

Lifting off towards Open Government A report from the EU Belgian Presidency Conference

This article summarises the main messages from the Lift-off towards Open Government Conference, held on 15-16 December 2010, organised by the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council. It aims to disseminate these messages to the research and practitioner communities and to contribute to the current policy debate on the prospects of e-Government, now being shaped and implemented on local, regional, national and pan-European levels. First, the article outlines the progress of the EU discourse on e-Government also providing a brief overview of the evolving academic debate on this domain. It then introduces the current policy framework for Open Government in Europe and worldwide and provides an analysis of the key policy challenges discussed during the Conference. It concludes with the main messages that emerged, and gives an overview of future prospects and the possible directions the policy agenda for a European Open Society could take.

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Keywords

Openness, e-Government, policy,
European Union

“ The European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015, launched during the Open Government conference, paves the way for the transition of e-Government into a new generation of flexible, seamless government services that will effectively empower citizens and businesses towards building an open, innovative and inclusive digital Europe. ”

1. Introduction - Findings

The Lift-off towards Open Government Conference was organised by the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council and held on the 15-16 December 2010 in Brussels, in order to discuss the prospects of e-Government, now being shaped and implemented on local, regional, national and pan-European level.¹

Following the 5th EU eGovernment Ministerial Conference in Malmö in 2009, organised by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council,² the Belgian Open Government Conference was an important milestone in preparation of the forthcoming 6th EU eGovernment Ministerial Conference that will be organised by the Polish Presidency for November 2011.³

The Open Government Conference, preceded by a one-day event dedicated to Local e-Government, was attended by a total of 844 participants, 38% of whom came from the private sector, and 62% from the public sector. 60% were from Belgium and 40% from abroad. 15 press agencies and 5 TV crews were present at the Conference, where a total of 44 countries were represented.⁴

The Conference included an exhibition where around 40 exhibitors from public, private and third sectors showcased their projects and policy and research initiatives, and demonstrated best practices from the past decade. However, despite all the efforts and success stories, the exhibition also showed that e-Government is still work in progress. It could be said that Europe has only just begun to tap into ICT's potential for society and citizens.

David Broster, Head of the Information Society Unit of IPTS,⁵ the official Conference rapporteur, supported by Gianluca Misuraca and Margherita Bacigalupo, Scientific Officers at IPTS, presented the main findings in the closing session.⁶ These are summarised in this article which also provides further insights and ideas for future action.

2. A Decade of Joint Work on eGovernment

A look at the evolution of the e-Government agenda during the past decade and a glance through the Ministerial Declarations that started in Brussels in 2001 and have followed each Ministerial Conference since then (Como in 2003, Manchester in 2005, Lisbon in 2007 and Malmö in 2009). This clearly shows the changing political emphasis put on e-Government priorities.

1 <http://www.opengov2010.be>

2 MalmöSweden, 18-20 November 2009, <http://www.egov2009.se/>

3 The official eGovernment Ministerial Conference is organised every two years by the Presidency of the EU Council in collaboration with the European Commission. See http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/index_en.htm

4 Source: Official data provided by the Conference's organisers.

5 IPTS is one of the seven Institutes of the Directorate General Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. IPTS' mission is to provide customer-driven support to the **EU policy-making** process by developing science-based responses to policy challenges that have both a socio-economic as well as a scientific/ technological dimension. (See: <http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu>).

6 See: <http://www.opengov2010.be/sites/default/files/speakers/presentations/PL9-01-David-Broster.pptx>

Figure 1: A tag cloud highlighting the keywords of the five Ministerial Declarations on e-Government, to visualise the evolution of concepts in the eGovernment agenda. Source: Authors' elaboration.



In 2001, e-Government is associated with words like “modernisation, reorganisation, access, participation”. In 2003, new themes came in like “efficiency, transparency, measurement”. The emphasis on “transformation, effectiveness, inclusion, identity and exchange of best practices” started in 2005 in Manchester and was subsequently embodied in the [i2010 eGovernment Action Plan](#) (European Commission, 2006). In Lisbon (2007), “innovation and cross-border interoperability” were added, and finally, by Malmö, the agenda had moved on to “engagement, openness, quality of services and user needs”.

In the early 2000s, the ambition was to bring governments online to grant all citizens multi-channel access to public services. ICT was seen as a readily available set of tools that would facilitate public sector modernisation, thus improving service delivery. Almost as a side effect, inclusion would be ensured and greater participation encouraged. Progressively, sights were set higher towards the reduction of administrative burden in order to free resources to deliver more value for tax-payers’ money and to enhance productivity by leveraging on efficiency.

