

(Check against delivery)

Opening speech

EPSA launch event, 17/01 at 10h00

Dear Ms Pröhl, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Introduction -

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today, on the occasion of the launch of the third European Public Sector Award. The object of this award is to recognise and support innovative practices in the delivery of public services, while sharing and developing best practices across the European Union. As Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for inter-institutional relations and administration, I consider that it is very important to support this initiative, which highlights good practice in the public sector. As part of the Commission's support for this initiative, I have accepted to be in the patronage committee, and believe that the unique role of EPSA which is able to oversee pan-European public sector achievements – accessible to all levels of government - makes the launch event particularly relevant.

Given recent financial and economic developments, an increasingly clear drive for change in public services has led to reflection on the many challenges that governments and public institutions now face:

- How to better perform with fewer resources (budgetary constraints);
- How to deliver increased performance (in terms of efficiency and effectiveness);
- As well as how to become more open and transparent (building trust and acting with integrity).

Throughout Europe, public services represent a substantial part of the economy. Thus, promoting innovation in the public sector is constantly required in order to maintain credibility in the eyes of the general public. While demands on public service are increasing, driven by an ageing population and rising expectations, the resources available to meet these demands are not; quite the contrary.

- *Current initiatives emanating from the EC in terms of public sector delivery* -

As you probably know, within the Commission, many areas, procedures and rules have been modernized with the comprehensive administrative reform in 2004, which brought many changes to the Commission's working procedures and its staff. The reform is an excellent basis to build on for further modernization of internal policies and management instruments.

Our internal reform was of great value in relation to the launch of new processes targeted at the institution's external stakeholders.

In this respect, our contribution to the improved delivery of public services was focused on the following three key issues:

- Efficiency and effectiveness
- The closely related issue of performing better with fewer resources
- Increased openness and transparency

Efficiency and effectiveness are at the centre of the latest initiatives of the Commission on public service delivery. This can be seen most clearly in the areas of electronic cooperation and communication: rightly so, as citizens and businesses expect administrations to be able to communicate internally and with other Member States easily and swiftly.

The use of IT systems and machine readability of public information are very important issues in this regard.

The Commission's new e-government programme — known as ISA for "Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations" — aims at improving electronic cooperation among public administrations in EU Member States. It will run for the period 2010-2015.

This programme takes a practical approach in helping administrations across Europe to communicate more easily, and thus boosts our long-standing efforts to create a European Union free from electronic barriers at national borders. It will also help government agencies to develop systems with common basic architectures – thus cutting costs – while facilitating anti-fraud activities and other controls which are needed if our citizens are to continue to have faith in the single market and a frontier-free Europe.

Another example is the consolidation of websites and portals, such as 'Your Voice in Europe' (access point to on-line consultations and debates on the European agenda), 'Your Europe' (portal to on-line European and national public services), and 'SIMAP' (information for public purchasers and businesses interested in public procurement opportunities in Europe).

Performing better with fewer resources is a permanent and increasing challenge for the public sector in the current financial and economic climate. You are not alone in this endeavor. We are not alone in this endeavor. The Commission, an institution with around 40 different services and around 35.000 members of staff – is looking for the most appropriate organising structures for its different services, as well as the most suitable internal procedures for work coordination and staff management.

Moreover the Commission is committed to a zero growth policy with regard to staff numbers until 2013 despite the new challenges that the Union in general, and consequently the Commission, has to face – particularly after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. This has been discussed repeatedly at various levels since mid-2009. I understand that different experiences in this matter are regularly discussed and exchanged to try to identify the ideal solution to this huge challenge. No magic

recipe has so far been found, which is obvious since no one-size-fits-all approach is possible here. But we need to continue sharing ideas and experiences to identify realistic options that could be replicated.

Increased openness and transparency are the main concern in a number of key issues falling under my responsibility: the European Citizens' Initiative, the Framework Agreement between the Commission and the European Parliament, discussions on a revision of the Code of Conduct for Commissioners and plans for a joint Transparency Register between the Commission and the European Parliament.

The recent agreement between the Parliament and the Council on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) will for the first time allow citizens to directly suggest new EU legislation. An innovation contained in the Lisbon Treaty, the ECI will allow at least one million citizens from at least one quarter of EU Member States to invite the European Commission to bring forward legislative proposals in areas where the Commission has the power to do so.

Moreover, in line with the Commission's 2009 policy guidelines, a revision of the code of conduct for Commissioners is in preparation and the European Parliament has been informed about the Commission's plans.

- Future challenges -

When considering future challenges in the public sector, a link should be made with at least two recent important landmarks, affecting both European and national levels.

