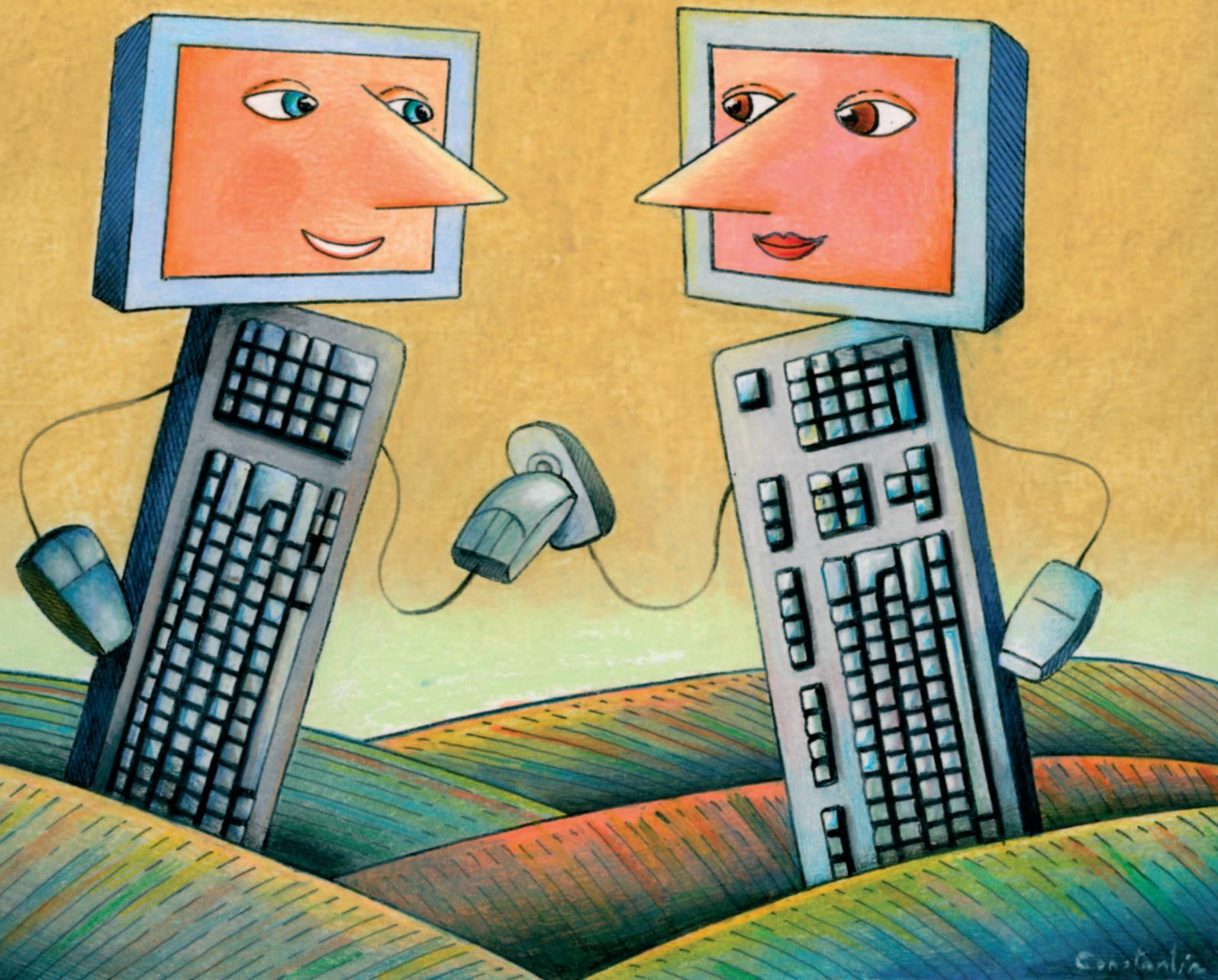




## IDABC and Beyond avoiding digital barriers





by Francisco GARCÍA MORÁN  
Director General for Informatics

At this halfway point in the IDABC programme, the 'IDABC and beyond' conference has been an ideal moment to take stock of what we have achieved so far and what we need to do to meet the challenges ahead.

The contribution of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU in organising this conference in the magnificent Brdo conference centre has been immense. We thank in particular the Minister of Public Administration, Dr. Gregor Virant, for his personal contribution to the conference and the insights he has given us. Slovenia's position as an innovative leader in the area of eGovernment services and as a role model for other countries cannot be understated.

The conference was organised with the aim of exchanging knowledge, ideas and future plans about eGovernment between policy-makers and high-level IT experts in public administration, universities and industry. It brought together more than 300 participants.

In the following pages of *Synergy* you will get a feel for the key discussions and main messages already emerging at this halfway stage in the IDABC programme. Further discussions will be taking place in the appropriate fora on translating these conclusions into concrete actions.

For my own part, I feel that the work already undertaken by IDABC has been very well appreciated. Some countries even regard IDABC as a 'trademark' and an important factor in stimulating progress at national level.