Over the same period, the importance of cross-border usage of emerging solutions gradually shifted from the exchange of good practices to cooperation, joint action and knowledge sharing to deploy interoperable cross-border electronic identity and authentication systems. Interoperability has gradually become the pivot for seamless cross-border e-Government services intended to enable citizen and business mobility and to remove procedural barriers to the Single Market.

Provided that delivery of inclusive public services for all never disappears from the list, citizens (and businesses) will progressively stop being passive recipients of services and become more active stakeholders. Initially they were encouraged to participate in policy definition and decision-making processes through consultation mechanisms. But their involvement has gradually grown to the point where they are starting to be recognised as co-designers of public services and active stakeholders in the generation of public value.

To sum up, there has been a steady shift from a back-office to a front-office focus. The unprecedented growth of ICT use has compelled a transformation towards openness and engagement. However, it is widely accepted that this transformation lags behind the Web2.0 phenomenon, that arrived on the scene in the middle of the first decade of 2000s, now becoming the ‘new normal’, as convincingly shown by Peter Hinssen, a visionary speaker at the Conference.⁷

To paraphrase Hinssen’s concept, Open Government will be the norm in the future, but this transformation will be brought about more by behavioural changes than by ICT. We are already witnessing many changes in our daily lives, and personal and professional attitudes. This can especially be seen in the way the young people integrate their digital and real selves, or how social networks and user-generated content is used and consumed (if not abused). However, we are only halfway through the digital revolution. Much more needs to be done, more than ever from a public sector organisational perspective, to institutionalise changes and ensure that a new generation of ICT-enabled public services become beneficial for citizens.

3. An Overview of the Evolving Academic Debate

e-Government policy in Europe has developed in line with its theoretical evolution in the academic and research community, where it has seen similar changes of emphasis. Since the 1990s, the systemic introduction of ICT into governmental operations has given rise to the concept of e-Government. This has numerous labels: e-Gov, digital government, e-administration, online government and, in certain contexts, transformational government, each of which reflects different priorities in government strategies. The term ‘e-Government’ has been diversely defined by different scholars and other stakeholders. In the narrow sense, e-Government indicates a system of effective provision of public services via ICT. It also implies electronic transactions between government and other actors such as citizens or businesses in society through new technologies including the internet (e.g. Evans and Yen, 2005; Gil-García and Pardo, 2005). In brief, the concept of e-Government includes all applications of ICT that improve efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability of daily government administration (e.g. Moon, 2002; Sharma, 2007). The broader concept, expanded from the simple definition of central and local government electronic administration, sees e-Government as more citizen-friendly, providing enhanced public services and improving productivity of the public sector via extended networks and advanced technologies. Alternatively, as indicated for instance by Nour et al., (2007), e-Government can be defined “as a complex socio-technical system in which heterogeneous stakeholders are interactively entangled to fulfil their best interests”.

In this connection, e-Government has been examined and analysed in diverse research and from different perspectives. Many argue that it should even be a discipline in its own right, notwithstanding its clearly multidisciplinary character. So far, as described by Cordella (2007) ‘the dominant literature has seen e-Government as a next step in the rationalisation of government activities along the lines of the New Public Management’ (NPM) (from Bellamy and Taylor, 1998, to Fountain, 2002, and Heeks, 2002). The concept and practice of e-Government has also been analysed in depth from an Information Systems Theory point of view (e.g. Avgerou, 2002, Ciborra, 2005, and Batini et al., 2009). More often, e-Government is conceived as a non-scientific domain, to be analysed purely from the practitioner’s point of view, giving specific consideration to the different “pillars” of the NPM agenda: efficiency, accountability, decentralisation and marketisation.

Criticism of these views has also emerged in the literature, in for instance Dunleavy et al. 2005, Finger and Pecoud, 2005 Misuraca et al., (2006 & 2008). These authors point out the inherent ‘multi-

⁷ See also <http://www.peterhinssen.com/>

dimensional components and levels of governance that need to be taken into consideration when analysing e-Government, especially in a globalized context where the state is being transformed and there are dynamic tensions between rapid technological developments and regulations. Therefore, e-Government can be seen as a middle-of-the road concept, which identifies the various levels of governments, mainly through their administrations and –subsidiary– through the access of citizens to public affairs, which aims to promote: 1) better and more efficient administration; 2) more effective inter-administration and administration-enterprise relationships; and 3) user-empowerment and more transparent access by citizens to political decision-making’ (Misuraca 2009 and 2010).

