

eGOVERNMENT: COMMITMENT TO MAKING LIFE EASIER FOR CITIZENS AND BUSINESSES

Statement

1. UNICE would like to take the opportunity of the “eGovernment Conference 2003” held in Villa Erba, Como (Italy) on 7-8 July to voice European companies support for eGovernment as a key element for increasing Europe’s competitiveness.
2. Information and communication technologies allow public administrations to improve the quality of public services and to reduce the costs of these services, including the costs to business in complying with government regulations, thereby contributing to greater productivity.
3. This is especially important for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). In addition to stimulating the demand for broadband in Europe¹, effective eGovernment (eProcurement, online declarations for VAT, social security, etc.) will simplify citizen and business relations with administrations as well as increasing transparency, reducing time and costs.
4. Simplification of Business to Government relations (‘B2G’) via eGovernment calls for public administrations to modify accordingly their internal operations. For example, setting up a ‘one-stop-shop’ for B2G needs clear and effective inter-departmental cooperation within public administrations.
5. Open discussions between governments and business will help find solutions that will be respectful of each party’s imperatives and also in line with business realities. Such discussions should also aim to identify best practice in eGovernment delivery of services

¹ **eGovernment is essential to stimulating broadband demand:** Governments have a major role to play in stimulating the development of broadband through developing eGovernment broadband services applications, ensuring that regulation stimulates investment in broadband infrastructure, services and applications and that rural or less developed areas are not left on the wrong side of the digital divide. Such services must be accompanied by sufficient public-sector-driven awareness campaigns communicating the benefits of eGovernment services to citizens.” See UNICE document “Make eEurope a Reality!” available at www.unice.org

to companies. Businesses have been delivering online services to customers since it was made possible and have gained valuable experience that Governments should call upon when setting up eGovernment services, and avoid imposing content standards which will prove burdensome to eGovernment customers. In addition, it is imperative that eGovernment services remain technology neutral and is accessible via multiple platforms (personal computers, mobile devices, digital TV etc.). Full interoperability of eGovernment projects and operations must be reached.

6. The objectives to be set for the years to come must be to simplify all administrative procedures. To achieve this, administrations need not only to invest in information and communication technologies, but also above all to invest in training programmes for civil servants so that optimal use can be made of these investments. At the same time, governments, local governments and authorities should bear in mind the needs of SMEs².
7. As indicated in a recent study commissioned by the Danish Presidency of the EU³, not only is there a need to prioritise the services that really add value for users, eGovernment solutions should be marketed by demonstrating the benefits to users.
8. Incentives for companies to use eGovernment should be used. For example, the time gained by public administrations in processing online operations in B2G should result in faster delivery results G2B.
9. UNICE stresses that for the EU to attain and retain a competitive edge in a global environment it is indispensable for EU governments to be efficient, effective and innovative in their use of information and communication technologies to improve their functioning in both back offices and visible forms of eGovernment.
10. UNICE reiterates its support to the eEurope 2005 Action Plan and the proposed actions related to eGovernment therein. Furthermore, UNICE calls on all EU governments to implement the necessary changes to “achieve not just the target of public service delivery online but to deliver the more important aspiration of a transition to a customer-focused governmental organisation”⁴.

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² As a concrete example, it appears that information concerning road works and subsequent road accessibility timeframes are not available on local eGovernment websites even though this would be of great value for local provisioning of shops and industry.

³ “Value creation in eGovernment projects”, By Flemming Christiansen (Danish Ministry of Finance - Digital Task Force), Jakob H. Kraglund and Jesper Steensen (Accenture). Available at the following link: http://www.e.gov.dk/sitemod/upload/Root/English/Value_Creation_in_eGovernment_projects.pdf

⁴ “Online availability of public services: How does Europe Progress?”, Cap Gemini Ernst & Young for European Commission, DG Information Society, January 2003.