

*Conference*

**E-GOVERNANCE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL**

**New Forms of Citizen Participation  
and  
Democratic Decision-Making**

**Antwerp, 28 November 2001**



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## Editorial

This volume is the result of the e-governance **conference CEMR organised on 28 November 2001 with the support of the city of Antwerp**. It links the work done on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) with our thinking on new forms of political participation at local level. Experts from the CEMR information society committee ELANET moderated the different sessions that gathered around 200 participants, politicians, senior local government officials, academics and ICT experts.

When we speak of "e-government" we usually discuss the modernisation of local and regional administrations. This involves the digital treatment of local data (back office); the digital links with other public sector services (middle office); or (front office) web services where citizens and businesses can access information round the clock and perform routine administrative tasks. In Antwerp we focussed instead on "**e-governance**", **the impact of ICT on the "Council Office"**, to support better, interactive policy-making.

Falling voter turnout and problems of legitimacy beset all levels of public decision-making. Electronic voting, e-mail addresses for politicians or building a municipal Internet website will not themselves fundamentally change the political process, or do away with the fall in voter turn-out or resolve **problems of legitimacy**. Actually, local government often fares better than other spheres of decision-making in these respects. Many regional/local governments have long started to react to such problems by introducing more active modes of citizen participation and involvement. Sustainable Local Agenda 21 or similar modes of strategic planning and citizen participation all have in common that they develop participative processes which commit citizens and stakeholders to the outcome. They commit citizens and stakeholders to the very policies and processes they helped plan and implement. **New information and communication technologies can act as a tool** to support consultation and provide rapid response mechanisms. They can create more immediacy between politicians and the electorate, ensure transparency and clarity in the decision-making process.

Mrs Leona Detiège, Mayor of Antwerp, presented **conclusions** the following day at the Ministerial conference organised by the European Commission, in Brussels. At the close of this e-government assessment, Commissioner Liikanen rightfully stressed the driving role of local government for the more general aspects of the eEurope initiative, while **the final declaration of the European IT Ministers** (enclosed) echoed some of the key points raised in Antwerp.

At the outset of the Antwerp conference the "**Introductory statements**" listed some of these points that were further analysed in the subsequent sessions. Under the theme "**Municipality as an e-community**" are gathered contributions dealing with the capacity of new technologies to fulfil citizens' requests for information and services on first contact. There should be a choice of service channels for the citizens, but these must meet

common standards to allow economies of scale in procurement whilst still allowing local ownership of information and services.

**Case studies** on "Increased accountability and transparency in the public sector and vertical integration" in Workshop I came from the UK local government development agency **IDeA**, **Münster** (D) **Szczecin** (PI), the regional network **eris@** and **Esslingen** (D). New technology should serve to enhance local/regional government accountability and transparency, while vertical integration between spheres of public administration should make information and services easily accessible and more relevant to the citizen. All the more so as typically a citizen will perform 70% of his administrative acts and information demands at local level.

Workshop II on "Effective consultation and citizen involvement" presented a **Swedish association study** on local/regional government Internet presence. **Examples from Bollnäs** (S), **Hertford** (UK), **Helsinki** (SU) and **Delft** (NL) showed how with the support of ICT governance can be organised as a process of broader consultation and participation resulting in mutually agreed goals and common commitments. The Internet more than any other ICT tool provides politicians with a possibility of communicating directly without intermediaries with the citizens.

The concluding roundtable on "**Political responsibility**" called on local and regional government politicians to show leadership in organising technologically mediated innovation in political practice that enhances citizen involvement and avoids exclusion. Market mechanisms alone will not deliver the required concepts and products. All spheres of government must support new ventures in democracy by encouraging experimentation, by funding research and development, as well as by changing political and administrative routines, wherever this may be required.

Under the **patronage of the Belgian Presidency**, the e-governance conference was generously hosted by the City of Antwerp, itself an outstanding European example of ICT development. Our special thanks also go to Bruno Peeters, who inspired much of the thinking behind the conference, to Anne-Marie Vastesaegeer from the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities and to my colleague Jani Taivalantti and the city of Antwerp officers who ensured a successful organisation of this event.

Brussels 20 December 2001

Walter Wenzel  
Director General of CEMR

## OPENING SESSION

- **Mr. Tuur van Wallendael**, City of Antwerp
- **Mr. Dirk De Bot**, The Belgian Presidency of the EU
- **Mr. Roger Sobry**, Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities
- **Mr. Walter Wenzel**, Council of European Municipalities and Regions and its Information Society network ELANET

Chairman: **Mr. Bruno Peeters** (Belgium)



The opening session of the conference featured four speeches:

**Mr. Tuur van Wallendael** (Alderman, City of Antwerp) thanked the Belgian Presidency for providing its patronage for the conference as well as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions for organising the event in cooperation with Antwerp. He then presented the main strategic targets for the Information Society development in Antwerp: efficient service-provision to citizens and the inclusiveness of the Information Society.

The first policy line has been facilitated by the establishment of Telepolis, the telematic centre of the City of Antwerp. The second step was taken in 1994 with the introduction of "the Metropolitan Area Network for Antwerp". These two instruments have enabled the City of Antwerp to develop deconcentrated services to all its citizens as well as to improve the internal communication flows within the public authority.

The inclusiveness of the Information Society in Antwerp has been developed by the provision of public facilities for citizens to access the Internet. In Antwerp people are not expected to own computers to access the Internet. In addition, special courses have been organised for the elderly and unemployed people to use the Internet effectively.

These kinds of tools are instruments to organise citizen participation in the City of Antwerp. Citizens become committed to local affairs, if public authorities encourage them and provide them with opportunities to use information and communication technologies in interesting and useful ways. Mr. van Wallendael concluded his presentation by saying that - despite of the success story in Antwerp - one model cannot suit all circumstances and all local authorities. Everybody should plan their own customised way forward.

**Mr. Dirk De Bot** (Advisor, FedICT), speaking on behalf of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, highlighted the Belgian global approach to e-government where Federal Government is focusing on the provision of a solid framework to enable cooperation between different levels of government, integrate back office processes and enable secure authentication. These have been the main areas of emphasis also in the context of the EU Presidency.

Mr. De Bot reflected upon the change of thinking brought about by e-government: citizens demand better services from public administrations, which should now act as service-providers to citizens - their clients - instead of functioning purely on the basis of their own internal logic. In these new circumstances government should provide its services faster, openly, more user-friendly and with less contacts. In parallel, traditional channels of service-delivery should be maintained with the same costs to citizens as the electronic ones.

The guiding principles for e-government development in Belgium have been the following:

- customers demand a complete solution for their problems - they are not interested in the different administrations and/or authorities that are involved;
- data that are already available somewhere in government should not be asked over and over again;
- administrations and authorities exchange as much as possible and electronically all available data;
- administrative formalities are limited to the strict minimum.

