



ANNEX

BusinessEurope's initial views on the Single Digital Gateway (SDG)

7 December 2016

1. Introduction

Companies and citizens are often not fully aware of their rights and opportunities in relation to the single market. The Commission therefore aims to strengthen and streamline existing single market information and (online) problem-solving tools. Problems are best resolved early and at national level. The Single Digital Gateway (SDG) has the potential to combine these efforts to create more opportunities for businesses to operate in another Member State.

The SDG should offer all the information and assistance companies need in order to do business more easily across borders, which saves time, costs and makes their life easier, in the form of:

- High quality single market information;
- Assistance services;
- Electronic procedures for companies wishing to develop cross-border activities;
- A variety of online problem solving and dispute resolution mechanisms;

The SDG should improve and better connect existing tools, and help companies to complete the most frequently-used administrative procedures and formalities fully online. More cross-border activity will offer new business opportunities, more choice at better prices, and ultimately create new jobs and growth.

This gateway is needed because online information can be scattered or even unreliable - it can be incomplete, inaccurate or hard to understand. Sometimes information may only be available in the local language.

The SDG should make the single market more transparent and in turn more certain and predictable. This will encourage more businesses to operate across borders. In this context, we see the SDG specifically facilitating the 'Quick-Assessment Procedure' to the benefit of the mutual recognition for goods.



2. Portal interface

Efficiency

It is important that any envisaged online portal is designed and built in a way that is easy to use and interactive, while meeting business' needs – efficiency is key.

- This could be achieved by test piloting systems with key stakeholders and giving them the opportunity to give upstream feedback before it is rolled-out as a Commission initiative.
- Information also needs to be continuously updated to stay relevant. This includes links relating to where data from Member States can be found or followed-up if queries arise.
- Companies indicate that the possibility to complete administrative procedures entirely online, also in foreign languages, through business portals is the greatest benefit next to accurate information about doing business in another Member State. It saves both time and costs for companies as well as for public authorities. Therefore, it is disappointing to see that with current business portals, such as the Points of Single Contact set up under the 2006 Services Directive, only a limited number of procedures are available for online completion and only for certain sectors. If certain key procedures are still offline, entrepreneurs still need to travel (multiple times) to another country.
- The SDG needs to be user-friendly, for instance by including a comprehensive search engine and offering entrepreneurs step-by-step guidance from information provision to completion of formalities online and help finding relevant problem-solving tools.
- The SDG should answer any request as rapidly as possible.
- Building on existing European and national e-governance policies, the SDG must improve interoperability between the different national business portals by offering cross-border e-signatures and user-friendly e-identification.
- Vocabulary and style should be standardised and harmonised where possible across all parts of the SDG.

Content

The SDG should offer companies all the information and assistance they need to operate across borders and on the home market in multiple languages, including the possibility to complete procedures entirely online. Additional languages should be offered in English and / or the language(s) of neighbouring countries.

- Information needs to be complete and contain all information that a company would need during its business life-cycle. This means it is not only necessary to include practical information on labour law, VAT rules or social security but also, for



instance on insurance and providing services online. This can already be partly achieved by creating links with (existing) websites of other relevant authorities, public bodies and information sources.

- The SDG should also enable access to clear information on the rights, rules and opportunities offered to businesses by the single market. Specific Member State information should also feature.
- Member States and the Commission must work closely together in the set-up of the SDG to share solutions and encourage the creation of standards in terms of lay-out, navigation, quality of service, and presentation of forms and information. Based on best practices, Member States could complement each other and the SDG as a whole.

The content of the SDG should originally be articulated on a single European portal and later adapted to specific Member State portals. This would hamper fragmentation of the SDG. Key standards should be upheld by the Member State portals. Information should remain comprehensive, updated, well-structured, and user-oriented. Enabling Member States to adapt to their domestic situation would provide a user-centred and -friendly service, particularly for start-ups and SMEs.