4. Today’s Policy Framework

The [European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015](#), launched by the European Commissioner for Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes during the conference, paves the way for the transition of e-Government into a new generation of flexible, seamless Open Government services at local, regional, national and European level that will effectively empower citizens and businesses (EC, 2010c).

During the two day event, there were constant reminders of the economic and political reasons for European collaboration in e-Government. EU President Herman Van Rompuy, Commissioner Kroes, and the Director General of the Commission’s DG INFSO, Robert Madelin remarked on how the eGovernment Action Plan fits into the hierarchy of EU and Member State policies. They underlined the fact that it impacts on most, if not all, flagship initiatives of [Europe2020](#), particularly the [Digital Agenda flagship initiative](#). Above all, however, they stressed that e-Government work aims to build a special, open and engaging relationship with Europe’s businesses and citizens (at all levels: local, regional, national and pan-EU) and that this is a key aspect of the society Europe will build as it moves forward.

The Belgian Minister for Economics and Administrative Simplification, Mr Vincent van Quickenborne, emphasised that ICT in public administration is not only about open data flows, virtualisation, greener IT, and cost saving due to greater efficiency. He claimed that ICT in e-Government have to be understood as the enablers of more agile, timely, and flexible public services. These, in turn, will be the building blocks for innovation which will boost competitiveness. Finally, he emphasised the role of the European Commission as the promoter of a pan-European e-Government ecosystem.

The Director General of the Commission’s DG DIGIT, Francisco García Morán, picked up on the crucial need for interoperability to achieve the EU goal of a digital Single Market. Interoperability (semantic, legal, technical and operational) is the cornerstone required for transactions in goods and commercial services and for making mobility of citizens and business a competitive reality. It is the necessary condition for seamless pan-European public services, which must have common standards, active collaboration, information and experience sharing. García Morán announced that the EC is committed to leading by example by implementing the “e-Commission” strategic framework to improve its efficiency and transparency through the best use of ICT.

The Commissioner for Inter-institutional Relations and Administration, Maros Sefcovic, followed by announcing the Commission’s adoption of the Communication [‘Towards interoperability for European public services’](#), an initiative to encourage public administrations across the EU to maximise the social and economic potential of ICT. The Communication looks at establishing a common approach for Member State public administrations and at helping citizens and businesses to profit fully from the Single Market.

Throughout the conference it was generally acknowledged that a decade of declarations and action

plans has shown that governments can optimise their efforts by working together. In this respect, the Commission has played a special facilitating role, spelled out more clearly than ever in the Action Plan for 2011-2015. However, the new action plan emphasises that the lion's share of effort must come from the Member States and from the people and businesses of Europe.

5. Achieving Efficient and Effective e-Government

The Conference provided an opportunity to collect perspectives and evidence on where Europe stands today. In the plenary session on “How efficient and effective is my government?”, challenges and leading examples were presented and discussed. The Dutch Public Administration presented the impact of the [Digital Client Dossier](#). Belgium provided an overview of the Belgian business register (CBE) as a case study to discuss what opening up government implies in practice. In the case of the CBE, it required the re-engineering of the entire government data structure, and overcoming the challenge of establishing coherence between legacy systems.

However, in order to reap the benefits exemplified by successful cases, governments must be able to provide answers to questions like: How efficient is my back-office and how effective is delivery as perceived by the users? This leads to other questions, such as: How long will it take me - in people time or business time - and is it getting better? Will it be easier next year? Will the system part-fill all the forms by re-using last years' data, saving time for citizens and business and also for the Public Administration?

A common challenge is to establish the metrics of effectiveness, and to measure investment versus creativity. Mrs Mechthild Rohen, Head of Unit for “ICT for Government and Public Services” in DG INFSO explained that the Action Plan tackles this challenge. Rohen said that efficiency and effectiveness imply the provision of new services of higher quality and the capacity to “do more with less”. To achieve this, a fundamental re-engineering of processes and the reorganisation of institutional boundaries and administrative rules will be initiated with the support of ICT.

ICT can indeed help break down silos and open up government processes (e.g. through open data). It can enable new forms of collaboration to design and deliver public services (user-generated public value, according to the Web2.0 model). Furthermore, service-oriented architecture can help generate innovative services through the flexible combination of modular components. Mrs Rohen also said that the European Commission is clearly committed to leading this transformation by example. In this respect, the Commission has put in place a strategy to open up data and a plan for seamless cross-border eID and procurement schemes. The Action Plan sets out a common agenda for the European Commission and the Member States over the next five years, incorporating open government elements, which will contribute to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of European public administrations.