In order to fulfil these points, e-government requires cooperation between all government levels, change of mindsets to become more customer-centric, re-engineering of processes, changes of legal environment, technical building blocks and changes in information management.

Mr. De Bot concluded by saying that ICT can be a powerful tool for good governance and can contribute to greater participation in democratic activities through consultation, referenda and participation in decision-making. Key principles for good e-governance are openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. However, the time might not be right for the full deployment of e-voting, as there are some unsolved problems regarding trust and confidence of the citizens and identification and authentication of the voters.

**Mr. Roger Sobry** (Alderman, City of Chaudfontaine), representing the Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities and its regional associations, considered that in municipalities with variable social, geographic and demographic architecture it is important to add new technologies into the range of modes of interaction between the elected and the citizens. Furthermore, it is necessary to convince both of them on the inherent validity of this scheme and to ensure the future correctness of the political debate despite of the easiness of Internet use. On the other hand, the local dimension should be guaranteed in the digital era: citizens should feel at home when accessing their municipal homepage.

In Belgium the objective has been to create one stop shops from where the citizens could perform all administrative acts with the public administration. However, this scheme might not abolish the undesired transfer of the tasks belonging to the central administration towards decentralised administrations. Within the pretext of proximity with the citizen, the local level might need to take the additional responsibility of explaining the tools used, as most likely the administrative forms will not be as self-explanatory as their creators might wish them to be.

New technologies bring about enormous conveniences and possibilities from the technical point of view. Despite of this fact, the gap between Internet users and the rest of the population should be avoided. In this context, the work done by the Wallonian Region, in assuring minimum web presence for all municipalities, as well as the television distributor ALE-Teledis in Liège, in aiming at providing the possibility for all its subscribers to access Internet through television, are efforts worth mentioning.

Internet offers new perspectives for people to express their opinions, also beyond the political life. More and more websites have organised feedback mechanisms for their users of services and products. How should we seize this opportunity to reactivate the political debate? How should we assure that the web content represents people's will? How should we elevate the debate into the fundamental stakes of the society? The combination of democratic requirements with new technologies is a challenge that we should address, also at the local level.

**Mr. Walter Wenzel** (Director General, Council of European Municipalities and Regions) introduced the conference theme, which stands at the crossroads of two strands of CEMR activities: **the work done by its Information Society network ELANET, on one hand, and CEMR's input in the discussions on European governance, on the other hand.**

The recent Swedish Association study (distributed to participants) set the scene for the conference discussions showing that political participation via the Internet is already a reality in Sweden. However, there remains a general need to rethink our political processes to strengthen their legitimacy for the citizen and to create participatory process that allow citizens to sense of being consulted, of influencing a decision-making process to whose outcome they will feel committed. Today's governance debate seeks to address these kinds of issues. Electronic means and ICT are instruments that may further support and extend such practices.

E-governance is therefore more than e-government or e-democracy. It focuses more on what could be called the Council office and its Executive, concentrating on interactions between citizens, community actors and stakeholders and their locally elected politicians. It is about changing how citizens relate to local and regional government. In this context, Mr. Prodi's White Book on good governance presented the criteria that should be applicable at all levels of government and governance in Europe: transparency and openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness; and coherence.

Mr. Wenzel reflected upon the possibility of distinguishing the different stages of decision-making: consultation, decision, implementation. In this framework, citizen participation would be a key element during the first phase, consultation, and the last one, implementation. Decision - in the narrow sense - would be properly reserved to those that have been elected to assume the political responsibility and who after extensive consultation will have to arbitrate between different options emerging.

Different rules might need to apply at different stages of consultation. Politicians and political parties need to assume fully their leadership role in developing e-governance, guarding against ill-conceived ICT applications, meeting the challenges and opportunities that ICT may bring to political process and legitimacy. Internet allows politicians to communicate directly with the citizens, without press and journalists as intermediaries.



## **PLENARY SESSION**

### **Municipality as an e-community**

New technology provides the opportunity to fulfil citizens' requests for information and services on first contact. This one stop fulfilment can be made available through the citizen's choice of channel: over the counter, by telephone, by a local government officer in the home, on the Internet and by digital TV.

To achieve one stop fulfilment requires the development and adoption of common standards. This enables economies of scale in procurement whilst still allowing local ownership of information and services.

#### **Presentations**

- **Mr. Roel Verhaert**, Managing Director, City of Antwerp (Belgium): *"An example of deconcentrated administrative service-provision"*
- **Mr. Jens Ole Back**, Head of Center, Local Government Denmark: *"The Danish digital municipalities project: grouped municipal service delivery in three smaller municipalities"*
- **Mrs. Ma. Salut Camps i Russinés**, Chief of cabinet, City of Barcelona (Spain): *"The experiences and strategies of citizen participation in the City of Barcelona"*

**Roundtable discussion** with the participation also of:

- **Dr. Javier Ossandon**, President, ELANET
- **Mrs. Ingrid Götzl**, President, TeleCities
- **Mr. Krzysztof Glomb**, President, "Cities on Internet" Association, Poland

**Moderator** : **Dr. Johannes van Veen**, Head of Department, Association of Netherlands Municipalities

**Dr. Johannes van Veen**, moderator of the plenary session, presented a framework that had been developed within the eMunicipality project of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). The model incorporates four municipal priorities that are linked with one another: society/local community - service provision - internal organisation - council/executive office. Municipality's thriving overall intercourse with citizens in the Information Society presupposes that all these four sectors are addressed and implemented. The following presentations scrutinised the last three priorities, respectively.

**Mr. Roel Verhaert** (Managing Director, City of Antwerp) highlighted the experiences of Antwerp in delivering integrated services to citizens. A key step was taken on 1 January 2001 when the City decentralised its administration with the formation of nine districts, each of which had **counter offices**, in addition to four town council offices. Subsequently, all the services provided by the public authority are equally available at its 13 branches all over the City, close to the citizens.

The fundamental principle behind this reorganisation was the customer-oriented service concept adopted in the City of Antwerp three years ago. Procedures and services are now offered in a customer centred way to facilitate the citizen's needs and requests. Additional factors of success have been the development of a knowledge management system to facilitate the information flows within the local authority and gearing communications to services when dealing with the citizens.

**Mr. Jens Ole Back** (Head of Centre, Local Government Denmark) presented the Danish Digital Municipalities project. Stimulated by the need to keep citizens in their small municipalities through providing services efficiently to them, Hedensted, Juelsminde and Topping-Uldum decided to merge their administrations while keeping separate their political councils. The main goals have been to reduce costs while combining the benefits of small and large administrative units. The aim is to develop new digital services for the citizens, develop professional skills by exchange of knowledge between City Halls, offer all citizens from all three municipalities service at all three city halls, and compensate for anticipated recruitment problems in the public sector.

