



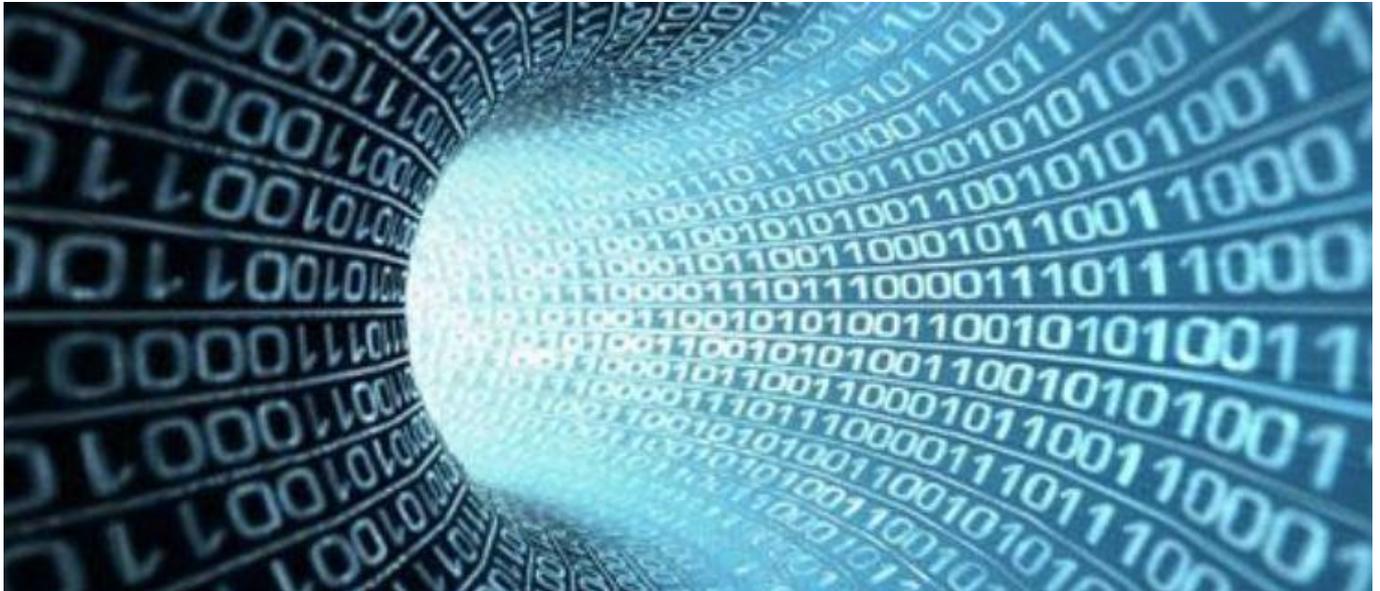
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## Single Digital Gateway

Written by Astrid Van Hecke, Senior Monitoring Consultant on 13 October 2017



*On October 10, the IMCO Working Group on the Digital Single Market held its thirteenth meeting. The topic of debate was the Single Digital Gateway.*

*The participants to the debate elaborated on the fact that the Your Europe portal is not well known by EU citizens and that the Single Digital Gateway needs to become a well-known and easily accessible portal for citizens and businesses alike. MEP Julia Reda (Greens/EFA, DE) had some reservations in terms of the exceptions to the administrative procedures that are to become fully digitalised and the sending of biometric data via the internet. Please find below a summary of the debate.*

**Roza von Thun und Hohenstein (EPP, PL)** started off by saying that the EU needs to meet the expectations of citizens and businesses, it is of key relevance to the Digital Single Market. She explained that both need to comply with national rules, often cross-border and therefore it is pivotal that all those are informed about the rules applicable and can find all the information and assistance service. Citizens and businesses should not run into additional obstacles when dealing with national administrations. Borderless, personalised and user-friendly digital public services are important. The digital transformation of government is key to the success of the single market. The proposal on the Single Digital Gateway intends to address these needs. It aims to have a centralised access port for all EU citizens and business to all information necessary. It ensures full access to online procedures in a non-discriminatory way. If a procedure is available in a Member State, it should also be accessible to

other citizens from other Member States. It also imposes an obligation on Member States to create full online access to the most important and most often used procedures. She said they should assess whether this meets consumer and business expectations. She stated that the Parliament has called many times for a European single point of contact for both business and consumers. She noticed some steps from the Commission, they were timid but went into the right direction. She wondered why the Commission is building a new structure instead of reinforcing the Your Europe portal. She also pointed out that there was a very low awareness of Commission information services.