This plenary was closed by Mr Randeep Sudan - Lead ICT Policy Specialist from the World Bank - who centred his intervention around the visual analytics, and the geospatial, mobile, and social networking capabilities of today's ICT. He focused on the potential behind distributed data collection via mobile phones for a real-time, bottom-up data stream for action (traffic jams via mobile, weather conditions via Twitter). His point was that ICT today enable citizen-empowered government and this may generate a great deal of value, especially in developing countries (innovate, connect, transform).⁸

8 See the World Bank initiative eTransform at <http://web.worldbank.org>

6. Policy Challenges

The conference organisers put particular emphasis on the challenges that lie ahead. These need to be addressed if we are to benefit from an open model of governance, enabled by today's ICT. Based on our analysis, the challenges have the following key dimensions.

The first dimension encompasses the **relation between governments and the citizens and businesses** they are meant to serve. The five ministerial declarations demonstrate governments' undeniable concern with becoming more and more citizen- and business-centric. However this ambition depends on the capacity of governments to survey the actual needs, expectations and desires of their target population before attempting to re-design processes and services to satisfy such needs and desires. The capacity to establish a continuous two-way dialogue between governments, public administrations, individuals and collective agents is still one of the major challenges for the deployment of an open model of governance; a model where citizens are empowered as voters, tax payers, service users and active participants in the creation of services that have a collective impact.

The second dimension covers aspects of **technological evolution**. The trend towards the virtualisation of processing and storage capacity in the Cloud environment will not disappear. But though cloud computing provides interesting efficiency and cost saving opportunities, it also creates a plethora of uncertainties in terms of privacy and security. Such uncertainties are not new. They have prompted a number of wider legal questions, and demand the definition of a regulatory perspective on the evolution of eServices in a distributed computing space. Still on the technological ground, increasing constraints are being imposed in terms of energy efficiency on production processes based on computing power. Moving towards greener IT is inevitable. The challenge is not only technical, but economic and political as well. In addition, the costs and benefits of the virtualisation of computing resources, as well as the deployment of energy-saving ICT, have to be assessed and measured. The capability to measure the costs and benefits of new technology deployment is not the only challenge at measurement level in an Open Government perspective. In addition to transparently delivering efficient and effective eServices, the public sector must set in place the means to assess the impact of ICT-enabled transformation in terms of both economic performance and back-office and transaction costs. This need to collect empirical evidence for cost-benefit analyses and to estimate return on investments extends to the mapping of public value and to the measurement of stakeholder satisfaction.

Finally, the **regulatory dimension** is creating bottlenecks in the implementation of a uniform landscape of pan-European public services. The absence of a binding European legal framework for identity, company law, contract law and data protection is de facto a barrier to effective seamless interoperability and to the building of the European digital single market. The existing legal framework, at both national and European level, may need to be revised to better reflect the changing technological and market landscape. In theory, legislation should be technologically neutral so as to be independent of technological evolution. Therefore, the principle of technological neutrality is crucial from both systemic and legal perspectives. Efforts to assess the existing regulations are already underway. However, it must be considered that sometimes the national roles of different governmental organisations hinder the growth of cross-border activities and transactions. In other words, they are forced to adopt regulations and positions that prevent cross border activities due to national considerations.

7. Building Trust in the Single Digital Market

One of the Action Plan's priorities is the development of seamless cross-border e-Government services that correspond to well-defined needs, enabling entrepreneurs to set up and run businesses anywhere in Europe independently of their place of origin, and allowing citizens to study, work, reside and retire anywhere in the European Union. A number of important pilot projects which focus on specific cross-border services were presented at the Conference.

In the plenary session "**Putting the Internal Market in Practice: How can I trust the rest of Europe?**", the results and benefits of the European Large Scale Pilots –STORK, PEPPOL, SPOCS and epSOS– were presented. These projects deal respectively with electronic identity, public procurement, registration of services, and patient health records. Each of them represents a fundamental pillar of delivering electronic government. They provide a model for how EU government agencies can cooperate to deliver seamless cross-border services. The pilots were praised as a source of inspiration for effective collaboration and development of sustainable solutions. It was also interesting to see that the results from one pilot were key enablers for the other pilots.