The three municipalities have already merged several departments and jointly provide services to the citizens in different fields (procurement, kindergartens and refugees, labour market initiatives, building permits). Other achievements include fast data communication between city halls; common mail, calendar and file system; common telephone system and call centre; look-a-like web systems; and electronic forms. Digital signature is offered to all citizens and videoconference facilities exist at each town hall. Web casting of Council meetings will start in December 2001. Nationwide 'service-clusters' are being created in municipal and county administrations, some smaller municipalities are planning to merge, and focus has been on new digital administration.

**Mrs. Ma. Salut Camps i Russinés** (Chief of cabinet, City of Barcelona) described the models and strategies of citizen participation that have been implemented in Barcelona. The normative two-layer framework for this was established in 1986 when ten districts with political, decision-making, management and executive autonomy were created to function alongside the City. At the same time, two objectives were set for the period 1986-99: (1) to suggest, agree on and validate the municipal policies, and (2) to bring public authorities closer to citizens. The implementation of the first target has worked, even though question

marks were thrown on the true nature of this participation. With regard to the latter objective, 2.040 local association and citizens groups have been created to contribute to the municipal discussions, but there still remain large groups of people outside the participatory system. It was concluded that the system was overflowed and that the second transformation needs to be initiated.

For the period 1999-2003, two action lines were set: to reinforce the associations created and to provide more possibilities for direct citizen participation. In addition, a list of ten points were outlined to set the guidelines for further citizen participation:

1. Participation is a political and strategic option of city halls;
2. Politics of participation are cross-sectoral, affecting all sectors;
3. Participatory councils are not enough. They should be complemented with participatory city halls;
4. It is not possible to support and increase quality standards of city halls without the involvement of associations;
5. It is not possible to increase local democracy without citizen participation in public affairs;
6. Profound changes in the political culture and the municipal structures are underway. Participation brings added value;
7. A deep transformation of the association sector is necessary - from claims to involvement;
8. It is necessary to promote second degree associative structures through appropriate policies;
9. Associations are not everything. It is necessary to reach citizens directly;
10. Attention must be paid to the citizens' demands of becoming involved in the development of the local community.

For the subsequent roundtable discussion, the above mentioned speakers were joined by **Dr. Javier Ossandon** (President of ELANET), **Mrs. Ingrid Götzl** (President of TeleCities) and **Mr. Krzysztof Glomb** (President of the "Cities on Internet" Association, Poland). They briefly commented the presentations:

Javier Ossandon considered digital communities as prerequisites for e-governance. The establishment of civic networks would be a way forward, and education and training for citizens and civil servants is important. The development steps should be channelled from technological aspects into true interactiveness.

Ingrid Götzl agreed on the aspects raised by Javier Ossandon and further elaborated on the concept of community in the Information Society. She considered crucial that the actors in a given area aim at common objectives. The main task of the public authorities within e-governance is to bring people back to voting booths.

Krzysztof Glomb contributed the viewpoint of the Central and Eastern European countries. In particular, monetary allocations and dedicated programmes should be developed to facilitate rapid EU accession of these countries. The development of electronic tools could facilitate the accession process and the dissemination of best practices could bridge the gap between the candidate countries and EU Member States.

The moderator of the session proposed some topics for the roundtable discussion: main aspects of a municipality as an e-community, crucial factors contributing to success or

failure, possible implementation in every municipality, and prerequisites/conditions to make it happen.

The following **issues** were raised during the ensuing exchange of views between the audience and the roundtable participants:

- Cooperation between different levels and actors of government is important in developing innovative e-governance solutions in municipalities. Political leadership and commitment is crucial during the implementation phase of these schemes.
- Visions are essential in Information Society -related development and local authorities need endurance to carry out the strategies agreed upon.
- The emerging Information Society tests existing democratic and administrative structures. It provides tremendous opportunities, but also challenges in forcing local government to modernise. Business process re-engineering and renewal of organisation models are central ingredients.
- Greater administrative efficiency may be combined with increased proximity to the citizen and a strengthened feeling of belonging to a community.

## **WORKSHOP I**

### **Increased accountability and transparency in the public sector and vertical integration**

New technology should serve to enhance local/regional government accountability and transparency. There is a need for vertical integration between different levels of public administration in order to make information and services easily accessible and more relevant to the citizens, particularly as a citizen will perform up to 70% of his administrative acts and information demands at local level.

#### **Introduction**

- **Dr. Andrew Larner**, Head of Information Age Practice, IDeA (United Kingdom): "*Vertical integration for efficient service-provision to citizens*"

#### **Case study presentations and debate**

- **Mr. Horst Freye**, Managing Director, Municipality of Münster (Germany): "*Facilitating communication between administration, citizens and local business - Cityweb*"
- **Mr. Mirosław Czekał**, City Treasurer, Szczecin Municipal Government (Poland): "*Providing budgetary information and economic data on the municipality*"
- **Dr. Gareth Hughes**, CEO, eris@ (European Regional Information Society Association): "*Linking local and regional administrations*"
- **Mr. Hans Hagedorn**, Consultant, Hammerbacher GmbH (Berlin, Germany): "*Online services need relevance*"

**Moderator : Mr. Bruno Peeters (Belgium)**

● **Case study 1 : "Vertical integration for efficient service-provision to citizens"  
IDeA (United Kingdom)**

Local government is faced with increasing expectations from the private sector, citizens and government who is feeling increasingly squeezed in terms of resources and thorough competition from other public and private actors.

New services provide better optimal access for the public and efficiency gains to local government. In order to provide services in customer centred ways, existing central and local government services often need to be brought together. The public should be able to perceive a significant improvement in accessing public services, and governments should bring together resources of public, private and voluntary sector under partnerships to create a seamless "one stop" approach to service delivery.

This one stop approach is to be achieved by streamlining internal processes, improving the supply chain to the authority, innovating in the front office but collaborating in the back office, and using priority projects to create a common infrastructure. The priorities for the development are the links between back and front offices, engagement and consultation of relevant actors, measurement of citizens' priorities, release of resources through efficiency gain, and achievement of declared government policies and legislation. This overall process should be in the best interests of the whole of local government, in which all authorities can participate no matter their status. It creates a drastic change in local government performance and a platform for future change while helping councils to pay for the change process.

**Dr. Andrew Lerner, Head of Information Age Practice**

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● **Case study 2 : "Facilitating communication between administration, citizens and local business - Cityweb" - Municipality of Münster (Germany)**

"Publikom" is one of the largest and most advanced city information systems in Germany, It is a collaboration between the public administration, local citizen groups and commercial providers. It is dedicated to support the acquisition of IT skills, to foster public discussions and exchange of information among citizens, and to facilitate the interaction of citizens with their administration.

