

eGovernment - On Your Computers, Get Set, Go!

By Jean-Marc Zahlen



Currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Estonia does not miss a chance to promote its digital revolution and to strengthen its position as a global digital leader for eGovernment operations.

Relying on a strong ICT infrastructure of decentralized nature (i.e. the “X-Road” – as technology is the primary enabler of eGovernment services) and a strong legal framework for security and protection of personal data, every Estonian citizen has a state issued digital identity which is used for online authentication and digital signature, allowing citizens and businesses to access a broad number of public services online from around the world. Upon the point that “E-stonia” has been labelled the world’s most advanced digital society by the magazine “Wired”².

The benefits of adopting a digital approach to public services are potentially huge in economic terms, as for instance, it is estimated that, in Estonia, near-universal adoption of electronic identification creates savings of 2% of annual GDP³! Thus, in the context of the Estonian Presidency of the Council, Europe finds itself confronted to a major opportunity to boost its competitiveness and to make interactions easier and more transparent between citizens, businesses and the government.

According to Bloomberg’s⁴, the only reason why more countries aren’t adopting Estonia’s eGovernment system is the absence of political will. This might now improve as a declaration on eGovernment (“The Tallin Declaration on eGovernment⁵”) has been signed by 32 countries of the European Union and the European Free Trade Area (including Luxembourg) at the ministerial meeting during the Estonian Presidency of 6 October 2017. Basically, the participating countries approved the vision laid out in the EU eGovernment Action Plan⁶ to «strive to be open, efficient and inclusive, providing borderless, interoperable, personalised, user-friendly, end-to-end digital public services to all citizens and businesses».

To reach this ambition, participating countries engage themselves to take steps to ensure citizens and businesses interact digitally with public administrations, to implement the “once-only” principle for key public services, to ensure that information security and privacy needs are met and to increase the uptake of national eID schemes following the European framework on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (eIDAS⁷). Furthermore, engagement encompasses steps to provide transparent, open and interoperable public services to allow EU citizens and businesses to better manage their personal data and to facilitate cross-border access to digital public services.

It might also be interesting to acknowledge that the declaration was signed for Luxembourg by Mr. Gilles Feith, Government CIO and director of the CTIE (Centre des technologies de l’information de l’État), which may underline the willingness of the government to push things forward. In one way or another, there’s not much time to lose to fulfil the taken commitment in order for efficient, digital eGovernment services “à la luxembourgeoise” to become an argument for competitiveness and economic promotion. Like the French President Mr. Macron and his Secretary of State for Digital Mr. Mahjoubi, French Prime minister Édouard Philippe has repeatedly reaffirmed that the digital transformation of public administrations remains a top priority for his government and recently announced on Twitter that “the Estonian reality is the French objective in terms of e-government by 2022⁸”. The race has started - ON YOUR COMPUTERS, GET SET, GO!

Jean-Marc Zahlen is Project Manager at FEDIL

1 <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/interoperability-services/x-road/>

2 <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/digital-estonia>

3 https://www.eu2017.ee/sites/default/files/2017-09/EU2017_Tallinn%20Digital%20Summit%20Background%20Paper_0.pdf

4 <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-03-04/envying-estonia-s-digital-government>

5 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/ministerial-declaration-egovernment-tallinn-declaration>

6 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/european-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020>

7 https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/eidas_regulation.pdf

8 <https://twitter.com/ephilippepm/status/880096407578963968>