These projects were designed to remove administrative barriers to the delivery of services on a non-discriminatory basis to all businesses and citizens across Europe. The next step will be to benefit from synergies between the projects by re-using existing infrastructures, sharing results from the large scale pilots, and by identifying gaps and opportunities. In this way, development efforts may be aligned and it will be possible to assess the real social and economic needs, cost-benefits and barriers for future cross-border services where interoperability is key. In fact, it seems that although we have the technical solutions, we still need to bridge the national trust models and harmonise legal structures.

The e-Government Action Plan foresees an assessment of the solutions developed, and based on this, Member States will agree a list of key e-Government cross-border services that could be available in the 27 EU Member States by 2015.

In the following plenary session – **An Open Battle for an Open Government** – CEOs from private sector companies (Bull, Microsoft, Oracle, Siemens and Verizon) discussed the value that their companies provide to the public sector.

The debate addressed the critical issue of how governments can trust the private sector and how a multi-stakeholder approach can be implemented effectively. Representatives from the ICT industry emphasised the need for a healthy public-private partnership. In such a partnership, the public sector would have the power to embed in its procurement process a multi-stakeholder project governance, which would ultimately deliver value to society.

It was acknowledged that part of the tension derives from the fact that government services usually take a long time to gestate, and are complex and interconnected, while the underlying technologies move faster than the standard lead time for system delivery.

The panel agreed that Cloud Computing and shared services are here to stay and that the open standard debate is crucial. Open standards must be pursued. The public sector has to make its motivations and objectives transparent so that the industry can deliver. The panel agreed that ICT is becoming a commodity and that security will be an increasingly important dimension that must be embedded in all ICT solutions by design.

In this final session, it clearly emerged that high levels of innovation and healthy competition are needed between suppliers and providers, but at the same time interoperability and borderless

compatibility are vital for the prime services of the Single Market. This undoubtedly requires a delicate balancing act that heavily relies on open standards for service definition, data structures and semantics. Web2.0, Cloud Computing and browser-based applications were very futuristic concepts when the first Action Plan was drawn-up a mere 5 years ago, whereas today they are technologies and approaches that cannot be ignored (they are the ‘new normal’, as the Conference’s visionary speaker Peter Hinssen would say). So the task of delivering public services that demand high-levels of robustness, trust and openness and resulting heavy investment are indeed grand challenges for all of us to address.

8. Conclusions and future prospects

The main findings of the Conference could be analysed by applying the famous Gartner Hype Cycle (Fenn, 2008) to illustrate how e-Government in Europe, after reaching “the peak of inflated expectations”, is now on the edge of the “trough of disillusionment”. However, the events of the last 20 years (and the expectations of the Internet age) provide a strong sense of “*Déjà vu*” since Europe has stood on that same peak and peered into that same trough many times, but has had to get on with the job.

As effectively demonstrated at the Conference by Peter Hinssen, whose talk on the “new normal paradigm” for the future of Open Government reinforced Commissioner Kroes message about the shift towards a *weGovernment*, there is still work to be done to define exactly what is wanted and meant by ‘Open Government’. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the open government movement will evolve as a partnership between governments, businesses and citizens. It is also evident that public sector information will need to be made more and more available for re-use by an extended range of stakeholders.

During the Conference, the ‘futuristic’ presentation by US Government CIO, Vivek Kundra, compared the US and the EU policy perspective on the future of public services. He pointed out how the US administration has grasped the nettle of Open Government by setting four priorities: i) cost saving (e.g. IT dashboard project), ii) efficiency and effectiveness, iii) cyber security, and iv) open transparent participatory government (based on the democratisation of data and the creativity of crowds which can lead to user-generated public value). The main difference between the EU and the US agendas for Open Government is that the US defines cyber security as an overt goal, something Europe should perhaps consider.

The Obama administration in the US is recognised as a pioneer in open government. On his first day in office, President Obama signed the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, “*ushering in a new era of open and accountable government meant to bridge the gap between the American people and their government*”. However, searching Wikipedia for ‘Open Government’ reminds us that “*the origins of open government arguments can be dated to the time of the European Enlightenment: to debates about the proper construction of a then nascent civil society*”. Open government can be defined as “*the governing doctrine which holds that the business of government and state administration should be opened at all levels to effective public scrutiny and oversight. In its broadest construction, it opposes the use of reasons of state and national security to legitimize extensive state secrecy*”.

