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Position Paper

Comment on the new eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020

21 January 2016

OFE welcomes the [consultation](#) on a new eGovernment Action Plan for the period 2016-2020. As this consultation is about perceived user needs and priorities as seen by individual citizens, businesses and public administrations, the format of the consultation is not very well suited for OFE that is not conducting economic activities. Therefore, OFE took the liberty to complement our answer to the [questionnaire](#) with this position paper in which we want to express our support for the Commission's initiative, but also raise some concerns.

The Digital Single Market strategy describes eGovernment as a tool to support the modernisation of public administrations, to achieve cross-border interoperability and to facilitate interaction with the citizens. As focal points for future actions, the “once-only” principle, the promotion of eProcurement, the “single digital gateway” and the use of electronic documents are listed in the strategy document.

As this new eGovernment Action Plan will be the successor of a series of earlier action plans, it is important to look back and to evaluate if and how the previous action plans have had an impact at the level of individual Member States and, for cross-border aspects, at the level of the Union. From the roadmap published by the Commission, we understand that this will be covered in a Staff Working Document that will be published alongside the new Action Plan. But the midterm evaluation of the previous eGovernment already contains interesting suggestions that seem to be taken up by the Commission, such as focusing on a limited number of priority areas and to move away from a five-year, static action plan towards a rolling action plan that can take into account new policy priorities. Also, the mid-term evaluation identifies open data, the re-use of public sector information, the once-only principle and the involvement of citizens in the development of public services as new themes that deserve attention.

Based on the information made available via the roadmap published by the Commission, OFE wishes to make a few suggestions:

- Although certainly much still can be done to improve eGovernment in the Union, it can be wondered if the continuation of the past (eGovernment action plan and IDA(BC)/ISA⁽²⁾ programs) provides the most effective instruments to do so. Especially because the same problems (lack of interoperability across borders; no Union wide validity of eIdentification and eSignature; limited use of eProcurement; the “once-only” principle; the single access point – single digital gateway; lack of citizens involvement) keep coming back as justification for new action plans and actions. An in-depth review of the real needs of citizens and businesses is required – and while the ongoing consultation is exactly trying to do so, the outreach of this consultation is far too limited to give trustworthy results, as this consultation will only reach those that follow closely what happens in Brussels. The new online platform that the Commission is suggesting to discuss new ideas during the period covered by the action plan will have the same problem. One can also wonder if the priorities

as expressed via these plans and programs really match the political policies in the Member States.

- Looking to the underlying principles in the roadmap:
 - OFE fully supports the “once-only” principle. The principle is enshrined in law in some Member States, but seems very difficult to implement. We suggest the Commission to concentrate on technologies and tools that would facilitate the re-use of information over the borders of individual administrations while ensuring security and privacy. The issue of who owns the information (the government \diamond the citizen or the business) and who controls who can use the information needs to be tackled.
 - Open & transparent by default: we suggest that the Commission really takes the lead here (and leads also by example). The Commission may seek inspiration by for example the [Open Standard Principles in the UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles>) or the recognition in France that source code developed by public administrations should be accessible by the public (see <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/community/osor/news/france-parliament-source-code-should-be-made-public>). We also ask the Commission to continue the good work done via ePractice and now Joinup as a platform for the exchange of information and for the promotion of re-use of solutions that have proven to work elsewhere.
- Looking to the actions that are already suggested in the roadmap document:
 - The idea of a “single digital gateway” is not new: over the last ten years, the idea has many times been taken up by administrations at all levels, resulting in thousands of such single entry points – and making search engines the default single entry points. In what will this new priority differ from all previous attempts?
 - In the past, already many projects around the interoperability of eID and eSignature systems in use in various Member States have demonstrated the technical feasibility of such interoperability. The eIDAS Regulation and its implementing acts provide a legal framework for such interoperability. The phase of pilot-projects should be over now and Member States should implement the existing legislation. The Commission should support Member States who do so and also promote close cooperation between administrations and economic actors (banks, eCommerce shops, etc.) who are struggling with the same problems – but also often have developed workable solutions that are used by millions every day.
- Furthermore, OFE welcomes the close cooperation between the Commission services responsible for the eGovernment plan, the ISA² program and ICT standardisation. We suggest that the set of documents maintained by the ISA² program (European Interoperability Strategy, European Interoperability Framework and European Interoperability Architecture) should be “promoted” from Commission document towards documents formally subscribed by the Member States. The Commission should also

continue to support the MSP and the development and maintenance of a list of technical specifications developed by fora and consortia that can be used in the procurement of ICT systems while recognising the right of individual administrations (or groups of administrations that work together) to select and impose interoperability standards / technical specifications within the context of an ICT architecture.

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