We are now living in a networked world where interoperability is the key to many things. In this new environment, the legislative initiatives developed in Brussels must take into account the full ICT impact of their implementation.

Governments want to cut red tape for citizens and business. This means more cooperation between administrations at various levels – local, national and European. ICT must ensure interoperability at all these levels. Decision-makers must be able to see the challenges, and ICT developers must know which interfaces to foresee and understand what changes can be accommodated. Critically we must avoid creating new electronic barriers.

IDABC is clearly one of the important instruments which can respond to the eGovernment needs of the EU and the Member States. eGovernment is not, however, just about technology. It is about leadership, organisation and service provision. Cross-border interoperability has to be organised. Strategic leadership has to be provided.

We need interoperability strategies that clearly indicate how to go from policy to implementation. Guidance must be given.

And it clearly makes sense to share infrastructure, particularly at the European level. The benefits are potentially enormous.

We should not forget that the second half of the IDABC programme still has to be completed. We will be giving our full commitment to this.

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# eGovernment Days IDABC and Beyond

Opening the eGovernment Days conference programme in Brdo, Slovenia, 11-13 February, Commission Vice-President Siim Kallas said that EU Member States had reached the point where they should move from e-Government to i-Government, based on interoperability. Cross-border and cross-organisational interoperability is a challenge today and the key to success, ensuring that no new digital barriers are created within the EU.



Siim Kallas,  
Commission Vice-President

'If the European Union is to be ready to face upcoming global challenges and help its citizens and businesses make the most out of them, then we must ensure that all our e-Government services turn into "i-Government" ones, which means into interoperable and user-centric services,' stressed the Vice-President and European Commissioner for Administrative Affairs Siim Kallas, opening the 'e-Government Days' conference organised by the Slovenian Presidency in cooperation with the European Commission.

The Commissioner highlighted the substantial progress made by most public administrations in Europe in developing and providing electronic public services. He had a word of praise for the hosts of the conference, the Slovenian Presidency, which together with Austria, Malta, Portugal, Denmark and Estonia, is now one of the leaders in the process of enhancing eServices delivery in Europe.

'But,' he cautioned, 'over the years, my generation has gradually become accustomed to interacting electronically with our administrations – and nowadays most of us, acting as citizens or as businesses, expect to be able to communicate with administrations electronically, in a simple and easy way. I believe that we have reached the point where it becomes necessary to move from "e-Government" to "i-Government".'

'The move to e-Government was driven more by the need of all Member States to ensure cost savings and increased efficiency,' he added. 'The move towards i-Government is much more driven by users' needs – by the need for flexibility and transparency coming from citizens and businesses across the EU.'

'In addition to this,' he stressed, 'we need to be able to deliver public services that are personalised to each user.'

## Pooling resources

The Commission is trying to improve the interoperability between Member States administrations – notably through programmes such as IDABC, Siim Kallas explained. This is definitely an area where the Commission and Member States need to pool resources to create common policies, a common framework and a solid governance structure, so as to support an interoperable and cost-efficient exchange of information across borders.

On the other hand, the Vice-President underlined that 'we constantly strive to improve the efficiency and transparency of information exchanges within the Commission in the framework of our e-Commission strategy, to the benefit of businesses, citizens, staff and our partner administrations in Member States.'

## Avoiding digital barriers

The Vice-President concluded that, from past experience, it is evident that more ICT is not necessarily better ICT: sometimes less is better. Real progress in this field means not creating isolated systems that can barely talk to one other. It also means not developing new systems when suitable ones already exist.

Less is also often better in the case of public administrations. In particular, they should stop asking users to provide information that they have already provided. 'We should streamline administrations and rethink completely how Governments interact with citizens and businesses. Integrated, interoperable and transformed governments are better, i-Governments are better.' ■

“ Europe has removed its internal borders;  
let's now remove its electronic barriers. ”



The Slovenian Government hosted the IDABC conference at the impressive **Brdo Conference centre**

## The Slovenian path to eGovernment

Slovenia has emerged as one of the most progressive adopters of eGovernment in the European Union and is setting the example in many areas for others to follow.

‘Slovenia is a story about how to make public authorities and government as simple and accessible as possible to both business and the general public. In this respect we believe that the development of eGovernment services in our country has been very successful,’ says Dr. Gregor Virant, Slovenia’s Minister of Public Administration, who has been one of the driving forces behind his country’s implementation of a programme of high-quality eServices.

Indeed, since the adoption of the 2002 eEurope Action Plan, Slovenia has risen in the European Commission’s eServices ‘league table’ from 15<sup>th</sup> position in 2004 to 7<sup>th</sup> place in 2006 and 2<sup>nd</sup> position in 2007, with only Austria ahead in terms of the most developed Internet-based administrative services.

### Single point of access

The Republic of Slovenia’s State portal has become, in a relatively short space of time, the single access point

for business and individuals to a full range of public administration information and electronic services.

‘Our aim has been to connect all state and public administrative bodies that are directly involved in the process of providing eServices for citizens and companies to the communication network of state bodies. And our information services are provided in a friendly and simple way in the form of “life events”,’ Dr. Virant explains.

