Trans-European networks for the electronic interchange of data between administrations IDA II: guidelines and projects

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This Communication is an end-term evaluation of the IDA II programme and has been prepared by the Commission in accordance with legal provisions governing the establishment of IDA II. The purpose of the document is to report on the findings of the end-term evaluation of the programme and to give an indication of how these findings have been taken on board to the successor of IDA, namely the IDABC.

IDA II entered into force in 1999 following the approval of two Council Decisions referred to as the Guidelines and Interoperability Decisions. One of the main aims of IDA II was to ensure interoperability and information exchange between public administrations and to ensure efficiency in the provision of on-line services by public administrations to citizens and enterprises at a pan-European level. As well as being project driven by horizontal measures, IDA II seeks to establish technical guidelines and recommendations to be used by public services when sharing information.

In terms of project implementation, between 1999 and 2004, IDA-financed activities included measures such as improving veterinary control and health through information systems in the wake of the BSE crisis as well as information on maritime protection in the wake of natural and man-made disasters. In total, IDA II financed projects of common interest in nineteen different policy areas. Among the more prominent information systems that received IDA II support are the job opportunity website EURES, the PLOTEUS portal on learning opportunities, the flood alert system LISFLOOD, the EUPHIN public health information network, the SOLVIT system for dispute resolution in the Internal Market, DSIS, a telematic application for the collection of statistics, SAFESEANET for maritime safety, and CARE, the road accident database. Although enlargement of the EU to embrace ten new Member States in 2004 did not lead to new information systems being established, a major effort was undertaken to extend existing projects to these countries.

Projects, which addressed the more technical requirements of data exchange, were given similar attention. Much of IDA II's effort went into creating the basic infrastructure for data exchange, with increasing emphasis being placed on the security of information. Central to this initiative has been the TESTA network for secure communications between European public administrations. At the end of the IDA II programme, all of the Member States had connected to TESTA and the network was close to receiving security accreditation. A second group of measures contained a number of applications addressing specific public sector requirements, including CIRCA, a groupware application especially suited to the multi-lingual operating of committees and expert groups required in the implementation of European policies. The "Your Europe" portal, has established itself as a consolidated delivery platform for information on the mobility requirements of citizens and businesses.

The third group of actions included guidelines and recommendations to develop capabilities for interoperability, such as the European Interoperability Framework and the Architecture Guidelines, which developed recommendations for more efficient and effective communication between public administrations. As well as being project driven, IDA II has also been responsible for the coordination of Community and national stakeholders. The management committee and its technical working group, plus experts, played a central role in this. The Committee considered subjects as diverse as videoconferencing, data networks, interoperable IT networks and open source networks.

Over the duration of the programme a total of 107 projects received financing from IDA II. Of these, 62 were projects of common interest. Health and agriculture accounted for the largest number of projects of common interest (PCI), although the agriculture sector did not rank top in budgetary terms. The biggest recipients were the health and environment sector and projects initiated by the European Agencies. In a break down of budgetary commitments, the evaluation report notes that about 52% of funding went towards projects of common interest, while 48% went towards horizontal actions and measures.

The Commission Report also considers a number of key factors in its final assessment of the IDA II project, namely the relevance of the programme, its effectiveness, its efficiency, utility and lastly sustainability. Regarding the first question, the Commission notes that an EU data interchange could not be efficiently run by uncoordinated actions at a national level. The need for an EU based programme is therefore highly relevant. In terms of its efficiency and effectiveness the Report finds that although the IDA II programme consumed a small budget, it delivered many concrete results. The effectiveness of IDA II was harder to analyses against the open-ended nature of the programme's stated objectives. The evaluation process did, however, note that IDA II was warmly welcomed by the new Member States. The utility aspect of the programmes evaluation found that many public sectors have networks with data sharing capabilities – one of the desired objectives of the programme. In addition, IDA has initiated and facilitated the creation of an infrastructure providing a useful service to its target populations. As far as sustainability is concerned the Report notes that, initially, not much attention was given to this matter. However, in the last two years a significant effort has been made to secure the sustainability of projects in the IDA II programme.

To conclude, while pinpointing a number of weaknesses in the programme, the end-term evaluation has drawn largely positive conclusion regarding its over-all performance. The improvements suggested have been or are in the process of being implemented in the IDABC programme.