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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Digital Government Conference (Helsinki, 22 October 2019) - Information from the Presidency

Building a Human-centric Digital Government

The Digital Government Conference¹ — organised by the Finnish Presidency on 22 October 2019 in Helsinki — came at a unique historical conjunction. The Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment was agreed two years ago in October 2017, and thus it was time to discuss the progress on it and the lessons learnt about the commitments made. In recent years, public debate has increased about maintaining trust in digital technologies used in public administration and possible risks related to these practices, for example using algorithms instead of people in decision-making and sharing of large amounts of personal data. In 2019, a new European Parliament and Commission will also begin their terms; hence, a new wave of EU policies will be shaped. As Finland's Minister of Local Government and Ownership Steering *Sirpa Paatero* stated in her opening remarks, this is not the time to rest on our laurels, but rather to provide a renewed commitment and to deliver it.

Evidence shows that effective and inclusive public services can help to address societal needs to uphold trust between citizens, government and technology, and to bring our communities together. This means governments hold formidable responsibility, but to be fair, the implementation of digital government has not yet fulfilled its promises.

¹ A more in-depth report on the Conference, drafted by the Lisbon Council and commissioned by the Finnish Presidency, will be published later in December 2019.

The Conference aimed to:

- create a renewed policy momentum behind digital government,
- shape the future of digital government policy towards human-centricity and
- provide an educational and inspiring opportunity for participants.

To achieve this, the Finnish Presidency introduced the concept of a ‘human-centric digital government’, an element of novelty with respect to the previous editions of common policy statements. In a truly human-centric society, services will be accessible and available on a continuous basis, and people will have access to services that match their needs through different life events. At the same time, human-centricity means empowering individuals to better govern the use of their data to enable more data-driven and personalised digital services.



Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment of 2017

The Conference started with the implementation of the Tallinn eGovernment Declaration, which has 25 actions forming the basis for building a human-centric digital government. The discussion focussed particularly on concrete experiences of the Member States of innovative solutions in implementing the once-only and cross-border by default principles related to the Single Digital Gateway (SDG).

The discussion showed that in recent years important progress has been made in developing digital governments in Europe, although not very quickly. This is in line with the results of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). According to DESI 2019, all EU countries improved their digital performance over the past year. Yet — the report continues — some countries still have a long way to go, and the EU as a whole needs improvement to be able to compete on the global stage.

New trends in digital government

The Conference identified several trends in digital government that have resulted in considerable development in recent years. These trends include the

- use of data for better policies,
- implementation of co-creation and design practices in public services,
- development of innovative public services, and
- establishment of digital government ecosystems.

Need for an ecosystem approach

To overcome the present and future challenges, and to place the users squarely at the centre, governments need to adopt an ecosystem approach: they need to act as enablers for a fair data society, fully recognising that players outside the government sector will also be involved in service provision. Furthermore, governments need to orchestrate complex processes, including service providers such as banks, other government departments, local authorities, NGOs and more, by ensuring their buy-in from the early stage of service provision.

This ecosystem approach is too often left to the goodwill of individual decision-makers. However, large-scale collaboration does not happen by itself. There is a need to adopt systematic practices for scaling up government solutions in the ecosystem and, vice versa, the promotion of open solutions from the private sector.

Governance is the fundamental ingredient in ecosystems. In the public sector, the same as with private-sector platforms, ecosystems require a careful balance of creativity and control. The lack of governance is one of the reasons behind the failure of many open-data initiatives, which were the first attempt to implement ‘government as a platform’.