‘A particular achievement has been the removal of the old style tax declaration obligation. We have reduced this burden for thousands of citizens.’

Indeed in Slovenia various types of information can be accessed at eGovernment portals. Many services are accessible via the Internet: tax returns, order documents, enrolment of children in school, place of residence and company establishment – all can be set up on-line in Slovenia.



**Dr. Gregor Virant**, Slovenia's Minister of Public Administration, has been one of the driving forces behind his country's implementation of a programme of high-quality eServices.

## Development

'It is very difficult to determine the real beginning of eGovernment in Slovenia,' Dr. Virant explains. 'Between 2001 and 2004 our Parliament passed the Electronic Commerce and Electronic Signature Act, followed by the Strategy of eCommerce in Public Administration. This was followed by the creation of an agency for issuing the digital certificates SIGEN-CA and SIGOV-CA.'

Indeed the country's first State portal was established in 2001, when users could for the first time access electronic services and obtain, for example, extracts from the register of births, marriages and deaths. In 2006 Slovenia adopted an eGovernment strategy for the period 2006-2010. This provides the framework and sets out goals for further realisation of new and already established eGovernment activities with emphasis on user satisfaction, rationalisation of administrative business, and contemporary electronic services. The overarching aim is to raise the quality of life for citizens and provide a friendlier relationship between the administration and the end-users.

## One-stop shop

'Companies are very significant customers for us,' says Dr. Virant. 'They have daily "eContact", particularly in relation to pension funds, employment issues, etc., while citizens tend to only have dealings once or twice a year when they have problems.'

'We have a one-stop-shop portal for business which allows online delivery of a range of services. Companies can be registered at this one-stop-shop very quickly, at no cost and in a simple way. This is a model of how eGovernment should function,' he emphasises. 'It also represents a sophisticated integration of the back office processes.'

## European eServices - setting an example

The Slovenian Minister stresses the importance of developing eServices at European level and points to a number of initiatives taken by his country.

Slovenia is already developing the first pan-European eService with a pilot project relating to temporary residence registration, and to setting up a one-person company over the Internet. Austria, Estonia, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia have come together to develop the possibility of delivering such services from one country to another.

'In our pilot programme, a citizen of Estonia would be able, under certain conditions, to register a company in Slovenia. Part of the pilot is in a real environment and part in a test environment,' Dr. Virant explains. 'We believe this could be a "snowball" pilot project. When it succeeds, other countries will join us. We already have 300 participants from all EU countries. It is clear to us that Pan European services are technologically viable, and we have shown that they can work from an administrative and organisational point of view.'

## Contribution of IDABC

In developing pan-European eServices, Dr. Virant believes that IDABC has played an important role and will have an important contribution to make in the future.

IDABC contributes guidelines, standards and good practice in this area. As discussed at the conference, there are still key areas such as eID and eSignatures, where IDABC is helping facilitate the development of solutions that are essential for the overall development of pan-European eGovernment services.

As a country Slovenia aims to be one of Europe's leaders in the implementation of cross-border eServices. ■



# IDABC lays the foundations of an eGovernment ecosystem

Since its launch as the IDA in 1995, IDABC has become a key and highly valued element in the process of developing interoperable eServices across the European Union.

The Commission programme which is today known as IDABC started in a very modest way in 1995 as a project for the interchange of data between administrations – IDA – and was limited to projects in the field of telematic interchange of data between administrations with a view to facilitating cooperation between them.

The launch of the second phase, IDA II, saw a change of focus in the direction of creating community projects to link together systems in the European Commission with those in Member States. The overriding aim was to establish operational, interoperable trans-European telematic networks between the national administrations. This phase also saw the introduction of horizontal actions and measures. Priority was given to ensuring that the benefits of the programme are enjoyed by businesses and citizens as well.

With the introduction of IDABC, the strategic concept was further broadened. Its role became to identify, support and promote the development and establishment of pan-European eGovernment services.

The foundation stone of this strategy was the development of the underlying interoperable telematic networks across Europe. The instrument for achieving this was a series of projects of common interest (PCIs) – projects providing ICT support to the implementation of EU legislation – and horizontal measures (HMs) relating to pan-European eGovernment services, infrastructure services, the dissemination of good practices, etc.

## Results to date

Addressing the eGovernment Services Conference, Karel De Vriendt, Head of the IDABC Unit in the European Commission, highlighted the number of substantial achievements of the IDABC programme, referring both to a series of projects that have been successfully implemented and to those currently in development.

He cited the Commission's 'Your Europe' portal which offers unique services to business and citizens, providing a range of information, country by country, on the requirements for working, studying, and setting up a company in another EU country. All information for this service is collected via Member States and translated into major languages, with links to other relevant Internet portals.

IDABC has also helped develop the 'IPM - Interactive Policy Making' portal. This site permits online interactive consultation on policy and impact analysis of new legislation. It has proven to be a rapid and effective mechanism for harvesting the views of stakeholders and citizens on a wide range of issues. With the launch of major initiatives, such as the Services Directive, its importance is growing as a tool for the impact analysis of new legislation.