Interactivity

The SDG should be ambitious enough to be more than just a landing / information page but actually assist businesses that are willing to operate across borders. This could include creating an interactive framework of:

- Unified FAQs in various national languages
- E-assistance through live chat
- A forum for user discussion

The gateway should function as a one-stop-shop where businesses, first, easily search and find complete information and, second, receive customer-oriented services. Businesses should have the possibility to communicate with Member States through digital forms that can be submitted online or through direct contact.

3. Mechanics

Communication

To prevent the duplication of data and ensure consistency throughout the gateway, a central database should be used perhaps on the basis of existing platforms such as the Internal Market Information (IMI) System. The information required and provided by the Member State would be most efficiently implemented if detailed Commission guidelines were provided. These should be devised following in-depth stakeholder input.

Digital forms that are recognised in every Member State make it possible for companies to submit documents and registrations online building on agreed standards.



Existing tools

There are numerous existing information platforms and tools concerning the single market. The SDG has to be an all-encompassing platform. It should be the focal point for businesses seeking information and assistance.

Therefore, we stress the importance of good coordination between the various work-streams in the Commission that are closely related. Ideally, the Commission would combine the input received on these different consultations - such as on the European Services Card - into a single or at least coordinated approach. To deal with the consultations separately can have a contradicting effect, creating different "second best" options.

These existing networks and platforms, but also new initiatives include (not exhaustive):

- Points of Single Contact
- Product Contact Points
- Construction Contact Points
- Your Europe
- EUGO
- SOLVIT
- The IMI System
- The European Services Card

4. Implementation and next steps

In the above context, BusinessEurope welcomes the streamlining and creation of one focal point – a true online business portal - for companies providing goods and/or services through a **new legislative instrument** (a Regulation) to complement and improve the existing landscape of single market tools and to clearly indicate which minimum performance criteria must apply in practice.

In particular it is key to focus on:

- Business needs, which requires further stakeholder consultation
- Further administrative simplification (share best-practices between countries)
- Incorporating and fully exploiting digital tools, developing e-governance
- That it leads to further modernisation of public administration in the Member States leading to cost reductions and efficiency gains

Responsibility

Member States are going to operate the SDG initiative on the national level, but the Commission must play an important role in coordinating among Member States.



- This should be done by defining and monitoring **mandatory quality standards and benchmarks** as well as assisting and enforcing MS where necessary, which do not abide by the agreed minimum performance requirements and quality standards.
- A clear set of guidance information should be provided by the Commission and implemented by the Member States. There should be no misunderstanding or inconsistency.
- The quality would be monitored by the Commission through soft and hard law, through setting obligatory minimum quality standards, benchmarking of national SDGs as a part of the Digital Scoreboard and the Single Market Scoreboard, user-testing and various user feedback mechanisms.
- The expertise from the different Member States and existing framework needs to be used to ensure the best workable outcome.

Branding

To make sure businesses will use the SDG, a coherent approach to its promotion is necessary. By committing to a one-roof policy which integrates all existing European and national portals to one recognisable brand, the gateway can be actively promoted by the Commission. They should be promoted as a Trustmark. Something that businesses recognise and link to quality services. Establishing common features and labelling is key here.

The unified SDG brand should be easily identifiable across the EU with an easily memorable name and web address that is easily advertised across the Union and further. This allows for ease users' navigation within the whole SDG network. The user shall have multiple ways at hand how to access the interconnected SDG services from any physical location in the EU.

Resources

While the setting up of the SDG in each Member State would require additional efforts and investment, national governments need to realise the high return on investment of more cross-border activity, leading to new business opportunities, more choice at better prices, and ultimately create new jobs and growth.

For Member States, a well-functioning business portal can be an important instrument for attracting foreign investment and promoting establishment that specific country. There is also great potential and momentum with this initiative to cut costs by simplifying procedures and making better use of e-government tools. Business needs and expectations must be taken better into account, when considering (national) budget(s) to establish the SDG.

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