

Basic information: Digital Europe

The new German ID card:

A key prerequisite for efficient eGovernment

Both the European Commission and Germany's government are committed to an integrated information society based on standards and cross-border IT infrastructures. A digital Europe of this kind would benefit citizens and business. Processes would be simpler and more efficient and people could move more freely in Europe. Many believe that this will boost innovation and hence create interesting new jobs.

What the European Commission wants

This is why the introduction of the new German ID card must be seen in a European context. In 2005, the European Commission already launched its i2010 initiative in an effort to harmonise information societies in the member states and to promote greater growth and employment. An important cornerstone of this strategy is the eGovernment action plan. This plan is geared to speed up the introduction of electronic administration services. The member states can hence:

- provide public services in a modern and efficient manner,
- perform services for their citizens in a more secure and improved manner,
- reduce red tape and speed up processes,
- guarantee cross-border public services and hence promote their citizens' mobility.

What the federal government is doing

Based on this European action plan, Germany's federal government developed eGovernment 2.0, a new national IT strategy. State-of-the-art IT infrastructures are to make co-operation between federal government, the federal states and municipalities more efficient and citizens are to be provided with optimum service. Here are just some examples of these offers:

- **ELSTER**

Thanks to this project by all German tax administrations, tax registrations and returns can now be made online.

- **eVergabe, Germany's e-Tender platform**

This platform from federal government, the federal states and municipalities provides information on current calls for tender.

- **DE-MAIL**

This project by the federal government and various service providers enables users to exchange documents in a legally binding and confidential manner via the Internet.

Due to Germany's federalist system, the federal states and municipalities have used different infrastructures and security standards for many of their public administration services. This is all set to change. The following nationwide eGovernment solutions would then be conceivable:

- **Motor vehicles**

Citizens could register vehicles, de-register and register changes via the Internet. Electronically readable documents will successively replace the vehicle documents currently valid.

- **Civil status register**

Authorised applicants receive information, for instance, regarding birth, marriage and death certificates through electronic channels.

- **Citizens' registration**

New IT infrastructures will improve the availability and up-to-dateness of registration data.

What the new ID card can do

The new ID card is an important precondition for further cutting-edge eGovernment solutions. This card provides citizens in Germany for the first time ever with standardised, electronic proof of identity. But the road towards an integrated digital Europe is long. Although the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) has for some years now been calling for the harmonisation of the multinational eCard strategies, countries in Europe are still using ten different concepts for ID cards. Different data protection requirements make it very difficult to change these boundary conditions. First cross-border pilot applications are being prepared by the European STORK (Secure Identity Across Borders Linked) project. The German eCard API framework has a key role to play here.

This new IT framework structure enables public agencies to read out different, international ID and signature cards without having to use numerous IT systems parallel. To what extent the new German ID card will be able to assume a pioneering role in ongoing harmonisation efforts will be seen in the years to come.