

Competitive digital single market - eGovernment as a spearhead

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The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Silvia-Adriana Ţicău (S&D, RO) in response to the Commission communication on a competitive digital single market eGovernment as a spearhead.

The report is aware of the major contribution made by the ICT sector to the EU's industrial policy, innovation, growth, competitiveness and the trade balance. It underlines that the creation of a European eGovernment Area has the potential to be an essential part of the Horizon 2020 agenda, boosting the promotion of economic and social growth, stimulating innovation and human capital development, and helping meet the societal and political challenges faced by the EU.

eGovernment Action Plan: Members welcome the adoption of the European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015, the European Interoperability Strategy (EIS) and the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) for European public services (EPS). They call on the Member States to take rapid action to align their national strategies to these overarching policies.

The report supports the overall targets for increased use of eGovernment services in 2015, i.e. 50 % of citizens (up from 41 %) and 80 % of businesses (up from 75 %), but calls on the Commission and Member States to consider these targets as minimum thresholds. It calls for the special programmes and eGovernment platforms to be developed with the aim of protecting and promoting local, regional, ethnic and linguistic diversity.

Members consider that in order to ensure effective EU-wide crossborder eGovernment services providing two-way and/or automated interaction between administrations and citizens and/or businesses, there needs to be a clear and coherent EU legal framework for the mutual recognition of eAuthentication, eIdentification and eSignatures. They point out that there is still no clear definition of the term public administrative data and that, with a view to clarifying its precise meaning, a common understanding must be reached by means of public discussion. They call for adequate measures to be put in place to ensure data and privacy protection and minimise vulnerability to cyber-attacks.

Member States are called upon to:

- continuously inform citizens about the existing EU portals, such as SOLVIT and Your Europe, as the current lack of information is delaying further development of the business environment and consumer protection arrangements, especially in cross-border areas;
- develop open educational software at European educational institutions, to exchange best practice, and to develop online platforms for collaboration on educational materials and resources that are free for students and take due account of data protection and copyright rules;
- make use of ICT tools to improve transparency, accountability and citizen involvement, increase efficiency and competitiveness, reduce administrative burdens, time and costs, improve administrative processes, reduce carbon emissions, save public resources, and contribute to a more participatory democracy while building up trust and confidence;
- oblige public entities to make data available by maintaining repositories and catalogues of public data and ensuring that rules for disclosure and reuse are established, taking due account of copyright law and the law on the protection of databases;
- implement one-stop shops and make use of intermediary actors, with a view to providing a seamless, integrated and easily accessible system of contact points for users, for both domestic and crossborder eGovernment services.

The report recognises the major potential of cloud computing, for businesses and private citizens alike. However, Members stress that with the increased use of cloud services, supervision of the relocation of IT resources and strict control of access to servers and data are required, inter alia in order to prevent unauthorised commercial use by other parties, and that as a consequence these issues should be dealt with in the reform of the EU data protection rules as proposed by the Commission.

Recalling the key commitment to reduce both digital literacy gaps and competence gaps by half by 2015, Members call on the Commission and the Member States to launch digital training programmes to promote the full use of eGovernment services, reinforce digital literacy and overcome the e-barriers affecting SMEs and disadvantaged sectors of the population such as older people, persons with disabilities, minorities, immigrants, the unemployed and those living in remote areas of the Union. To this extent, e-learning should be incorporated into national education and training policies.

eProcurement: the report emphasises that in the EU-27 public expenditure represents 16 % of GDP, and urges the use of eProcurement for all public procurement by 2015. It calls for the use of eProcurement also for concessions. Members regret the fact that in 2010 only 13 % of EU enterprises used the internet to submit a proposal to public authorities through a public electronic tender system. They call on the Member States to encourage the participation of SMEs in eProcurement.

The Commission is called upon to: (i) submit the White Paper on interconnecting eProcurement capacity in the EU A strategy for eProcurement; (ii) introduce an implementation monitoring mechanism to review progress, barriers, corrective action, etc, in the context of the introduction of eProcurement in the Member States ; (iii) set an example to all by implementing the eProcurement system in all its organs.

eInvoicing: underlining the substantial benefits offered by eInvoicing, the report welcomes the eInvoicing Initiative, which aims to make eInvoicing the predominant method of invoicing in the EU by 2020. It stresses the importance of legal certainty, a clear technical environment and open and interoperable eInvoicing solutions, based on common legal requirements, business processes and technical standards in order to facilitate mass adoption. It invites industry and the European standardisation organisations to continue their efforts to promote convergence towards a common eInvoice data model.

Members underline the importance of one-stop-shops for VAT in order to facilitate cross-border e-commerce for SMEs and promote e-invoicing and welcome the new VAT rules as regards eInvoicing, which introduce equal treatment as between paper and eInvoices. They consider that consumers with limited access to the internet or none at all should not be left behind, and that consumers should always be allowed to receive paper invoices.

