be feasible if those public services are designed with interoperability requirements in mind.

Towards interoperability for European public services

Within the Digital Agenda for Europe, the Commission committed itself to adopt a Communication that introduces the European Interoperability Strategy (EIS) and the European Interoperability Framework (EIF), two key documents that promote interoperability among public administrations.

The direct beneficiaries of this action are Member States’ public administrations and European Commission services that will gain in efficiency when establishing European public services and will be more aware of the risk of creating new electronic barriers if they opt for public services solutions that are not interoperable at EU level. Citizens and businesses will benefit from better European public services in their daily life when they want to extend their work or leisure activities beyond the borders of their home countries.

Both the EIS and EIF recognise that interoperability has several dimensions: legal, organisational, semantic and technical. All of them are important, but thanks to the Internet and to the work of standardisation bodies and other organisations, significant progress has already been achieved in the area of technical interoperability, thereby ensuring openness, promoting reusability and fostering competition.

The European Interoperability Strategy will help focus EU efforts through an appropriate governance organisation and common policies and initiatives to create the environment for a trusted information exchange between public administrations.

The European Interoperability Framework paves the way for public administrations in the EU to use a common approach by adopting guiding principles to allow genuine collaboration between public administrations, while modernising and rationalising their systems to increase in a cost-efficient way their capability to provide high quality public services.

The European Commission invites the Member States to continue to work together to ensure that their different efforts to achieve the interoperability of public services are aligned and take into account the European dimension at an early stage in the development of any public service that might become part of European public services in the future.

In order to facilitate this collaboration, a brand new conceptual model for European public services has been proposed. This model will allow the identification of barriers and facilitators for the deployment of such services in the future.

http://ec.europa.eu/isa/strategy/index_en.htm