Other successful project implementations include PLOTEUS, a European portal on learning opportunities throughout Europe\*, and Health EU\*\*, a portal on health-related activities at the EU and national levels.

An important Internal Market Information system (IMI) is under development and will go live in 2008.

Other examples of projects include:

- **AMIS-QUOTA** – management of tariff quotas (agriculture);
- **CAP-IDIM** – monitoring of the implementation of rural development programmes;
- **R&TTE 1-SN** – notification on radio/telecoms equipment (mutual recognition);
- **CPCS** – exchange of information on actions against rogue traders (consumer protection);
- **TRACES** – computerisation of veterinary importation procedures.

\* <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/portal/home.jsp>

\*\* [http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/index_en.htm)



Karel De Vriendt

## Back Office interconnections

In many sectors important work is underway in devising appropriate methods for interconnecting Member States' back-office systems. Key work has been undertaken in the development of infrastructure services and re-usable components:

- The **s-TESTA network** (a secure virtual private network connecting all national administrative networks and the EU institutions) is used in areas covering energy and transport, environment, health and consumer protection, trade, fisheries, justice and security;
- **PKI services:** for pan-European eGovernment projects, providing certificates to closed user groups;
- **CIRCABC:** used by the Commission and by more than 50 other administrations to support collaboration between the Member States and the EU institutions.

## Final two years

With two years to go under the present programme, there are still some 15 PCIs and 20 HMs under way. Important pilot projects are currently in progress on collaboration and re-use in the areas of semantic interoperability and open source (see SEMIC.eu on page 12).

Further actions are planned in the area of electronic signatures, in line with the Commission's action plan announced in the 'Single Market Review' of November 2007.

## Developing cooperation

'And the key to this work,' Karel De Vriendt stressed, 'is the development of a range of expert groups of national specialists who bring their skills and experience to the European table. They cover areas such as interoperability, networks, security, eIdentity, eSignature, semantic interoperability, open source, etc.'

In order to support these networks IDABC has developed, together with the Information Society and Media Directorate General, the ePractice web portal as a leading-edge information and networking tool. Other key areas of work in progress are the European Interoperability Framework and the promotion of open document exchange formats.

'There is still a lot more to do but interim evaluations so far are very positive and point to the high relevance of IDABC's work programme,' Karel De Vriendt concluded. 'At the end of the day we are aiming to create an eGovernment ecosystem. Through IDABC we are providing tools, services and guidelines and a common framework to make this possible.'



# Large-Scale Pilots show the way forward

The problem areas of electronic identity – eID – and panEuropean online public procurement are being tackled at European level by two proposed Large-scale Pilot projects supported under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) and in particular the ICT Policy Support Programme managed by DG INFSO.

In the areas of electronic identity and online public procurement, many initiatives have been launched at national level to develop solutions. Bringing these sometimes divergent approaches into line and making them interoperable at European level is the focus of a series of Large-scale Pilots (LSP) being launched with the support of the European Commission.

David Broster, Head of Unit, eGovernment and CIP Operations in DG Information Society and Media explains that the proposed LSP's represent in many ways a new approach to developing cross-border interoperable solutions for complex areas where many initiatives are already underway.

‘We face a situation where some countries have been spending billions whilst others are just starting. The general approach of the Large-scale Pilots is not to sweep away national solutions and the good work already undertaken, but to make them interoperable.’ ‘National solutions will not be replaced, instead they will be aligned with common European standards and then linked together.’

**‘With the LSP's we are essentially building on and leveraging what Member States are doing anyway.’**

[ David Broster ]

‘The Commission's approach is very pragmatic,’ he explains. ‘Though we call these projects “pilots” in fact they are much more than that. What we are developing is a “process” – a methodology for working with existing approaches and trying to find a common way forward which builds on what is already being done.’

‘As the Commission we see our role more in terms of providing the “cement” that will join together all these approaches into a coherent whole which will provide the

interoperability we are seeking and provide a solution to “legacy” issues.’

‘Indeed, the STORK and PEPPOL large-scale pilots are a response from the Commission to proposals put forward by Member States (MS) themselves. With the LSP's we are essentially building on and leveraging what Member States are doing anyway,’ David Broster stresses.

## Avoiding divergent solutions

As part of this approach, the Commission insists on a minimum of 6 Member States taking part. Also to ensure that other Member States do not initiate their own divergent solutions, a ‘reference group’ of other potential future partners has to be established to keep everyone in the loop. The projects will be supported for a maximum of three years including at least one year with the project running operationally.

## STORK and eID

The STORK (Secure idenTity AcrOss Borders LinKed) LSP consortium is trying to respond to the challenge around eID interoperability and find a solution which can provide cross-border recognition of eID and authentication across Europe.

The STORK project encompasses 13 Member States plus Iceland and has 29 participants in total. Its end-goal is to define and test common specifications for an overall cross-border architecture which is acceptable to all Member States and industrial interests.

‘There are currently different trends across Europe. Belgium, Portugal and others favour an eID smart card. The Austria and Slovenia approach is based on virtual identification. The Anglo-Saxon model is based on other identification tools such as the passport,’ explains Frank Leyman of the Belgian consortium member, FEDICT.