The project offers free access to local electronic information that is organised by topics without any censorship. The services contain, *inter alia*, hotel booking services, reservation of guided city tours, customised car registration, ordering of brochures, online search in the city library catalogue, a newsletter, requests for official documents, and bookings of night school courses. Publikom has established itself as the basic source of up-to-date political, social and cultural information, as a platform for discussion on local political issues, and communication channel for different initiatives. The Münster experience has shown that :

- the use of electronic signature tests business processes and internal organisational structures of administrations;

- a city network can link a very wide range of groups of the citizens with the city administration to help reduce potential conflict;
- the administration can benefit from the Internet if it concentrates on the genuinely meaningful areas of application; and
- the Internet is an instrument among others.

**Mr. Horst Freye, Managing Director**

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● **Case study 3 : "*Providing budgetary information and economic data on the municipality*", Szczecin Municipal Government (Poland)**

The City of Szczecin embarked on a scheme of providing full disclosure and transparency on its financial management. Municipal procedures are public, there is unrestricted access to budget data and local government procedures, as well as full dialogue between the local authorities and the citizens.

This applies in particular to budget planning and control process. What started with printed materials evolved to electronic versions published on the city's Internet website. In the near future, both the authorities and citizens will enjoy the same level of access to available information. Internet and e-mail have proven an excellent communication tool to reach the citizens. This kind of Internet communication with citizens is gradually being extended from Szczecin to all other Polish cities.

The Szczecin City website on finances was launched on 26 February 1998, publishing the city budget for the first time in Poland. Citizens have become accustomed to having documents like the City Budget Draft of 2002 or the Information on Municipal Assets of 2002 first published on the website before a printed version exists.

**Mr. Mirosław Czekaj, City Treasurer**

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● **Case Study 4 : "*Linking local and regional administrations*"  
eris@ (European Regional Information Society Association)**

The public sector has a key role to play in the development of the regional Information Society. The regional authority has a critical leadership role to play, and local and municipal authorities are key players in forming regional partnerships.

Demand for ICTs is weak in the less-favoured regions of Europe and the public sector can and should play a key role in stimulating that demand in order to improve the competitiveness and enhance the cohesion of their region. By providing real value-added applications for citizens and enterprises, e-government can become a key driver for increasing the usage of, and demand for, electronic services in general. Regional strategies for modernising the economy must therefore include policies to promote modernisation of public administration.

Local, regional and national administrations have to work together – to design or procure, and to implement and develop common, integrated solutions. At the regional level, the regional authorities have a vital role to play in creating a cooperative environment for the procurement or development of common and consistent applications across the territory – and to ensure that these are consistent with national systems and standards. The biggest problem with implementation is not the technology – but getting administrations to work together and to agree common data systems and standards.

The private sector can contribute a great deal to the development of e-government. There is a real risk that less competent public administrations will insist on "reinventing the wheel". Vertical integration between the different levels of administration is critical. If we categorise these levels as national, regional and local, it will be important to establish framework conditions and standards in which each takes account of the others.

**Dr. Gareth Hughes, Chief Executive Officer**

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<p>● <b>Case study 5 : "<i>Online services need relevance</i>" Hammerbacher GmbH (Berlin, Germany)</b></p>
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In the city of Esslingen, Germany, the Internet is used to involve citizens in an informal discussion about plans for a neighborhood development project, before starting the planning procedures.

In May 2001 a virtual platform was set up on the Internet, providing information about the planned new residential compound, asking citizens to express their opinions in a discussion forum over a period of one month. The forum was facilitated by professional mediators, who ensured fair discussion and encouraged constructive dialogue between citizens, planning staff and local politicians in order to identify common ground wherever possible. Citizens used the platform very actively, with over 120 contributions that received considerable attention by the public.

The experience demonstrated the potential of the Internet in a case where the city has publicly committed to making reasonable use of the results of the discussion in subsequent, formal steps of the planning process. It also proved the importance of moderators to ensure quality discussion, relevance and authenticity. They should analyse conflicts of interest in advance of the online discussion, conceive a framework for the dialogue and publish summaries of the discussions at the end.

**Mr. Hans Hagedorn, Consultant**

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<p>● <b>Workshop summary</b></p>
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**Key issues** that emerged from the presentations and the subsequent exchange of view:

- falling birth rates and increased longevity mean that the proportion of working-age to retirement-age citizens falls. Therefore, public administrations will have to

- become more efficient and cost-effective as well as build effective support mechanisms;
- municipalities and regions should learn from both good practice and mistakes;
  - is e-government really driven by the needs of citizens or is it driven by politicians, engineers or administrators?
  - different authorities (local, regional, national) have different needs (e.g. urban vs. rural);
  - multi-layer and multi-agency cooperation is needed in design, development and procurement of e-government systems;
  - principles are needed to define what is meant by the right level of vertical integration;
  - the use of ICTs includes the risk of job losses but on the other hand offers opportunities for unemployed people to acquire further training;
  - there are some potential dangers/threats in e-democracy.

**Mr. Bruno Peeters, moderator**



## **WORKSHOP II**

### **Effective consultation and involvement of citizens in the decision-making process**

Governance is a process of broader consultation and participation, which results in mutually agreed goals and common commitments. The public sector can no longer seek to attain its policy goals without active support from the citizens, local firms, voluntary organisations and other actors on the ground. Citizens themselves increasingly want to be directly involved in the relevant decision-making processes. The Internet more than any other ICT tool provides politicians with a possibility of communicating directly without intermediaries such as the press or the media, with the citizens.

#### **Introduction**

- **Mr. Tommy Rosén**, Senior Executive Officer, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Swedish Federation of County Councils and Regions: *"Basic principles of citizen empowerment in a modern representative democracy"*

#### **Case study presentations and debate**

- **Mr. Bengt Lindstedt**, Chief Executive Officer, Municipality of Bollnäs (Sweden): *"Sharing power with citizens in a representative democracy"*
- **Mrs. Dianne Desmulie**, Mayor, Hertford Town and District (United Kingdom): *"Broad consultation and feedback mechanisms in the municipality of Hertford"*
- **Mr. Vesa Paavola**, Organization Manager, City of Helsinki (Finland): *"Increasing the participation of citizens through information networks"*
- **Mr. Piet Severijnen**, Senior Researcher, SGBO / Association of Netherlands Municipalities: *"Virtual Carpark in Delft: Virtual reality for interactive decision-making"*

**Moderator** : **Mr. Roberto Di Giovan Paolo**, Deputy Secretary General, AICCRE (Italy)

● **Case study 6 : "*Basic principles of citizen empowerment in a modern representative democracy*" – A study by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Swedish Federation of County Councils and Regions**

The results of a recent study on e-democracy in Sweden has shown that 80% of the population has access to computers and 50% to the Internet. 22% of the population visits local authority websites at least once a month. Importantly, there are no differences to this figure as to the visitors' sex, age, education, occupation, family status or income. The only distinction derives from whether the person comes from an urban or rural area, as the latter ones are more active in this respect.

