Editorial

E-Government Deployment Grows Rapidly in Europe and Asia

In many developing as well as developed countries, the introduction of e-Government services is advancing at the national, regional and municipal government levels rapidly. This issue of I-Ways illustrates how diverse these applications are, ranging from a recruitment portal in Malta, e-Games for kids in the UK, an e-Complaint window at the Czech Arbitration Court, a new land register portal in Slovakia, and business services portal for investors in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. At the European level, the EU has adopted a plan for cross-border e-Health services.

It remains a challenge for national authorities in many jurisdictions, however, to take the essential steps necessary for planning, organizing and implementing e-Government projects. The valuable experiences of the government of Sri Lanka are presented as a case study in this issue. While having a strong commitment to e-Development, the Sri Lankan government has faced multiple constraints to mobilizing resources for the roll-out of e-Services benefiting its 20 million citizens. The focus of e-Sri Lanka since 2002 has been on an ICT Development Road Map, considered key to achieving growth, equity, and peace, through technological and institutional transformation of all sectors in the economy and development of an ICT industry.

Since 2003 with establishment of the Sri Lanka ICT Agency and generous support by the World Bank, US-AID and other donors, a number of guiding principles were applied to ensure that e-Sri Lanka became a reality. Dr. Nagy K. Hanna, an internationally recognized development strategist with extensive experience in assisting developing countries design and implement ICT strategies for the World Bank in all geographic regions, pioneered and designed the e-Sri Lanka project. He is the author of two books published by the World Bank that describe in detail the evolution of the e-Sri Lanka project, providing insights into the problems and accomplishments. The observations of Mr. Shoban Rainford, Program Manager of the ICT Agency also are presented.

Russell Pipe, Editor

Guest Editorial

The United Nations and the Future of the Internet

John M. Eger

On June 13 and 14 the United Nation's International Telecommunication Union (ITU) "Working Group" on the Information Society will consider whether – and how – it will assume the lead policy role for the future growth and development of the Internet.

This includes assigning domain names and addresses and related technical matters discussed at two earlier UN conferences. While no decision affecting the way the US – mainly through its agreement with the southern California corporation called ICANN – does business has been made, that is slowly but surely about to change. And it must.

Just two years ago the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), adopted a treaty promoting "cultural identity." The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) among others opposed the resolution. The US stood alone in opposing the cultural treaty on the grounds that it would be used for trade purposes to block the importation of American information and entertainment products

The issue other nations' have about trade in information goods and services or the "free flow" of information across borders is certainly not new. In the '70s, the term "The New World Information Order" was part of the debate by the MacBride Commission – named after Nobel Prize winner Sean MacBride, chairman of the panel – whose concern, then as now, was that the current flow of information and communications heavily favored the US. Developing countries were expressing frustration with what they called a form of "electronic colonialism" with the US dominating media flow. In protest, the US withdrew from UNESCO and rejoined just a few years ago.

This concern with the U.S. does not extend to the developing nations alone. Indeed, France published a treatise called "The Computerization of Society" written by then-Secretary of the Treasury, Simon Nora and co-authored by his assistant Alain Minc, which called for a way of taxing information as a way of controlling what even France saw as a one-way flow of information.

As early as 1976, the French government realized that there was a basic change in the structure of its economy and it was going to be increasingly difficult to tax or control information products and services. It was also concerned with the collection of information for subsequent data processing that was being done in the US by multinational corporations located in France.

To keep the data from being transmitted and processed elsewhere – and in turn to create a robust data processing industry in France – the French devised the concept of "data protection" and argued that nations such as France had a duty to control "the transborder flow of data" in order to preserve and enhance the communications and information technology infrastructure so essential to the economy of the future.

For the first time, it was clear to America that data flow and media flow were one and the same and that the loss of information could hurt domestic economic development. It was also clear to every nation that having a robust information and communications infrastructure was culturally and economically important to their future.

Fast forward to 2005 and the ITU's World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis. The European Union (EU) joined most developing nations in expressing their concern over the widespread develop-

ment of the Internet and its control by the US. With support from UNESCO and other UN agencies – including the Office of the Secretary General – the ITU appears to have launched a new initiative for solving many of the problems UNESCO identified through the WSIS.

All this may seem arcane and distant to the average American. Perhaps too little has been said or written about these issues. Or, perhaps most Americans don't care or they simply trust the UN system.

Yet the US desperately needs to listen and act. It needs to recognize that the Internet is valuable precisely because it is global and everyone and every nation not only has a stake in its future but must embrace this technology to survive. Globalization -which the US is most credited (or blamed) for creating-simply will not work otherwise. Unless the US has a plan to negotiate and establish global polices that satisfy the worldwide hunger for the bold new future promised by the growing Internet, no one will reap the benefits.

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