‘What we aim to achieve is the implementation of an EU wide interoperable system for recognition of eID and authentication that will enable business, citizens and government employees to use their national electronic identities in any Member State.’

‘The solutions will need to be usable with as many technologies as possible and be open and scalable.’

[ Frank Leyman ]

‘A citizen from country A who has an eID should be able to make a tax declaration in country B or access local social security services elsewhere as well as his pension rights. Similarly, a business should be capable of replying to a tender in country B or dealing with VAT from country C.’

Leyman stresses that the solutions they are looking for will need to be usable with as many technologies as possible and be open and scalable. A key strategic issue is to keep non-participating countries informed about developments on a continuing basis. Indeed some countries may be interested in participating at a later date and it is important that the direction they take is in tune with the rest. The consortium will provide ‘non members’ with regular status reports via EU meetings. They will have the opportunity to provide feedback, comments and input.

The project involves close collaboration with the private sector. It will have a live website to allow everyone involved, directly or indirectly, to follow the work.

## PEPPOL

A further important CIP large-scale project currently under negotiation with the Commission is PEPPOL which is focused on pan-European Public Procurement Online. With the participation of Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Norway and the UK, the PEPPOL consortium has good representation across Europe. Members of the ‘reference group’ could

take advantage of the work done by the consortium at a later stage.

‘Governments are the largest buyers in the EU. Larger than any multinational corporation. But the ability of government to handle key processes is falling behind major industries,’ explains Peter Sonntagbauer of Austria’s Federal Computing Center.

‘Despite accounting for 16% of the EU’s GDP, national governments are lagging behind major industries in the way they handle supplier processes such as tenders, orders, delivery notes, catalogues, invoices, or payments.’

‘The ability of government to handle key processes is falling behind major industries.’

[ Peter Sonntagbauer ]

Following the 2005 Manchester ministerial declaration, initiatives in the procurement area involving the private sector, CEN (European Committee for Standardization), and the Commission have reached critical mass. PEPPOL sets out to coordinate this work and get all the initiatives together so that they all march in the same direction.

The broad vision is that any company in the EU can communicate electronically with any EU governmental institution over procurement. The strategy, Sonntagbauer stresses, is not to sweep away national solution but to make the national solutions interoperable. Pilots will be implemented which demonstrate the interoperability of national solutions. The workplan is spread over three years with an operational pilot scheduled for 2011.

The LSP will focus on eSignatures, Virtual Company Dossier, eCatalog, eOrdering, eInvoicing, Consortium Management, Awareness Training and Consensus building, Solutions Architecture Design and Validation. ■

## Security & infrastructure: progress is being made on eID and eSignatures but many legal issues have to be resolved

'The pillars for electronic communication and interaction are security and trust,' pointed out the Chair of the parallel session on Security and Infrastructure, Peter Kustor, Head of eGovernment, Federal Chancellery, Austria.

'Looking back to the "signposts" paper of 2005 and Manchester and the eGovernment action plan, it is clear that eID and eSignatures are clearly highlighted as key enablers for eGovernment. But the paradox we face is that despite this cross-border interoperability of eSignatures and eID have not been priority issues for Member States. They are still being dealt with on a national and not European level.'

'And the problem here is not primarily a technical one,' he said. 'The solutions are indeed out there. The stumbling blocks are principally legal and organisational problems.'

The parallel session looked at the issues of the mutual recognition of signatures, eID interoperability and cross-border interoperability and infrastructure services.

Regarding eSignatures, it is evident that the solutions being implemented are predominantly PKI-based. The sector is indeed governed by the eSignatures Directive but, Peter Kustor pointed out, the national exceptions permitted are too wide.

'In practice the interpretation is quite extensive and this is leading to interoperability problems,' he said.

A lot of discussion centred on the detailed study undertaken by the Commission: the 'Preliminary study on the mutual recognition of eSignatures for eGovernment applications' which highlights the challenges and presents possible routes for finding solutions.



**Peter Kustor:** "The solutions are indeed out there. The stumbling blocks are principally legal and organisational problems."

One of the main problem areas is that of signature validation. One approach is to establish a list of certification service providers at EU level. Another approach is the creation of a federated authority to set up a validation platform.

'The main issues here are first and foremost legal issues and not technical ones. These have to be sorted out first,' Peter Kustor said.

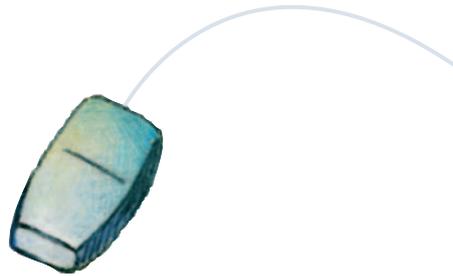
Liability questions arise when we talk about a qualified certificate. Can I rely on the gateway or the validation

authority? Or does it have no legal relevance. Just where does the liability lie in these systems? 'We have a picture for the technical solution, but there are some important legal questions to be sorted out.' The discussion on eID concluded that it is not harmonisation we should be aiming at, but the interoperability of the national solutions. Indeed progress is well advanced and eID cards are already in process in 21 countries with 7 already issued and 14 planned.

