Electronic Identity: easy access to public services across the EU

Today, the European Commission unveils a pilot project to ensure cross-border recognition of national electronic identity (eID) systems and enable easy access to public services in 13 Member States. Throughout the EU, some 30 million national eID cards are used by citizens to access a variety of public services such as claiming social security and unemployment benefits or filing tax returns. The Commission's project will enable EU citizens to prove their identity and use national electronic identity systems (passwords, ID cards, PIN codes and others) throughout the EU, not just in their home country. The plan is to align and link these systems without replacing existing ones. The project will run for three years and receive €10 million funding from the European Commission and an equal contribution from the participating partners.

"Electronic Identities do not yet do enough for mobile EU citizens," said Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Information Society and Media. *"By taking advantage of the development in national eID systems and promoting mutual recognition of electronic identities between Member States, this project moves us a step closer to seamless movement between EU countries that Europeans expect from a borderless Single European Market."*

The implementation of online public services is progressing rapidly throughout the EU. A Belgian taxi driver can prepare and submit tax returns online while eID cards make it possible for an Estonian nurse to quickly check pension entitlements. However, the benefits of these services disappear when citizens try to use one country's card to access another country's service.

The European Commission, 13 of the 27 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and Iceland (party to the European Economic Area agreement with the EU) will work together to enable different national Electronic Identity schemes to be recognised across national borders. The project will establish a number of trans-border pilot projects based on existing national systems. Through its size and momentum, it will overrun traditional barriers and encourage the mutual acceptance of other countries' electronic identities. The solutions developed and the experience gained by the project team will be shared with all states whether or not participating in the pilot.

Without replacing national schemes, the new system will allow citizens to identify themselves electronically in a secure way and deal with public administrations either from public offices, from their PC or ideally from any other mobile device. It means, for example that a student will be able to register in a foreign university using his/her home country's electronic identity. Some cross-border services already exist, including a Belgian web portal allows foreign companies to register to employ citizens from Sweden, for example. After completion of the project this should be possible using their national electronic identity card.

Easy access to public services across the EU is crucial for EU citizens travelling within Europe for business, studies or holidays and contributes to enhance the mobility of workers around Europe.

Background:

The EU's Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) aims to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises. Part of CIP, the ICT Policy Support Programme focuses on stimulating innovation and competitiveness through the wider take-up and optimal use of ICT by citizens, businesses and governments.

This eID project is a Large Scale Pilot (LSP): it is driven by participating countries and focuses on enabling the cross-border provision of ICT-based services that are already operational at national, regional or local level. LSPs build on these to find common specifications that can be further developed and gain wider agreement, enabling different national systems to communicate and interact with each other so that citizens and businesses can enjoy the full benefits of the Single Market.

This LSP, called STORK (**S**ecure iden**T**ity acr**O**ss bo**R**ders lin**K**ed), aims at implementing an EU-wide recognition of electronic identity that will enable businesses, citizens and government employees to use their national electronic identities in any Member State. It will test some of the most useful eID services by defining a set of common specifications that allow for the recognition of different national eIDs between the participants and will be accessible to other countries.

Earlier this month, the Commission launched another LSP that will allow businesses in Europe to compete electronically for public tenders across Europe (see IP/08/785).

For more information:

eID:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/policy/key_enablers/eid/index_en.htm

eGovernment: http://ec.europa.eu/egovernment

ICT-PSP: http://ec.europa.eu/ict_psp

CIP: http://ec.europa.eu/cip/index_en.htm