Speech by Vice-President Ansip at the Digital and Open Government conference, Amsterdam

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be with you in Amsterdam. I would like to thank the Dutch EU Presidency for inviting me today.

eGovernment is a subject close to my heart. And not only to mine – to many other people's as well.

As people's lives turn more digital, they expect public services to follow suit.

We want them to be open - yet secure and easy to use. We want them to let us play a larger part in forming policy and taking decisions that directly affect us.

Several months ago, the European Commission asked people for their views on digital public services in the EU. A clear majority – more than 80% – said they expect e-government services to be open and transparent.

People want public services guarantee full protection of personal data. They believe – as I do - in the 'once only' principle: for people, organisations and businesses to give information to a public administration <u>only once</u>.

Getting rid of complex, paper-based and duplicated processes will help to make the single market a reality in the digital age.

It will make it easier for everyone to interact with governments, based on openness and transparency.

I am a strong advocate of open government.

If we can use digital technology to support and increase public involvement, then it is good for legitimacy, accountability and – ultimately – trust in government.

In addition, the public sector produces and gathers a wide range of information. If this is made accessible, made available as open data – free for use and re-use – then everyone can benefit hugely. The public sector benefits in return.

There is also an important wider aspect to take into account.

In Europe, people travel and reside in other countries a lot more than ever before.

Today, more than 13 million Europeans live in an EU country other than their country of citizenship.

And not only people: EU businesses are increasingly mobile and operate across borders.

That makes sense if they are to make full use of a vast single marketplace of more than 500 million people.

This is where public administrations should not be an obstacle.

Administrations should be able to help businesses to start operating, get their products and services to market quickly, and then expand into other EU countries.

Getting public services to go fully digital is the way to achieve that.

Today, many online public services are confined inside national borders. Often, they do not communicate or cooperate well with each other, even inside a given country.

Opening up data and services between public administrations across borders will raise efficiency, cut costs and facilitate free movement - for businesses and people.

That said, there are already some great success stories:

The UK saves 1.8 billion pounds a year thanks to its 'digital by default' strategy.

Denmark has got rid of paper forms completely. Electronic invoicing now saves its taxpayers €150 million a year and its businesses €50 million a year.

In Italy, e-procurement systems cut more than €3 billion in costs.

But overall, Europe is not yet getting the full benefit from digital public services that should be available seamlessly across sectors and borders.

Digital helps Europe's public administrations to save money.

Applying 'once-only' across the EU could save around €5 billion per year.

Or take public procurement, which is still fairly untapped as an area of e-government. Public expenditure on goods, works and services represents 19% of the EU's GDP.

So it makes a lot of sense to manage it as efficiently as possible - digitally.

For the EU as a whole, each 5% saved by moving to e-procurement could return about €100 billion a year to the public purse. This is equivalent to building more than 150 large hospitals.

Take Portugal, which introduced e-procurement in 2009. Its hospitals were able to achieve price reductions of 18% on procurement contracts.

Ladies and gentlemen: I have outlined some of the many benefits of digitising public services. How are we going to proceed?

A few weeks ago, the Commission published an EU e-government action plan for the next years.

It is part of our broader vision for creating a DSM in Europe and based on three main principles: digital by default, open by default and cross-border by default.

Firstly, 'digital by default' means that interaction with public administrations is done electronically wherever possible.

Regarding openness and transparency, I would like to see public bodies open their doors more to third party involvement:

To other administrations, to civil society, to businesses and private individuals.

And on the cross-border aspect: Put simply, this means not having digital barriers. That applies to European public administrations too: sharing information and delivering services between regions, and between countries.

Let me give you a few examples of specific initiatives contained in the plan.

- We will extend and integrate European and national portals to create a 'Single Digital Gateway' that will save time and money for people and businesses.

Frequently used administrative procedures will be brought fully online, No need to print and send documents on paper.

This will not happen overnight. But if we do not start today, then our businesses will lose out tomorrow. I expect the first concrete results to come next year.

- We will interconnect all business and insolvency registers and link them to the e-justice portal.

Digitising company law will make it easier for companies to meet legal requirements or interact with business registers.

Again, we need to start the reform process today so that we see the first results next year.

- We will launch a pilot project with national EU administrations – in the course of this year- to apply the 'once only' principle for businesses across borders.

This means companies will only need to provide paperwork to public authorities in one EU country, even if they operate in another.

- We will accelerate EU countries' transition to full e-procurement and interoperable e-signatures.

Uptake and progress has been slow in this area, even though the EU has appropriate rules in place.

If I were to sum up the Commission's vision for public administration in Europe, it would be this:

Open, transparent and collaborative governments that make life easier for people and businesses – and for administrations themselves - also across borders.

We want this action plan to exemplify that vision.

I encourage you all to engage actively with our plan over the coming years. It can only succeed if everyone involved plays a full part: to raise concerns, propose solutions and work together.

For that to happen, the working culture of our administrations needs to change and move away from compartmental thinking.

This kind of "silo mentality" creates so many inefficiencies and duplications.

It damages the perceptions that people have of governments.

Ladies and gentlemen

Digital public services are an obvious way to reduce administrative burden, to increase efficiency and improve the quality of those services.

This helps people, businesses and the public sector itself.

Digital technologies need to be an integrated part of governments' modernisation strategies.

It is how we can achieve seamless cross-border digital public services that will contribute to Europe's competitiveness and help our companies to grow globally.

That is to everyone's benefit. Thank you.

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