The Commission's study on eID discussed one possible approach involving pan-European Proxy Service Providers (PEPS), and also a second middleware approach.

The solution may well be found through the STORK eID Large-scale Project which will look at both approaches. Peter Kustor said that IDABC has a strong role to play in finding the appropriate solutions and he concluded that a great contribution has been made through the technical studies.

It was clear from the discussion in the Parallel Session that IDABC can provide further added value. A new study on legal issues surrounding eID will soon be forthcoming. ■



## European eGovernment Services

many valuable lessons learned through IDABC projects



The second parallel session took a look at the development of eGovernment services and also focused on the development of the European Interoperability framework and its future direction.

Under the IDABC programme there have been several Projects of Common Interest (PCI) involving cross-border electronic services. Three cases were presented at the conference:

- **The consumer protection system CPCS** which exchanges information on rogue traders;
- **EESSI** which focuses on the electronic exchange of social security information (replacing 10 million forms);
- **The Internal Market Information system (IMI)** for the implementation of Single Market legislation.

Chair of the parallel session, Karl Mårten Karlsson of the Strategic Development Office of VERVA, the Swedish Administrative Development Agency, highlighted the valuable lessons that have been learned through the IDABC programme about the development of eGovernment services at EU level.

'What we have learned is that ICT is now an integral component in the implementation of EU legislation. The issue of reusability is also very important and we can and must learn from each other and not reinvent wheels. We should use existing solutions where possible.'

The future challenges, Gavino Murgia of IDABC pointed out, lie in giving appropriate support to the implementation of Community policies. Careful analysis of the ICT implications at the impact assessment phase

is required before legislation is adopted. During the phasing-in stage guidance is required on how to achieve interoperability. This should be supported by exchange of good practices. After legislation enters into force, operational infrastructure services must be provided and we must ensure ICT governance.

### Services Directive

The implementation of the Services Directive was highlighted as a case in point where the ICT aspects should have been developed sooner. The Directive's three-year implementation period ends in December 2009 and involves a complex series of actions by Member States including the creation of points of single contact – the one-stop shop to centralise cross border information and services for users.

All Member States are currently trying to implement the Directive and are battling with electronic barriers. The challenge is Article 8 of the Directive which relates to electronic processes for completing formalities and procedures. There is also an obligation to promote administrative simplification (Art. 5) and not impose further barriers for other EU citizens.

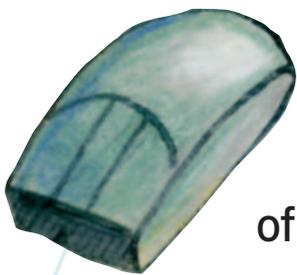
The preliminary results of a stocktaking study on the implementation of Article 8 show that there has been a low take-up of electronic means in Member States. There are still a number of remaining issues concerning interoperability and there are indeed a lot of elements that have to be put in place before we can use electronic means. The process needs to be started early. It is by no means a simple task.

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There was in-depth discussion in this parallel session on the future shape of the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) – the guide to Member States for the delivery of cross-border, cross-sector public eServices. The EIF was first issued in 2004 and is currently being revised. Discussions on the final form of the new EIF are ongoing with Member States. Interoperability is clearly needed between EIF and the different National Interoperability Frameworks (NIF) and the launch of an Observatory is proposed with the aim of improving awareness on NIF's, speeding up their establishment and avoiding barriers between EIF and NIF's, IDABC's Serge Novaretti explained.

The new EIF, it is recognised, will facilitate interoperability which will in turn facilitate the cross-border and cross-sector delivery of public services. The publication of a new version is anticipated before summer 2008. ■



## Collaborative Platforms: interoperable solutions through the organised pooling of resources and experience

The parallel session on collaborative platforms looked at different ways in which it is possible through cooperation to harmonise interoperability approaches and share resources between Member States and the EU.

The session discussed three general models for collaborative platforms. The first model consists of the collaborative effort by different departments of the Commission. An excellent example of this is the ePractice.eu web portal, which brings together the e-Government Community.

The second model discussed focuses on the creation of repositories for publicly available (Open Source) software. OSOR.EU – the Open Source Observatory & Repository, for example, is a Commission project to facilitate the sharing and re-use of Open Source code and solutions among public administrations across Europe. Scheduled to go

online in June 2008, OSOR will also provide a platform for cross-border OSS (Open Source Software) collaboration and provide technical, organisational and legal support to collaborative projects. OSOR will compliment and work in parallel with national repositories, such as Slovenia's OSS repository and competence centre (COKS), in order to provide pan-European visibility for their content.

Interoperability also requires the establishment of the CAM (Common Assessment Methods) relating to information. There is a need for a platform to promote agreement on standards and methodologies and to share work at the European level, as with the CAMSS (Common Assessment Methods for Standards and Specifications) project.

The third type is a more specialised model focusing on one of the areas of interoperability, the semantic field.