How can citizens be empowered and at which stage of the political decision-making process should citizens be able to participate ? Citizen participation is essential during the initial political debate, political drafting (consultation) period and the actual decision-making.

During the initial political debate, it is important to provide "democratic education" to the citizens at schools, meetings, on the web and in other media in order to attract interest for the issues. During the early stages of the political drafting, citizens could have influence over what should be drafted and, thereafter, over selected questions to which the "elite" has formulated alternatives. For the actual decision-making the citizens could be provided with related documents and minutes on the web as well as some opportunities of monitoring the process through telematic means. The final decision would at any rate be reached by politicians. Finally, citizens should be offered a proper channel, feedback mechanisms, to react to the quality of the work done.

The degree of activity during the political decision-making process does not relate to the means of voting, but rather to the nature of the issue at hand. Mr Rosén also raised some questions to which answers should be sought in order to get better understanding on e-governing processes at local and regional level:

- How can ICT support the current forms of dialogue?
- What information is needed to keep politicians accounted in general elections?
- At what point of time does the public have real influence on upcoming decisions?
- Who should be able to express their views on upcoming decisions?
- What impact should people's contributions have?
- Which methods suit different questions best?

**Mr. Tommy Rosén, Senior Executive Officer**

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● **Case study 7 : "*Sharing power with citizens in a representative democracy*" Municipality of Bollnäs (Sweden)**

Bollnäs has undertaken various measures to establish a good dialogue with the citizens. The basic idea of local democracy is that the inhabitants take active part in the democratic process and that the citizens are supported in a unique way by social services and information providers.

Thanks to various initiatives such as open access and the possibility for the general public to send suggestions to the local authority administration and elected representatives, the

citizens become involved and shape the political agenda. Important municipal documents are published online, council meetings are broadcast over the Internet, with the simultaneous possibility for citizens to send in comments. The central instrument in collecting citizens' opinion is the Bollnäs Dialogue, which is a web-based application on the homepage of the local authority. It provides a forum for discussion between citizens but also a platform where elected representatives and officials give answers to specific questions from citizens within 48 hours.

The next steps of development will be the establishment of a citizens' panel - a panel composed of citizens that will give its views at an early stage of the decision-making process - and an electronic message and document handling system, with which citizens will be able to search for various local authority documents. This should further strengthen democracy and develop the whole society into a local authority, in which the motto is "citizen value".

**Mr. Bengt Lindstedt, Chief Executive Officer**

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• **Case study 8 : "*Broad consultation and feedback mechanisms in the municipality of Hertford*" - Hertford Town and District (United Kingdom)**

Consultation and participation mechanisms have been introduced in the municipality of Hertford, a small local authority with relatively scarce resources. The main problem in Hertford has not been so much the lack of financial resources as the absence of skilled technical staff.

The Hertford website offers information about local affairs as well as connects citizens with one another through Internet. Most notably, the website covers extensively the history of Hertford and offers a platform for local enterprises and companies to promote their products and services. ICT tools have allowed to involve citizens in a voting for their favourite buildings, in researching names of the war dead, and in providing views and comments on municipal issues.

New technologies enable new experiments : local referenda, allotments and grave sites, debates and consultations, web access without computers, and increased accountability and visibility. Political processes should be properly connected with the consultations. In the course of the development, clear visions and political will are required.

**Mrs. Dianne Desmulie, Mayor**

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• **Case study 9 : "*Increasing the participation of citizens through information networks*" - City of Helsinki (Finland)**

The City of Helsinki has developed methods of consultation and citizen participation. These "Citizen Channels" enable debate on matters affecting a specific district and the city as a whole, as well as discussions on matters affecting a specific sector of the administration or on matters common to all sectors.

The city of Helsinki has striven to increase citizen participation with the use of neighbourhood web sites. The concept of the Home Street project was launched in 1997 based on the idea of a digital neighbourhood forum supporting local communities in different development processes. It seeks to empower the inhabitant on urban planning matters and hereby to strengthen local identity and processes. The second goal is to develop the Internet as a means to support these interactive processes. The sites are created and maintained by the citizens themselves, the city only provides some financial support.

Helsinki has about 30 committees composed of politicians elected by City Council for four years. The agendas and minutes of committee meetings are available on the Internet. Furthermore, interactive committee sites are being set up to inform on their decision-making processes. The target is to construct a bridge between direct citizen participation and the traditional representative democracy. The committee for public transport has been a pilot within the Helsinki City administration. Here inhabitants can discuss beforehand some of the issues on the committees' agenda, and the opinions of the citizens are made available to the committee when it makes its decisions.

“Straight from the city” is a universal discussion forum for the citizens of Helsinki. This forum is divided into five news groups, covering topics to the whole city, such as : cycling conditions in Helsinki, drug problems, schooling, etc. When a topic is closed, the summary of the discussion is sent to the department concerned and to the decision-makers. The topics change about every three months or when the discussion comes to a standstill.

**Mr. Vesa Paavola, Organization Manager**

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• **Case study 10: "Virtual Carpark in Delft : Virtual reality for interactive decision-making" - SGBO/Association of Netherlands Municipalities**

The City of Delft has introduced a planning process where the question was on whether to build a car park on the fringes of the historical inner city to deal with the increased car traffic without discouraging visitors. Delft already had experience in interactive policy decisions that create positive attitudes for urban planning projects: involve the actors in the initial phase of the planning project, listen to the actors and make use of the information they provide.

This experience together with the mission statement of Delft (City of Knowledge) gave rise to the idea of using ICT applications to give citizens and council members an active role in the planning of the car park. In order to support the decision-making process and consult the citizens on the plan, a virtual reality software was created, accessible on the Internet and in public buildings. After having visited the virtual car park, people were able to give feedback and suggestions for improvements or other alterations, but also express their support for the ideas they liked, to the town planners.

Thus it was possible to involve the citizens in an early stage of the planning process. Approximately 2.000 people visited the virtual reality on the Internet, which is a considerable figure as compared to traditional hearings. It was concluded that virtual reality offers many possibilities for communication with the citizens when drawing up plans. Having a virtual reality built does not cost much more than the traditional presentation of

urban plans. It is especially useful in the early stages of planning, when the citizens are called upon to participate in the development of plans. Involving citizens like this in an early stage of the planning process has proved to have positive effects on bringing the citizens and the local authority nearer to one another.

**Mr. Piet Severijnen, Senior Researcher**

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• <b>Workshop summary</b>
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The following **key issues** arise from the presentations and the debate :

- it is not enough to create and develop technological instruments for e-governance. The main issue is to know how citizens can participate in the governance processes at local and regional level;
- the tools of citizen involvement and consultation should become everyday tools for interaction;
- the relevant instruments should emerge from the consultation phase and only thereafter should the corresponding information and communication tools be created. Otherwise ICT could become only a public relations act;
- issues regarding values are more difficult to settle with e-governance tools than 'simple' yes/no questions.