**Charlotte Duke, Partner, London Economics and leader of the consumer behaviour and experimental economics work programme** explained that they conducted a study in 2013 on a single point of contact for consumers and businesses in the EU. Improved access to improved online information processes and problem-solving solutions are key to the Digital Single Market and e-government. Issues with access, awareness, fragmentation online information, missing and inaccurate information can cause lost benefits and incur costs to businesses when undertaking their activities in another Member State. There have been studies in the past four years that provided estimates of the cost or lost benefits. In 2012 it was identified that consumers, if able to compare services online, would gain 300 million euro per year. The costs incurred due to difficulties in accessing services were between 150-600 million.

In the single point of contact study of 2013, 91.6 percent of respondents did not know any EU portal for citizens. In addition, 25 percent of businesses could not find the information they needed. The evidence shows that information and access issues remain fragmented and missing. There is low awareness and processes are often not available or more difficult to foreign users. She continued by summing up a number of key recommendations that were identified in the 2013 study:

- The establishment of an umbrella or single entry point that assists citizens or businesses to find the information they require and guide them to the most appropriate service that can assist them. There is a large number of online services, portals on EU level but a larger number at national level. Consequently, there are overlaps and they create confusion. She therefore suggested bringing the groups into families of services;
- Interlinking between complementing services and routing users between services;
- The utilisation of key solutions: search engines, enquiry forms etc;
- Information should include national level issues and access to national organisations. People go first to a national level service, so they have to be able to route themselves from there to a European service.

She explained that they did an assessment in regard to deficiencies identified and recommendations made in the 2013 study. She stated that the aim of the Commission proposal is to reduce additional administrative burdens for cross-border activities. One must keep in mind the cost of slow Europe. She said that the preferred option is an EU-coordinated approach. She then made a comparison between the Commission proposal and her recommendations.

- 1st recommendation: The umbrella single entry point should be based on user needs, it should not be a supplier framework.

Commission proposal: The Commission wants to build upon the Your Europe portal.

She said she had questions about the poll the Commission undertook as the citizens questioned are not a good representation.

- 2nd recommendations: Existing or familiar services should be grouped.

Commission proposal: The Commission plans to create links from the Your Europe Portal to other EU initiatives.

She thinks there will still be overlaps between existing services.

- 3rd recommendation: There should be routing and interlinking between EU level services and national level services.

Commission proposal: Create links to the Your Europe portal on the EU and national websites, set up a common search facility and an EU level enquiry form.

She believes it is an improvement and will assist citizens and businesses to navigate their way around. However, it seems one directional. Citizens will have to find the Your Europe portal first.

- 4th recommendation: Key solutions should be utilised.

Commission proposal: Set up a common search facility and service finder and make sure the information exists in at least one other language, set up a coordination group.

She acknowledged that the single digital coordination group will replace a silo based approach. The key solutions are moving in the direction of the recommendation, but they seem to be one directional nevertheless.

- 5th recommendation: Information about national level issues and national organisation should be available through national organisations.

Commission proposal: 10 plus 10 procedures, common information, common feedback control.

She said that the option for Member States to choose how to sort national information and how to present national information does not improve the findability and accessibility problems for consumers. Findability was identified as the most important quality criteria for online services in the public consultation as part of the Commission impact assessment. The option for Member States to provide information in the format they elect will not improve the findability of the required information on Member State level.

She suggested that all Commission services for businesses, citizens and consumers are captured in the Single Digital Gateway linkages. In addition, they need to identify where it is possible to streamline services and if there is an overlap, it is due to supplier focus rather than consumer needs. She referred to the need to move towards common presentation and organisation of information between the single digital gateway and national portals. Finally, if harmonisation is not feasible then exploring the guidelines of the coordination group may be an option.

**Märt Loite, Counsellor for Economic Affairs, Head of Section for COMPET matters, Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU**, said that the Digital Single Market and the Single Market are at the centre of the Estonian Presidency's priorities. He referred to the informal telecoms meeting in July where they discussed the free movement of data. The Member States were proactive. He said that the free flow of data is an enabler. It is rather clear that in the future economic sectors will be more and more built on data. The governments must take that into account and build their own procedures. In the discussions it was reminded that the issues that need to be tackled are data ownership, securing identity and ensuring digital transparency. The main question is how Europe should act on the free flow of data and come forward with initiatives. He pointed out that the Single Digital Gateway is not just about cross-border issues. He said that there are many situations where one would be better off having a digital procedure. That would in turn enable single market services

to be completed. It has been a target for quite some time. He explained that the EFTA countries also signed the e-government declaration in Tallinn. The declaration has a clear common understanding that EU countries should create opportunities. The EIDAS directive has to be in effect. If Member States obtain data from a person or a company then they should not have to ask for it a second time. He acknowledged that the security and safety issues have to be taken into account in every step. The Estonian Presidency likes the proposals. It can bring about savings but it takes investment in the first stage. The main idea is to shift the mindset. It is not just about digitalisation but also about rethinking the service altogether. This is where the real benefits lie. He acknowledged that it takes time. The proposal on the table is good and solid and the Presidency is committed to taking the discussions forward.

[Science, technology and research](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

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