In November 2007, IDABC launched the SEMIC.EU microsite, with the aim of providing an online presence to develop expert communities which share information and experience on semantic interoperability among European public administrations. This microsite was further enhanced in March 2008 with increased functionality for users, the provision of more information and a number of available assets.

SEMIC.EU is a continuation of the XML clearinghouse project and its objective is to promote the harmonisation of interoperability 'assets' between stakeholders and Member States and provide the basis for cross-border eGovernment services.

In particular the project seeks to promote the reuse of the syntactic (e.g. XML schemas) and semantic assets (e.g. ontologies) needed for semantic interoperability. The ultimate goal is seamless data exchange between countries with different administrative, technical and linguistic backgrounds. This requires analysis and solutions for the technical, semantic, and organisational dimensions of interoperability.

The electronic aspects of policy initiatives such as the Services Directive and the eProcurement Directive require work, not only on technical issues but also at the content level, with a view to resolving problems of language and

technical interface. SEMIC.EU will be a collaborative tool and the platform through which there will be the exchange of assets relating to semantic interoperability. The platform will provide methodologies and tools to improve the quality of data, share concepts and data models to improve interoperability, and make available code lists and mapping for specific domains.

A clearing process will be in place for good governance of the platform together with a Licensing and Quality policy to handle all legal and quality aspects of the published items, intellectual property rights policy, comprehensiveness of documentation, etc. Phase one of the platform will be launched in June 2008.

Chair of the session, Martin Hagen, Senator of Finance, Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, pointed to the important work such platforms do in the area of cross-border interoperability. He also highlighted the need for proper support and funding of common platforms at national and EU level.

'In the i2010 strategy, the goal for 2008 is to ensure the long-term financial and operational sustainability for sharing experience, infrastructures and services. In this respect there is still some way to go in respect to the refinancing of collaborative platforms,' he concluded.



Interoperability assets uploaded to SEMIC.EU are subject to a clearing process to safeguard standards.

# IDABC and Beyond: the future

With the IDABC programme coming to a close at the end of 2009, the Commission is already thinking about the follow-on programme. In the final session chaired by Director General García Morán, a high-level panel drew conclusions from the Conference and on the Commission's current thinking on the way forward.



Francisco García Morán

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'It is evident that by the end of the IDABC programme in 2009, tremendous progress will have been made in terms of the goals set by the Ministerial Declarations of Manchester and Lisbon, but the ultimate goals will not have been reached. It is a continuous process which must continue,' said Francisco Garcia Morán of the Commission's Directorate-General for Informatics, chairing a conference panel session on the future orientation of the IDABC programme. 'And above all, as IDABC has to provide the Member States with a forum to discuss existing and emerging topics and work together on solutions.'

The Commission's thinking on priorities for a future programme was outlined by Karel De Vriendt, Head of Unit for IDABC, who said that during 2008 there will be discussions in the IDABC management committee, with other Commission departments and also formal consultations with Member States. This will prepare the ground for a Commission proposal to the Council and to the European Parliament.

'What is clear from what we have learned at this conference and through the current IDABC programme is that individual Member States cannot solve cross-border interoperability problems on their own,' he said. 'Member

States all want to transform and modernise their public administrations. They need to redesign and improve their administrative processes, re-use information as much as possible and link up their systems, all with the aim of reducing administrative burdens and improving services to citizens and business.'

'What is clear from our discussions is that, unless these transformations are undertaken with an international and cross-border perspective, there is a risk that new electronic barriers may be created in cross-border interaction,' Mr De Vriendt continued. 'Problems cannot be solved by individual Member States. There is no such thing as "unilateral interoperability".'

Discussions during the conference indicated that the pressure for interoperability is being driven by the initiatives and legislation developed at European level, which increasingly require cross-border linking of national systems and/or the exchange of information between countries. In addition, there is a growing demand from users for pan-European services.

## Holistic approach

'There are lessons we have learned from our experience so far,' De Vriendt said. 'Our approach has to be "holistic" – we need a coherent and more focused strategy. And ICT considerations now have to be included in every EU policy initiative and not seen as an afterthought.'

Initial discussions within the PEGSCO management committee have already given priority to work on real-case problems and not theoretical ones. In the future, the work programme should be demand-driven. Solutions should focus on the sharing and the re-use of innovative national and sector solutions. New tools should only be developed when absolutely necessary. Concern has also been directed at ensuring the long term sustainability of these solutions and also of the ones initiated under other programmes.

'IDABC has already proved its value in helping develop guidelines, specifications and standards – a role which is well appreciated by Member States,' De Vriendt stressed. 'It is important that ICT-based cross-border interactions between European public administrations are embedded within a common interoperability framework, established by the Commission and Member States in cooperation.'

## Objectives

In the Commission's view, the key objectives of the new programme should be to facilitate cross-sector and cross-border interactions between European public administrations via:

- Development and evolution of common interoperability frameworks
- Assessment of ICT implications of EU legislation
- Common services
- Reusable generic tools
- Focus on sharing/re-use and exchange of good practices.

These must of course be coordinated with other programmes. There should be no overlap or duplication.

