When we talk about (cross border) cooperation in
eGovernment, interoperability becomes very important!

But what is interoperability?

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Interoperability means the ability of information and
communication technology (ICT)systems and of the business
processes they support, to exchange data and to enable the
sharing of information and knowledge (IDABC-EIF).

Three dimensions of interoperability need to be considered:

- organizational interoperability,

- semantic interoperability and

- technical interoperability.

Organizational interoperability

- is concerned with defining business goals, modelling business processes and collaboration of administrations that wish to exchange information and may have different internal structures and processes.

- aims at addressing the requirements of the user community by making services available, easily identifiable, accessible and user-oriented.

Semantic interoperability

- is concerned with ensuring that the precise meaning of exchanged information is understandable by any other application that was not initially developed for this purpose. Semantic interoperability enables systems to combine received information with other information resources and to process it in a meaningful manner.

- Semantic interoperability is therefore a prerequisite for the front-end multilingual delivery of services to the user.

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Technical interoperability

- covers the technical issues of linking computer systems and services.

- It includes key aspects such as open interfaces, interconnection services, data integration and middleware, data presentation and exchange, accessibility and security services.

- The ability of two or more networks, systems, devices, applications or components to exchange information between them and to use the information so exchanged [EICTA-1].

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Interoperability today

- Most EU countries launched actions to establish interoperability frameworks (SAGA in Germany, OSOSS in the Netherlands, e-Gif in the United Kingdom).

- According to the eEurope 2005 Action Plan the European Interoperability Framework has top priority. It is supposed to be the basis for the development of pan European eGovernment services.

- Through Web Service standards like WSDL, SOAP, XML,… there is a good method to overcome technical barriers.

- Semantic interoperability is more and more coming from the research field into practical usage.

- Organizational interoperability can not only be solved by technical solutions, so decision makers need to be convinced.

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Theses

- After focussing on the technical aspects of interoperability it is now necessary to focus on semantic and organisational interoperability.

- It is important to establish European standards in eGovernment to support pan European services (RISER: Registry Information Service by European Residents, eMayor: Secure WebServices for Small and Medium sized Government Organisations).

- What are your experiences and difficulties regarding interoperability in your own country, cross border? How do you see the development in standardization (services, data structures, …) in your country?

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