The first is the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force a little more than a year ago, on 1st of December 2009. The main innovations brought in by the Treaty are of course new high level procedures and new powers over foreign affairs and justice. But the importance of public administration both at the level of Union's institutions and across the EU in delivering efficiency and quality is equally an important aspect of the Treaty.

While public administration and public services remain very much the responsibility of individual Member States, Article 197 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides a legal basis allowing the Union to support the efforts of Member States to improve their administrative capacity to implement Union law.

Administrative cooperation has a voluntary basis – in the support and, coordination of the actions of Member States, thus excluding the harmonisation of national laws and regulations. However, there are already many existing activities and projects in the field of administrative cooperation in sectoral areas covered by the Treaty, which have been in place before the current legal basis entered into force – such as networks for co-operation on sectoral projects in the areas of goods, consumer policy, competition, taxation and customs.

Two successful examples of already existing sectoral cooperation networks with the national administrations are the SOLVIT network (targeting the resolution of cross-frontier problems arising in the Internal Market) and the EU Pilot network (aiming to respond to citizens' enquiries and complaints on the application of EU law). As regards horizontal actions, namely those fostering cooperation among public administrations themselves, the Commission already offers the possibility for civil servants from national administrations to participate in exchanges with the European institutions (the Seconded National Experts scheme) and vice versa.

Another excellent example is the recently established "Erasmus for officials" project, a short-term traineeship programme for national officials dealing with EU matters in their daily work. All these initiatives are important with a view to building mutual trust between administrations, and we will be exploring further ideas with Member States and in partnership with public administration networks and institutes such as EUPAN and EIPA, about how to improve mutual understanding of different administrative approaches, as well as to foster administrative cooperation.

The second recent important landmark is the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade, "Europe 2020", which was adopted last year. Three mutually reinforcing priorities were set – smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – aiming to help the EU and the Member States deliver higher levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. At this point, I cannot help but notice the congruence between the objectives set in the Strategy and the three themes selected by the ten official partner countries, clearly addressing public concerns about current and future challenges across Europe.

It goes without saying that high quality public administrations, at both EU and national levels, are an essential element for achieving the strategic goals set in the EU 2020 Strategy. A concrete example of this is the recent Commission Communication – "Towards interoperability for European public services" – which seeks to establish a common approach for Member State's public administrations, to help citizens and businesses to fully profit from the EU's Single Market. Making full use of the Single Market often obliges citizens to deliver or collect information or documents they need to work, study or travel within the EU and send them to public administrations in another Member State.

Businesses face a similar reality. The need for effective interoperability is a central part of the Digital Agenda, one of the flagship initiatives in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Commission's Communication introduces both the European Interoperability Strategy (common policies and initiatives) and the European Interoperability Framework (common guiding principles), which should guide Information and Communication Technologies policy for public bodies across the Union.

- Conclusion -

Apart from the numerous programmes and actions undertaken, more and always smarter initiatives are needed if the public sector is to adapt to the challenges it faces in the next 5 to 10 years. European public services currently face new issues in the light of increased public deficits across the European Union.

The growing challenges placed on public services by an ageing population as well as increased demographic pressures in certain parts of the Union, will also be important factors, we in the public sector must face. These issues coupled with the need to ensure that our people have the skills and knowledge needed to take full advantage of globalisation, paint a picture of challenging times ahead for the provision of public services. Tough decisions will continue to have to be made, and with the general public needing to be brought on board.

In these more difficult economic times, it is vital that European public services continue to contribute to essential policies in areas as diverse as climate change, energy and security. It is also crucial that the quality of public services is not compromised through issues of funding. What I hope to see in the next years is economic pressures acting as a catalyst for greater efficiency and quality in the delivery of European public services.

In light of this, the Commission intends, as previously outlined, to strengthen its support for cooperation among European public administrations in the next years. The initiatives I have chosen to mention today are but just a few of the examples of the EC working with public services, learning from their experiences, and helping them adapt to the challenges to be faced in forthcoming years. But of course different problems require different solutions.

That is why the presentations and discussions that underlie the European Public Sector Award are so important. I was pleased to note that during the previous EPSA event in 2009 all 27 Member States, together with some of the European institutions, took an active part and submitted their projects – and 300 of them were received for

assessment. It shows that Member States continue to take seriously the need to improve the efficiency of their public services and to innovate in service delivery within the current economic climate – endeavours whose continuity I strongly encourage.

It is through such exchanges of good practices that public bodies can foster mutual learning and obtain feedback on their work, in order to improve the quality and efficiency of the public services they deliver.

I hope that this year, EPSA will be able to collect even more projects than in previous years from across the EU-wide administrations and to provide the same platform in which to showcase public sector achievements.

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