## Beneficiaries

'Not only will public administrations benefit from this, but the business community and the general public will also benefit indirectly via better services and fewer administrative burdens at a cross-border level,' De Vriendt explained. 'ICT-based cross border cooperation between Member State public administrations must work within a framework.'

When EC legislation comes into force, ICT needs must be taken into account and the new solutions anticipated. A good example is the Services Directive where the ICT work should ideally have started a couple of years earlier.

## Panel Discussion

During the lively panel discussion which followed, Martin Schallbruch, Chief Information Officer of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, said that IDABC has achieved good results and important goals. 'It has done brilliant work over the past years,' he said. 'It has done a good job in the area of cross-border interoperability.'



It has helped build up ICT infrastructures such as TESTA and has influenced ICT policy in areas such as open document format standards.'

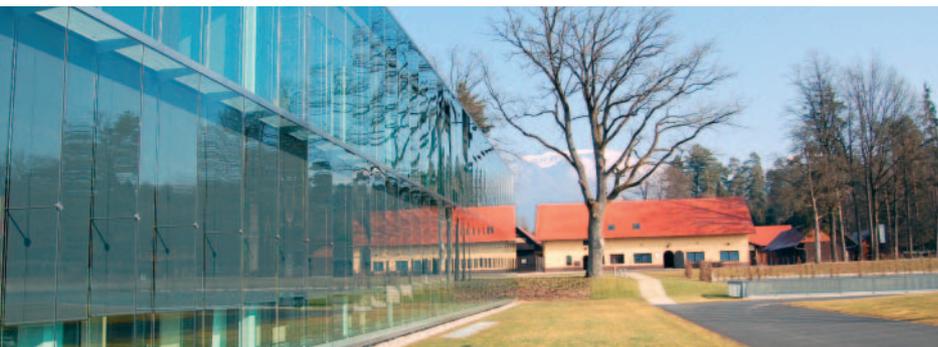
He highlighted the challenges facing public administrations due to the complexity of their work and its dependency on ICT. The complexity arises from the need to integrate different agencies at different governmental levels, he explained. There is also a growing need to integrate the ICT of the public sector with that of the private sector.

'The basic data for Governmental statistical services is being generated by the ERP systems of private companies, which are then aggregated at State level and used for services such as Eurostat. A further area of complexity is that of security. The dependency of public administrations on ICT has to be monitored carefully,' Schallbruch cautioned. 'It is a critical infrastructure for all Member States and the EU. And it is important to look at the ICT governance structure when we think about follow-on programmes.' He highlighted serious threats to the ICT infrastructure experienced in Estonia last year, when it was attacked every day.

'In Germany, we have set up a chief information officer (CIO) Council,' he explained. 'To incorporate proper governance, a lot of processes have to be redesigned. A similar approach is needed at the European level. The new IDABC programme,' he suggested, 'could be the core of a new IT governance model for Europe.'

Karel De Vriendt added that the Commission is currently looking at ways to give the CIOs in Member States a leading role in a new IT governance programme.

Lena Jönsson, Director-General of VERVA – the Swedish Administrative Development Agency – stressed the importance of creating better values for citizens and businesses. >>>



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Schallbruch agreed that customer centricity has to be at the top of the agenda, in particular eInclusion and high-impact services.

Graham Colclough, Vice-President of Capgemini, put the question: 'Would it matter if we got rid of IDABC? Do we need something like this?'

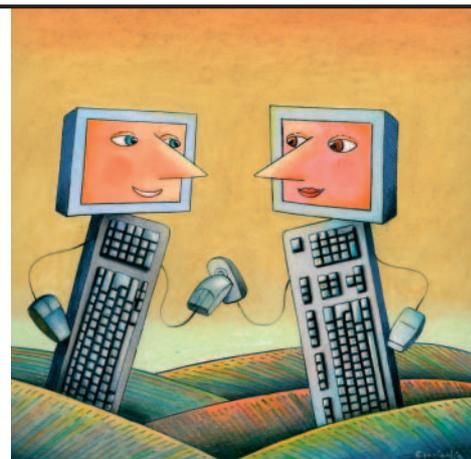
'Undoubtedly we do,' was his conclusion.

'But just how do you get 27 bodies to agree to do things in a similar way?' he questioned. The solution is to use the customer to drive the programme and show the way. 'We are generally too administration-centric in our thinking,' Colclough said.

He also stressed that industry participation is vital. 'But industry wants clarity,' he explained. 'You get this through collaboration and cooperation and by treating industry as a trusted party. The issue of intellectual property is exaggerated: 80 percent is common knowledge and can be shared, the other 20 percent is the problem. Industry wants to collaborate and make Europe a better place. It is excited about finding a single international solution to replace 27 ways of doing things.'

'We have heard many positive things about the IDABC programme during this conference,' said Director General Morán. 'Some speakers have even referred to IDABC becoming a "trademark", which is indicative of the useful role it plays. The work we have done in the past is clearly valued and we all know there is a lot of important work still to be done.'

'The current programme continues until 2009 and we are, as always, committed to effective delivery. Our overall philosophy is continuous improvement. We aim to lead by example. We will be judged on our delivery and our services.'



## SYNeRGY

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