**Mr. Roberto Di Giovan Paolo, moderator**



## **CONCLUDING PLENARY SESSION**

### **Political responsibility in the context of e-governance**

The availability of modern technology does not automatically lead toward new forms of governance and citizen involvement. Conscious efforts have to be made to bring about technologically mediated innovations in political practice. Market mechanisms alone will not deliver the required concepts and products. It is the political responsibility of all layers of government to support new ventures in democracy by encouraging experimentation, funding research and development, as well as by changing political and administrative routines, wherever this may be required.

Local and regional politicians will have to rise to the ICT challenges and prove leadership in organising e-governance that enhances citizen involvement and avoids exclusion.

#### **Keynote speaker:**

- **Professor Dr. Klaus Lenk**, University of Oldenburg (Germany): *"Local and regional e-governance facing the challenges of the future"*

#### **Roundtable discussion** with the participation of:

- **Mr. Gianfranco Burchiellaro**, Chairman of the ANCI E-Government Working Group, Italy, Mayor of Mantua
- **Mr. Roger Sobry**, Alderman, City of Chaudfontaine, Belgium
- **Mr. Bruno Peeters** (Belgium) - Moderator of workshop I
- **Mr. Roberto Di Giovan Paolo** (Italy) - Moderator of workshop II

Moderator: **Professor Dr. Klaus Lenk**

**Professor Dr. Klaus Lenk** (University of Oldenburg, Germany) delivered the keynote speech on local and regional e-governance facing the challenges of the future. Referring to the title of the concluding plenary session, Dr. Lenk suggested as his main message that e-governance will not happen without political presence, as technology itself cannot implement it. Compared to e-government and the other activity sectors of the Information Society, e-governance is more difficult to carry out, as market is not present therein to provide incentives for its smooth implementation. Dr. Lenk considered digital divide mainly a question of insufficient software, content and interfaces. In order to bridge this divide, the European Commission should invest financial resources to develop technologies as well as to consider technologies of tomorrow rather than contemplating PCs of today.

"Technologically Mediated Innovations in Political Practice" should be brought about by the Information Society. The main answers should reflect how to change our political practice and develop new ventures in democracy, instead of just superimposing technology. Results of these reflections should be propagated. In this respect, Dr. Lenk regarded the presentations and discussion during the conference workshops as a way forward.

With regard to e-governance, the circumstances and actual involvement of marginal groups are not discussed enough for the moment. Social networks should be created through information and communication technologies. Currently, there exists a dual view on reality within administrations: on one hand, the maintenance of social cohesion is considered an important task, but on the other hand, some administrations think that governance only means more work for them.

Finally, Dr. Lenk considered the strategic responsibility in the context of e-governance. Actions are currently being undertaken to create e-government and e-governance. However, these efforts are based on top-down approaches. National portals need to be developed instead with a bottom-up approach bearing in mind the final objective of a joined-up government. In parallel, a climate of trust between citizens and government should be created. All the above mentioned is a continuous process with a long-term perspective. A true e-governance could be reality in some ten years.

**Mr. Gianfranco Burchiellaro** (Chairman of the ANCI E-Government Working Group, Mayor of Mantua, Italy) considered that the modernisation of public administrations provides a key opportunity at this point of time. This transformation should be seen as an instrument for renewal aimed at bringing forward new values for all actors of public administration.

The main goal is to satisfy the citizens and all stakeholders of the public administration. The key words for future local development are federalism (principle of subsidiarity) as well as the introduction and adoption of new technologies. Public administrations should be efficient enough to make the economic development possible, and the improved efficiency of public services requires synergies between local autonomies and other institutional bodies.

The problems of e-government implementation are not only linked to the absence of technological infrastructure and their promotion. It is necessary to launch horizontal projects to implement the system of integrated public administration. In this context, the roles and responsibilities of project managers should be clearly defined and the importance of public-private partnerships should be emphasised.

**Mr. Roger Sobry** (Alderman, City of Chaudfontaine, Belgium) pointed to the importance of distinguishing within the decision-making process the phase of providing information to the citizens and the phase of decision-making itself. Local and regional level politicians would need to play different roles during these different phases. Under their currently heavy work load the politicians could be supported to a greater extent through ICT. Mr. Sobry also emphasised the contribution that enhanced education could offer to governance processes in the Information Society. It is necessary that everybody uses the Internet and accesses websites.

Mr. Sobry considered it important to establish multi-agency and multi-layer cooperation in designing policies within e-governance. This could also be a way to involve smaller municipalities amongst the drivers of development. In general, existing networks should be mobilised more effectively and new ones created whenever feasible and rational. For example, those responsible for Information Society implementation should be brought together. Furthermore, smaller municipalities could use a joint platform to discuss problems that are common for everyone.

Thereafter, **Mr. Bruno Peeters** and **Mr. Roberto Di Giovan Paolo** presented the outcomes of the respective workshops they moderated.

During the ensuing debate between the roundtable participants and the audience, the following **conclusions** emerged from the plenary session in addition to the points of view expressed above:

- involvement of politicians is essential within e-governance and they have a prominent role to play in e-governance processes and development at local and regional level. In this regard, local and regional level politicians should provide leadership;
- politicians must be involved in the actual technical discussions regarding the ICT tools of e-governance;
- in order to learn from good practice and mistakes, a political network should be established to exchange knowledge and information on issues regarding e-governance.



## Final Conclusions

### Engaging Citizens in Policy Making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation

1. The emergence and rapid deployment of information and communication technologies (ICTs) herald new opportunities for government renewal and administrative modernisation.
2. Political participation through the Internet is becoming an increasing reality in many countries. In Sweden Internet penetration is 80% and over two thirds of the municipalities publish council agendas on the Internet. Other European countries may not yet have reached the same levels, but are exhibiting similar short to medium term developments.
3. But publishing council agendas over the Internet, electronic voting or e-mail addresses for politicians will not by themselves stem falling voter turnout, create more immediacy between citizens, civic networks and politicians or recreate confidence in public institutions and decision-making structures.
4. ICT should be used to bolster novel participation strategies and forms of citizen involvement that are emerging in Europe, particularly at local and regional level. Agenda 21 sustainable development type processes and strategic planning exercises are some of the forms such interactive policy-making takes. They rally citizens and local actors around jointly developed - hence commonly accepted - long term horizontal goals, policies and strategies to develop the competitive advantages and quality of life in their area.
5. These **new forms of governance** rely on better **information, consultation** and **public participation** as key elements for **engaging citizens in policy-making**, thereby tapping new sources of ideas, information and resources when making decisions.
6. The CEMR June 2000 Oulu declaration stressed the vital contribution local governance processes can also make to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of European governance. Here, local/regional authorities - as a sphere of consensus building closest to the citizen - should work alongside national, European and even international spheres of governance, in true partnership, to achieve common goals and objectives.
7. CEMR thus welcomes the following **criteria for good governance**, that were presented by President Prodi in his White Book, as universal criteria to be fully applied within each and every sphere of government and governance:
  - Transparency and openness
  - Participation
  - Accountability
  - Effectiveness
  - Coherence

