Portuguese Council Presidency

On July 1, Portugal took over the EU's rotating presidency from Germany. Portugal is now responsible for the EU presidency for the third time, after 1992 and 2000. In turn, it will hand over the presidency to Slovenia on January 1, 2008.

The Portuguese presidency has set up several priorities for its six-month mandate. The most important one includes continuation of the Lisbon Agenda of 2000, when the economic reforms for the EU were launched. Portugal wants to broaden it again, to give greater weight to social and environmental objectives. Although Portugal has not explicitly highlighted them, energy and climate change will continue to be priorities for the European Union.

Established well in advance, the challenges and the agenda for the Portuguese EU Presidency are established around four main areas:

î A New Treaty: Stepping up efforts to solve the political impasse by 2009

î Lisbon Agenda: Facing the challenge of global competition without losing ground

î Security, Freedom and Justice: Adapting to new security threats after 9/11

î External Relations: Strengthening the EU's role on the international stage

With regard to the road map laid down by the German Presidency at the European Summit in June 2007, Luis Amado, President of the European Council, urged: "This is a critical moment of negotiations. We need a new Treaty and we need it fast." He added that the Constitutional Treaty should serve as a basis for institutional reform.

On research, Portugal hopes to stimulate initiatives in a variety of areas. The Presidency wants to attribute a new impetus in science and technology to the Lisbon Strategy which defined collective targets, but left responsibility for implementation in national policies and strategies. The main areas are:

1. Publishing and Scientific Information

Portugal believes that the launch of Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at EU science policy.

Based on a mid-February 2007 Communication from the European Commission on "Scientific information in the digital era: access, dissemination and preservation", the Presidency is committed to encourage debate on a European policy for publishing and scientific and technical information, namely in the field of digital scientific libraries, involving all interested stakeholders, and requiring that mutual trust be established.

Within this key area, special attention is paid to scientists and scientific jobs. The goals identified by the Lisbon Strategy cannot be reached without highly qualified human resources. The expansion of scientific jobs in Europe does not meet the ambitions and the policy objectives defined in the Lisbon Strategy. Hence, the definition of shared policy objectives in the field of Human Resources in Science & Technology has become increasingly indispensable.

The European Union gained an important science policy instrument with the creation of the European Research Council (ERC). The Scientific Council of the ERC met in Lisbon, symbolically representing the first event of the Presidency in science and technology and providing the occasion to discuss with the scientific community the activities developed by the ERC.

2. Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies: A Priority for Europe

Coinciding with the Commission's preparation of its midterm review of the European strategy for nanosciences and nanotechnologies, the Presidency has again highlighted this field, spelling out a specific intention to stimulate the coordination of national and European efforts and initiatives.

3. Reform and Modernisation of Universities

Universities are one of the most important strategic resources for a knowledge-based society and economy. The Presidency will contribute to the process of the modernisation of higher education in Europe, focusing in particular on the opening, diversification and internationalisation of universities, in the context of advanced research and training networks.

The Portuguese Presidency will promote the working agenda of the strategic framework **i2010** (please see Healthcare IT Management, Issue 2, 2007) for the information society, network security, and the general theme of Internet governance.

Within the context of ongoing actions developed by the European Commission and the former presidencies, the main priorities will be Digital Inclusion (eInclusion), electronic Government (eGov) and Research & Development for the information society.

a. Digital Inclusion

The Development of Information and Communication

Technologies (ICT), particularly in the last decades of the 20th century and its wider availability to the population, have led to profound changes in economic and social activities. These, in turn, have had a substantial impact on the quality of life of the EU's citizens, and in the competitiveness and productivity of its enterprises. Nowadays access to ICTs, and to the required competencies for its usage, are very important factors differentiating social opportunities. Furthermore, ICTs are a powerful instrument for social inclusion, opening up new horizons to social policies and actions promoting inclusion. Hence, these technologies can and should be social cohesion factors, as far as possible explicitly combating exclusion.

In the field of European policy for the Information Society, the Portuguese Presidency will highlight the priority given to digital inclusion, namely ICT usage by the social groups who are, so to speak, information society excluded. Within this framework, the Presidency will place special emphasis on the following themes: accessibility, ageing, and illiteracy.

b. Electronic Government (eGov)

Electronic government is a process backed by the diffusion of ICTs, which sets the citizen and the enterprise at the core of any activity. It aims "to improve the quality and the commodity of services, and to strengthen the practice of citizenship through active participatory means". At the same time, it increases efficiency, reduces costs, and contributes to the modernisation of States.

The Portuguese Presidency will continue the effort carried out by the European Union in the sphere of electronic government, and will accelerate the visibility of national policies and the allocation of best practices at a European level.

c. R&D in the Information Society

Within this scenario, the Portuguese Government states: "We know that globally, the European Union has not yet reached the goal of 1% public investment in R&D, or the 2% of private investment in R&D. The exchange of experiences and mutual learning between national governments is still scarce and the collaboration between governments, R&D institutions and scientific organisations at the European level is still in its initial phase."

Finally the Presidency also addresses the advances registered in topics related to security and trust within information systems and communication networks. (CC)

For more information, please visit http://www.eu2007.pt/

A EU Rfid (R-) Evolution?

The Commission has decided to study the options for using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in healthcare, with applications ranging from the identification of patients in hospitals to tagging pharmaceutical products. Therefore, a call for tenders for a study on requirements and options for actions in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in healthcare has been published on the Commission's TED website.

The main objective of the study is to assess the expected features of RFID applications in the healthcare market and to build future scenarios in the field. The aim is also to identify possible obstacles and needs for policy actions or specific research activities on the subject. In healthcare, RFID is used primarily for track pharmaceuticals. In hospitals, RFID systems are used, for example, to identify patients and to allow relevant

hospital personnel to access medical records.

Results of a recent Commission consultation on RFID with a focus on RFID use, Privacy, Data, Standardisation and Interoperability, Radio spectrum and Research opened a debate about RFID and its application. For the use of RFID-based solutions in healthcare, 45% of respondents to a survey said they were positive about the technology, while 40% said that they had a negative view. Overall, 60% of respondents believed that there is insufficient information available to make an informed analysis of RFID technologies.

Moreover, even the question whether RFID can ameliorate the lives of citizens are evenly shared. Some of the benefits of RFID touch upon food safety (identification of allergens, more comprehensive information, easier product recalls), healthcare (prevention of drug misuse, authentication) or supply chain management (fewer stocksout, better after sales service). On the other hand, the risks, which RFID may encounter are privacy, health and environmental risks.

As for the European Commission's role in the RFID debate, 68% of respondents thought that the European Commission should take a more active role in setting RFID standards, in particular to ensure that standards comply with "European cultures and values".

Under the auspices of the Portuguese Presidency a Conference & Exhibition entitled "The Internet of Things" will be organised in November 2007 in Lisbon, in order to showcase cutting edge innovations and research in RFID as well as to further discuss the existing barriers and concerns with respect to the acceptance of RFID. It should be mentioned, that since its adoption, RFID is still in an incipient stage and it remains far from fulfilling its full potential for citizens as well as the markets.

For more information, please visit http://ec.europa.eu/information_society

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