Recent developments in the theory of open source governance constitute a clear inspiration for open government. These advocate the application of the philosophies of the free software movement to democratic principles to enable interested citizens to get more directly involved in the legislative process. However, open government is not just about open source and is much more about open data.

In Europe, first the UK Government and now other countries and regions, have released public data to help people understand how government works and how policies are made. Some of this data was already available, but data.gov.uk brings it together in one searchable website. Making this data readily available means it will be easier for people to make decisions and suggestions about government policies based on detailed information.

In this regard, the European Commission's Public Sector Information (PSI) Re-Use Directive (2003/98/EC) emphasises that *"Public sector information is an important primary material for digital content products and services and will become an even more important content resource with the development of wireless content services"*. Many Member States have already started to implement the PSI Directive and are following US paradigms in opening up data. For example, in the UK "Putting the Frontline First: Action Plan", a key recommendation is *"to radically open up data and public information in order to promote transparent and effective government and social innovation"*. Over a thousand public datasets - including Ordnance Survey mapping data, data underpinning NHS Choices and the Public Weather Service, real-time railway timetables, and more detailed departmental spending data - will be released and made free for reuse.

Going further, both the Visby and Malmö declarations during the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council in 2009 underline the need to make data freely accessible in open machine-readable formats, for the benefit of entrepreneurship, research and transparency. They also encourage the reuse of public data by third parties in order to develop enriched services that maximise the value for the public.

The EU Granada Strategy, defined under the EU Spanish Presidency in 2010, further emphasises the way forward for Open Government, based on the principles of transparency, participation and collaboration and characterized by the establishment of communication channels and direct contact between the public sector and citizens.

By putting government information online, and making it easy to find, readily available, accessible, understandable, and usable, people can now interact with their governments in ways never before imagined. Or, as the "Many Minds Principle" states, *"the coolest thing to do with your data will be thought of by someone else"*. Sharing data enables greater transparency; delivers more efficient public services; and encourages greater public and commercial use and re-use of government information.

But again, this only resolves part of the problem. In fact, the real issue is how to link these open data (and make sense of it). Linked Data, a term coined by Tim Berners-Lee in his [Linked Data](#) Web architecture note, is about *"using the Web to connect related data that wasn't previously linked, or using the Web to lower the barriers to linking data currently linked using other methods"*.

At a policy level, most government announcements and guidelines are associated with the open data initiative, but do not explicitly emphasize linked data. Only the UK government has declared its commitment to publishing data as linked data because it is convinced that this is the best approach available in a hugely diverse and distributed environment, in a gradual and sustainable way. In addition to this, we should also consider that reaching out to non experts is as important as making data available and linked. In this, ICT tools for simulation and visualisation can be an important support to both policy makers and ordinary citizens.

In summary, as soon as data and information are open, available, and well-structured, the power of crowds, which has transformed the news industry with the advent of blogging, could extend into just about every corner of the web. Since third parties are less constrained by rigid internal bureaucracies and strict accountabilities, they will innovate around the data far more quickly and

freely than government can. However, open data is a means not an end, and releasing the data is a small step in a long walk.

In conclusion, despite all the efforts and successes of the past decade (many of which were embodied in working applications shown in the exhibition hall of the Conference itself), it was agreed that work has by no means been completed. Indeed, though the political commitment, backed by the eager expectations of citizens and business, is stronger than ever, and there is a framework to assess performance along with an abundance of technologies, a lot of hard work lies ahead.

Since the Conference was organised by the Belgian Presidency, CHOCOLATE was chosen as an acronym for an easy-to-remember message to take away. This stands for: Citizen-centricity; Harmonisation; Openness; Cross-border collaboration; Organisational change; Legal frameworks; Action Plan; Trust; and Engagement. These could also be the main keywords and principles for the lift-off of a European Open Government Strategy. This strategy can only be effective if the boundaries of traditional e-Government are pushed back to resolve the complex societal challenges Europe faces by applying ICT-enabled innovations and collaborative governance approaches. Innovation, sustainability, economic recovery and growth will in fact depend more and more on the ability of policy makers to envision clearly and effectively both the root causes and the possible solutions to complex, globalised issues (EC, JRC-IPTS, 2010). Only thus can the main barriers to better governance be removed and a more open, innovative and inclusive digital Europe constructed.

9. Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council, and in particular Frank Leyman, Manager for International Relations of the Federal Public Service Information and Communication Technology (FEDICT) of Belgium for the invitation to act as Rapporteurs of the "2010 Lift Off Towards Open Government Conference".

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