8. **E-government** was at the centre of two ELANET/CEMR conferences in Malaga (2000) and Zakopane (2001). They considered how ICT supported re-organisation of the "back" and "middle" office can create a one stop-shop "front office", ensuring optimal services to citizen-clients and enterprises. An EU financed research project (KEeLAN) will test the conclusions by benchmarking local and regional government performance and will result - by the end of next year - in practical e-government roadmaps for local and regional authorities.
9. In exploring **e-governance**, the Antwerp conference concentrated on how ICT enhances good governance principles at the local Council and executive office level and how ICT can support interactive participation of citizens, stakeholders and community groups for better decision-making. In this sense, e-governance goes beyond the scope of e-government or even e-democracy, which merely adapts existing democratic processes to the Internet age. E-governance is not simply about more effective, around the clock operation of a front office or digital access to information. It is about changing how citizens relate to local and regional government. It brings forth new concepts of citizenship and rules for organising and regulating the democratic process and requires rethinking and re-engineering existing structures.

## **The conference addressed the following themes:**

### **Municipality as part of an e-community**

10. *New technology provides the opportunity to fulfil citizens' requests for information and services on first contact. This one stop fulfilment can be made available through the citizen's choice of channel: over the counter, by telephone, by a local government officer in the home, on the Internet and by digital TV.*
11. *To achieve one stop fulfilment requires the development and adoption of common standards. This enables economies of scale in procurement whilst still allowing local ownership of information and services.*

### Local and regional authorities therefore need:

- assistance to strengthen their ICT competences and organisational expertise as well as their capacity to influence market developments with corresponding standards;
- creation of a political platform for exchange of experience, mutual assistance and co-operation on projects;
- a vision on their role in the Information Society and to develop corresponding strategy to develop governance processes that provide citizens with a real feeling of being able to influence the decision-making processes and outcomes;
- to act as enablers in driving the development of interactive services;
- to identify the relevant publics to be reached within each consultation process.

### **Accountability, transparency and vertical public sector integration**

12. *New technology should serve to enhance local/regional government accountability and transparency. There is a need for vertical integration between different levels of public administration in order to make information and services easily accessible and more relevant to the citizens, particularly as a citizen will perform up to 70% of his administrative acts and information demands at local level.*

Local and regional authorities should commit themselves to:

- focus on content rather than technology;
- provide reliable, concrete, understandable and relevant information to citizens over the Internet and other means. It should be easily accessible and structured in ways that are relevant to the citizen who is not interested which unit, department or organisation deals with the content or service;
- be prime-movers in the creation of integrated platforms allowing for vertical integration between different levels of government - local, regional, national and European - as well as horizontal co-ordination across public agencies, local businesses, the voluntary sector and other local actors. Due attention should be paid to privacy aspects;
- use the Internet as a means to enhance citizen participation and involvement by publishing for instance Council meeting agendas and minutes, to support early consultation mechanism and to provide regular feedback on policy developments and decisions.

**Consultation and effective involvement of citizens in decision-making**

*13. Governance is a process of broader consultation and participation, which results in mutually agreed goals and common commitments. The public sector can no longer seek to attain its policy goals without active support from the citizens, local firms, voluntary organisations and other actors on the ground. Citizens themselves increasingly want to be directly involved in the relevant decision-making processes. The Internet more than any other ICT tool provides politicians with a possibility of communicating directly without intermediaries such as the press or the media, with the citizens.*

Local and regional governance processes should ensure:

- a distinction between consultation, decision-making and final implementation of policies. There may be no theoretical limits to early consultation of citizens, of relevant actors and stakeholders, which should again be closely associated in the implementation of any resulting policy. But there is a time for decision-making, in the narrow sense, when the politically elected will have to assume responsibility for decisions and chosen options;
- rules need to apply to the different stages of the consultation. Representativity becomes an issue especially at the later stages where it is necessary to prevent minority groups or the most ICT skilled from imposing their views.

**E-governance and political responsibility**

*14. The availability of modern technology does not automatically lead toward new forms of governance and citizen involvement. Conscious efforts have to be made to bring about technologically mediated innovations in political practice. Market mechanisms alone will not deliver the required concepts and products. It is the political responsibility of all layers of government to support new ventures in democracy by encouraging experimentation, funding research and development, as well as by changing political and administrative routines, wherever this may be required.*

15. *Local and regional politicians will have to rise to the ICT challenges and prove leadership in organising e-governance that enhances citizen involvement and avoids exclusion.*

Local and regional politicians will seek to:

- apply and disseminate the commitments taken in the Helsinki declaration as well as to meet again at the EISCO 2002 conference in Sardinia to assess the results of an ELANET benchmarking study on e-government;
- foster new political cultures, values, attitudes and beliefs consonant with governance processes;
- organise a network and information exchange on the basis of the results of the e-Government benchmarking study presented at the EISCO 2002 conference in Sardinia.

**On this basis participants issued the following recommendations**

**16. To fellow municipalities, cities and regions**

- create awareness and wider access to interactive telecommunication and information and communication technologies;
- invite the private sector to participate actively in public-private partnerships and co-operate with universities and high schools for innovation and applied research;
- envisage inter-municipal co-operations or associations to share costs, exchange experiences and create critical masses;

**17. and inviting European governments and the EU institutions to**

- financially support and promote e-governance initiatives, implementing the White Book criteria, within the EU and the accession countries still involved in institution building;
- enhance ICT development at national and European level, with a focus also on local/regional authority applications;
- take account of the diversity of cultures, stages of development and local conditions in framing national and European support;
- encourage applied research and clustering of research in the fields of e-governance and e-democracy as well as dissemination of research as done through the PRELUDE R&D accompanying measure;
- further implement the eEurope initiative and Lisbon strategy notably to promote ICT skill development in schools, vocational training and retraining of the unemployed.

European IT Ministers, meeting on 29 November 2001 for the e-Government Belgian Presidency conference, were asked to include in their final declaration under the heading "Encouraging participation" the following reference to local and regional government:

***"Ministers recognised that European governance can only succeed through closely involving the citizens and hence local and regional government – as the spheres of consensus building closest to the citizen. National and European initiatives should support local and regional authorities to develop their own path to e-Governance".***

## **ANNEXES**

Ministerial Declaration, E-Government Conference, Brussels,  
29 November 2001

List of participants to the conference : "e-Governance at local and regional level", Antwerp,  
28 November 2001



## MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

*Brussels, 29th November 2001*

**Ministers of EU Member States, EFTA and countries in accession negotiations with the EU met on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2001 in the framework of the eGovernment conference organised jointly by the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the Council.**

On this occasion, Ministers re-affirmed their commitments to rapid eGovernment developments as an integral part of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment and of the eEurope Action Plan. Ministers welcomed the joint efforts by the countries in accession negotiations on the eEurope+ Action Plan, and declared willingness to work together in modernising their administrations.

