Interoperability for a modern public sector

The electronic services of European public administrations need to interoperate to support citizens and businesses studying or working in other Member States, as well as to reduce costs and realise efficiencies for governments. A renewed EU programme for 2016-2020 proposes to continue support for interoperable e-government services, emphasising open data and the re-use of digital solutions.

Background

Digital interoperability refers to communication between devices, networks or services such that they can work effectively with each other. For more than 15 years, the EU has supported programmes encouraging the digitalisation and cross-border interoperability of public administrations at all levels; these programmes have aimed to contribute to economic growth and government efficiency and to reduce administrative burdens and costs for citizens and businesses, particularly those operating outside their home countries. The most recent programme, Interoperability solutions for European public administrations (ISA), ends in 2015, although an interim evaluation in 2012 indicated that Member States still had needs.

The Commission's proposal

In 2014, the Commission proposed a new programme on interoperability solutions for European public administration, businesses and citizens (ISA^2), to continue support for modernisation of public administrations in the EU and governments' digital services. The programme seeks to promote interoperability between modern public administrations; to facilitate effective cross-border or cross-sector interaction between administrations and with businesses and citizens (who may face barriers if services are incompatible in different Member States); and to develop and operate interoperability solutions supporting EU activities. The proposed programme introduces a new focus on the sharing and re-use of solutions by public administrations to reduce costs and increase efficiencies, and the exploitation of public open data. The initiative is in line with the recommendations of the Commission's Expert Group on Public Service Innovation that called for embracing disruptive technology and co-creation of innovative solutions. It presages the Commission's idea for a 'free flow of data' initiative that, while respecting personal data protection, could encourage access to public 'open data' and drive innovation. Activities in many EU policy areas (in particular the internal market, environment, customs, health and public procurement) could benefit from increased digital interoperability. The planned financial resources for this 2016-2020 programme amount to about €131 million, down from the €160 million available under the predecessor ISA programme.

Response to the proposal

In June 2015, the **European Council** endorsed action to encourage eGovernment; earlier, in 2013, it had called for the swift implementation of eGovernment services, the promotion of interoperability and the re-use of public sector information. In a 2012 resolution, the **European Parliament** had recognised the contribution of the ISA programme, calling for increased funding for interoperability solutions in the next programming period. During its examination of the 2014 ISA^2 proposal, Parliament put forward a number of amendments that notably highlighted, clarified or strengthened notions of social inclusion, the role of common frameworks (including recommendations), personal data protection and the role of regional and local governments as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

In the text informally agreed with **Council** in a September 2015 trilogue and approved by Coreper the same month, priorities to be considered in financing ISA^2 projects have also been clearly laid down. This text was endorsed by the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee (rapporteur Carlos Zorrinho, S&D, Portugal), the lead of three associated committees for this proposal; it is expected to be voted in first reading at the November 2015 plenary.

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