

Mr Antti Peltomäki

Deputy Director-General at the European Commission's Directorate
General for Information Society and Media

4th Conference on eServices in European Civil Registration

**« Sharing information across borders –
European visions and national challenges »**

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

4th Conference on eServices in European Civil Registration

9-10 October 2008, Berlin, Germany (Speech on 10 October 2008)

Greeting

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Conference Organisers and Participants!

Introduction

First of all I would like to thank you for inviting me to the 4th Conference on eServices in European Civil Registration, organised by the European Commission supported RISER project. It is a pleasure for me to be here and talk about European visions in this important area.

Due to the development of civil registration, information on residents is now available in electronic data format, which can be accessed and moved around in a faster and more efficient way than ever before. The possibility of transferring such information within or even beyond national borders however, poses some challenges; and we are here to discuss these.

Let me set the scene by talking about a key European vision, one of the cornerstones of the European Union, the Single Market.

Our aim is to bring down barriers and simplify existing rules to enable everyone in the EU to work, re-locate, conduct trade or carry out business across the Union. So, there is homework for public administrations as foreign citizens and businesses now request the services they offer. And, this also increases the demand for cross-border and even pan-European interaction between public administrations. It is therefore, crucial that different government bodies, both within a country and in different EU Member States, are able to share information easily.

Sharing information across Europe however, poses some challenges and I invite you to reflect upon two I consider as most important; interoperability and security. These may seem to be conflicting at first glance, but I am convinced that they go hand in hand.

First challenge: Interoperability

At EU level we are promoting pan-European user-centred eGovernment services. Businesses and citizens are on the move around the EU, seeking new opportunities in other Member States without having to learn 27 different systems.

The European Interoperability Framework shall enable them to interact with public administrations across borders. This is why concrete steps have been developed in the eGovernment Action Plan, as part of the i2010 initiative, on exchanging information across borders. The 2007 Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment re-emphasized the need to intensify efforts to achieve cross-border interoperability.

Interoperability is also of vital importance for civil registries to be accessible across the EU. This conference encourages you to discuss national challenges in the field, I invite you however, to look beyond your borders and acknowledge that electronic services have a potential for cross-border and even Trans-European coverage today.

RISER is indeed one of the early examples of such a Trans-European electronic service. Since then, the European Commission together with the Member States have stepped up a gear and identified some priority areas that would most benefit from interoperability; such as electronic identity and online public procurement. These issues are being tackled at European level by the recently launched Large Scale Pilot projects receiving financial support under the ICT Policy

Support Programme which is part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP).

The Large Scale Pilot STORK, which stands for "Secure idenTity acrOss boRders linKed", will set up an EU-wide system for the recognition and authentication of electronic identity. It will enable businesses and citizens to securely use their own national electronic identities and get help from public administrations in any Member State to which they move or travel. I am glad to see from the conference programme that you will be able to learn more about STORK today in the upcoming session.

The other Large Scale Pilot project PEPPOL, or "Pan European Public Procurement OnLine", will link existing national e-procurement systems, thereby making it easier for companies, in particular SMEs, to bid for public sector contracts anywhere in the EU. The implementation of EU-wide e-procurement is expected to generate savings by reducing total procurement costs by around 5% and by lowering transaction costs by 10% or more¹.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/policy/impact/eproc/index_en.htm

The 2007 Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment laid down a third priority area for interoperability, linked to the implementation of the Services Directive. The directive aims at removing legal and administrative barriers to the development of service activities between Member States. Our focus is on its requirements for electronic procedures and formalities through so-called "Points of Single Contact"².

To support this specific goal, a third Large Scale Pilot is foreseen to be launched under the 2008 Work Programme of the ICT Policy Support Programme. This will benefit the internal market for services, making it easier for service providers, and in particular SMEs, to offer services anywhere within the EU.

I would also like to bring the ECRN – or European Civil Registry Network - project to your attention, also co-funded under the ICT Policy Support Programme³. This project aims to achieve interoperability in the area of civil act document exchange between European administrations. You can learn more about it during the following conference session.

² Article 8 of the Services Directive refers to procedures by electronic means; "...all procedures and formalities relating to access to a service activity and to the exercise thereof may be easily completed, at a distance and by electronic means, through the relevant point of single contact and with the relevant competent authorities..."

³ Currently under negotiation, but Grant Agreement should be signed by the date of the conference.

Second challenge: data protection / security

I identified interoperability as a first challenge to connecting national systems and sharing information across the EU. This is however, linked to another challenge; the need to guarantee data protection. I personally, want my data to be used for the purposes which I supplied it for... and not for other purposes.

The harmonised data protection legislation ensures that data protection be respected when personal data moves around Member States. So, we can only accept systems that comply with these strict rules.

Using official civil registry information also raises the issue of security. In Finland, for instance, records of births, marriages and deaths have been safely kept by the Lutheran church since the 1686 royal decree. Apparently this system worked – I am convinced - successfully for centuries.

Today however, more protective measures are needed. Moving from a closed model to an open and more flexible one, we are opening up our registers to the outside world to allow personal data to move between Member States smoothly. I am therefore,

glad that there are European initiatives like RISER that can challenge some of the old ways of meeting data security requirements.

Security and privacy are serious concerns for the Large Scale Pilot projects, as well. In this regard, all efforts will be made to ensure that mutual recognition of electronic identity makes identity theft extremely difficult.

Linking RISER to our areas of activity

The RISER Registry Information Service found the right balance between interoperability and safeguarding a high level of data protection. This allows RISER and services of similar nature to have a real user-focused approach.

Processing the request and data by a Single-Point-of-Access while ensuring data protection creates a situation, whereby users do not need to know the various legal and procedural requirements in accessing the desired data in the different Member States. In fact, users are usually not interested in the internal complexities and structures of their governments. They want a personalised service that suits their current needs

irrespective of whether provision of the service cuts across traditional internal administrative boundaries, departments, regions or even national borders.

The Large Scale Pilots, ECRN and RISER will help pave the way towards the implementation of user-centric, Trans-European electronic services, available at any time and any place.

Trends

Going forward, we are facing up to the challenges that are posed by "sharing information across borders". The initiatives of the European Commission will help citizens and businesses receive services from public administrations abroad.

Achieving interoperability of services at EU level will remain high on our political agenda as it will help reduce the main barriers to the free movement of people and services in the EU. This is why we have also identified the extension of the eID and eProcurement Large Scale Pilots as a possible area for the upcoming 2009 Work Programme of the ICT Policy Support Programme. While discussions are still ongoing, the current

plan is that those Member States that have not yet joined, could also take part in the pilots in the coming years. I am sure that you will be supportive of our initiative and I will be glad to hear your feedback on this.

Preserving data protection will also remain key. A recent Eurobarometer survey shows that 64% of EU citizens are concerned about data protection issues. We must therefore, ensure that citizens feel secure and confident when civil servants are using their data.

Conclusion

I would like congratulate RISER on organising this event on these important issues. We are still at the early stages, but I hope that RISER and our other EU projects will transform the way public administrations across the EU communicate with citizens, businesses and with each other in the future. I wish them luck for the successful achievement of their ambitious goals.

Thank you for your attention.