Ministers recalled the Resolution of European Ministers of Public Service and Administration<sup>1</sup> and the report of the Conference on “eGovernment in the service of citizens and enterprises”<sup>2</sup>, and agreed that higher priority should be given to eGovernment issues in further development of the Lisbon Strategy.

### **Ensuring inclusion**

Ministers agreed that citizens and businesses must be at the centre of attention in the design of on-line services which can be easily accessible by all. Ministers took note of the « e-Inclusion » report<sup>3</sup>, and agreed that greater account must be taken of specific needs, for example of the physically disabled and for different age and language groups.

Ministers agreed that services must be delivered through several complementary communication channels: on-line<sup>4</sup> and in traditional ways, with continued opportunities for direct human contact and assistance where necessary. Citizens must be able to exercise choice in the channel they use. The ministers expressed concern about dependence on single ICT service-providers and producers, and called for more competition. Ministers agreed to share experiences, and asked the Commission to stimulate the development of open-source alternatives where necessary. Inter-operability of a variety of network infrastructures and services will therefore be essential, and open standards and “technology-neutral” regulation are vital.

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<sup>1</sup> In Strasbourg on 7 November 2000

<sup>2</sup> IDA-conference “eGovernment in the service of European citizens and enterprises-what is required at the European level” in Sandhamn organised by the Swedish Presidency and Commission on 13-14th June 2001.

<sup>3</sup> “e-Inclusion” report of the High-level Group on Employment and the Social dimension of the Information Society (ESDIS), and the Council Resolution of 8th October 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For example : PC-telephone-line or cable-modem ; GPRS or 3G mobile wireless access ; iDTV etc

## Promoting trust and security

Ministers recognised that appropriate security and trust is a precondition to the successful introduction of on-line eGovernment services. Ministers agreed to strengthen co-operation across Europe to ensure the security of networks and guarantee safe access to eGovernment services: In the delivery of electronic public services, including respect for privacy and safety, Ministers invited the Commission to establish a group of national experts to survey national electronic identification and authentication systems and tools, and to explore the possibilities for measures to promote policy coherence in these areas at the European Union level, and that this work will be reviewed by Ministers in 2003. Ministers also looked forward to progress in this area at the forthcoming Telecommunications Council<sup>5</sup> and agreed to encourage the large-scale use of electronic signatures, when appropriate, for both public services and business by 2003.

## Building on best practice

Ministers agreed that effective eGovernment requires internal re-organisation: changes in structures and work organisation, training and skills, as well as in employment conditions. Ministers agreed to share experience in training, and in improving the quality of work and working conditions in the public sector.

Ministers took note of the good practices identified and presented at the conference and agreed to explore further how best to extend them within their countries, across Europe and internationally. Ministers invited the Commission to further refine assessment methodologies.

Ministers acknowledged that information and communication technologies (ICT) provide unprecedented opportunities for easier access to authenticated public-sector information, and that clearer conditions for re-using it throughout Europe will contribute to economic growth and employment. Ministers agreed to give urgent attention to the proposals by the European Commission in this area<sup>6</sup>. They agreed that special attention should be given to access to information from the EU Institutions.

Ministers agreed to encourage National Administrations and EU Institutions to establish a common view on which pan-European eServices are most essential on a European level, and to establishment of an eGovernment platform, building on the European Forum on eGovernment and the eGovernment Observatory<sup>7</sup>.

Ministers invited Governments of Countries outside Europe, both developed and developing, to participate in the exchange of good practices with Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Council on the 7th December 2001*

<sup>6</sup> *Commission Communication on Creating an EU Framework for the exploitation of Public-Sector Information (COM(2001)607final) : 23 October 2001*

<sup>7</sup> *Supported by the IDA programme.*

## Encouraging participation

Ministers agreed that ICT can be a powerful tool for good governance and endorsed five key principles<sup>8</sup>: Openness; participation; accountability; effectiveness; and coherence. Ministers recognised that the transition to eGovernment must improve all these dimensions, and invited the European Institutions to implement eGovernment solutions accordingly.

Ministers recognised that ICT can contribute to greater participation in democratic activities and can strengthen our systems of representative parliamentary democracy. They took note of the new opportunities and challenges associated with ICT and Parliamentary democracy in Europe<sup>9</sup>, and recognised the importance of increasing participation in local, regional, national and European democratic processes. Ministers agreed to explore, initially at national-level, with MEPs and others, how use of ICT could help to increase awareness, interest and participation in European democratic processes, in particular in the European parliamentary elections in 2004. Ministers also recognised that ICT offers important new opportunities for “e-community” development and agreed to catalyse and support these developments.

## Looking to the future

Ministers recognised that the transformations towards eGovernment must go beyond the first generation of Internet-based provision of information to fully interactive services. Ministers invited the European Commission to make the necessary investments in research and technological development, in particular in the sixth Framework Programme, to ensure interoperability and dependability in the next generations of infrastructures<sup>10</sup> and open systems. Ministers also stressed the need for prioritisation, evaluation and co-ordination of EU eGovernment initiatives<sup>11</sup>. and invited the Commission to ensure greater synergy between eGovernment activities under the responsibility of different services.

Ministers agreed that a dynamic and democratic European society, with a strong and productive economy, requires service-oriented, reliable and innovative government, at all levels. Successful implementation of eGovernment can improve services, strengthen our societies, increase productivity and welfare, and reinforce democracy. Ministers reiterated their commitment to pursuing a long-term vision, with clear and monitorable objectives, and with constancy.

Ministers agreed to request the President of the Council to bring the results of the conference, and in particular the Ministerial Declaration, to the attention of the Heads of State and Heads of Government in their forthcoming meetings.

Ministers welcomed the invitation of the Italian Government to take stock of future eGovernment developments in a Conference in Italy in July 2003, and took note of the plans for UN World summit on the Information society in Geneva in December 2003.

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<sup>8</sup> COM(2001)428 of 25.7.2001

<sup>9</sup> Statement from the meeting of European Parliamentary Delegations in Helsinki and Tallin in September 2001

<sup>10</sup> Including a fast but coherent transition to broadband access and the next Internet Protocol.

<sup>11</sup> In the frameworks of Trans-European Communications Networks, the IDA, eContent and eLearning programmes, and in the areas of Regional development ; Employment and social Affairs; Research; Information Society; Education and culture, and Enterprise.



## PARTICIPANTS to the conference : “e-Governance at local and regional level

### Speakers

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