

EPSA ceremony 2009

Maastricht, NL

Speech at the evening event

on 05.11.2009

(President), Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here today as patron of the 2009 European Public Sector Awards. The purpose of these awards is to recognise and encourage innovation in the delivery of public services – and to share and develop best practices across Europe. As Vice President of the European Commission,

responsible for administrative affairs over the last 5 years, I felt it very important to support the European Union Public Administration Network, EUPAN, and now also EIPA, our hosts today, in their efforts to highlight good public sector practice through these awards. I believe it is EPSA's unique overview of public sector achievements at a pan-European level across all sectors of government, which

makes today's ceremony important.

The impetus for change in public services can at times be diffuse. Too often I hear people say "Turkeys don't vote for Christmas" when talking about public sector reform. Yet innovation in the Public Sector is exactly what it needs if its credibility is to be maintained in the eyes of the general Public.

Throughout Europe, public services represent a substantial part of the total economy. I am delighted therefore to see that all 27 Member States are participating in these Awards and that Member States continue to take seriously the need to improve the efficiency of their public services - and to be innovative in their delivery of services - given the current economic climate. The demands on public service are

increasing, driven by an aging population and rising expectations. But the resources available are not. Thus ever greater creativity is needed to bridge the gap.

I am pleased to note that for the 2009 Awards, many European Union bodies have participated and submitted their projects for assessment. But for me one of the most important elements of the

awards is that they extend well beyond the national and European level and include many contributions from local and regional bodies. Given their smaller size, their diversity and the fact that they are so close to the daily needs and concerns of citizens and businesses, it is at this level that I think we will find many of the most innovative ideas for services of the future. Ideas and achievements which might go

unnoticed without the show case provided by awards such as this.

Let me talk about the latest initiatives emanating from the Commission on public Service delivery.

Quality and efficiency are at the centre of the Commission's initiatives on public service delivery. This can be seen most

clearly in the areas of electronic cooperation and communication. Citizens and businesses rightly expect administrations to be able to communicate easily and swiftly. And this internally as well as across borders with other Member States.

The 'e-Commission' strategic framework was endorsed for the period 2006-2010, with the purpose of making the

Commission an example e-administration. The strategy envisaged increased transparency and efficiency through the best use of Information and Communication Technologies. Within this framework, a clear achievement has been the development of advanced public websites and portals, such as 'Your Voice in Europe' (access point to on-line consultations and debates on the European agenda),

'Your Europe' (portal to on-line European and national public services), and 'SIMAP' (information for public purchasers and businesses interested in public procurement opportunities in Europe).

The new e-government initiative under the Commission's ISA programme, which just now entered into force, gives a boost to our long-standing efforts to create

a European Union free from electronic barriers at national borders. The name says it all: "Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations". It should result in better, less bureaucratic experiences for citizens and businesses dealing with other Member States. It will help government agencies develop systems based on common frameworks, IT elements and tools

- so cutting costs and facilitating effective and reliable policy delivery - which is vital for our citizens to continue to have faith in the single market and a Europe free of administrative barriers. All this, and this is important to stress, is not done by imposing ready-made systems top-down from the centre. To the contrary, ISA builds on listening to the needs of users and agreeing jointly on the most

useful solutions and elements to develop.

I have long championed efforts to increase transparency in decision making in Europe – though voluntary regulation of lobbyists and requirements to disclose the end beneficiaries of Community subsidies. I believe that these measures help ensure the quality of public administration by ensuring decisions are taken as

widely informed as possible but without inappropriate interference by interest groups. Disclosure of end beneficiaries forces all actors involved to ensure our policies are well designed and soundly delivered, since any flaws will rapidly become apparent through public scrutiny.

New policies and services are only useful if they are sustainable. Here, I should also mention an

internal tool developed by the Commission administration, which can help in the assessment of Public Administrative reform, both in candidate and potential candidate countries as well as Member States, called "PAR-checklist". Also the ISA programme has a strong focus on looking as early as possible at IT and interoperability issues when discussing and developing new policies.

From the beginning of December, the Lisbon Treaty will finally enter into force. The main developments of this are of course new high level procedures and persons, foreign affairs and justice powers. But the importance of public administration across the EU in delivering our common policies has not been forgotten. While public administration and public services remain responsibility of individual

Member States, Article 197 gives the Union – in practice the Commission – a new possibility to support the efforts of Member States to improve administrative capacity. This is important for building mutual trust between administrations. The Commission already offers some highly regarded training courses for national administrations via the European Administrative School, as well as the possibility for civil

servants from national administrations to participate in secondments and exchange with the European institutions. Nevertheless, we will be looking carefully with Member States at other areas where support would be valuable. Certainly, I believe the European Public Administration Network should be further developed as a forum for sharing ideas on administration across national boundaries.

The future

Past initiatives however are not enough if the public sector is to adapt to the challenges it faces in the next 5 years. European Public services face new issues in the light of increased public deficits across the European Union. The growing challenge placed on public services by demographic pressures – with increased demand from an ageing

population, and fewer younger people to work - will also be an important factor. We, in the public sector, must face up to these challenges.

These issues coupled with the need to ensure our people have the skills and knowledge needed to take full advantage of globalisation, paint a picture of challenging times ahead for the provision of public services.

Tough decisions will have to be made, but these must only be made with the engagement of the general public.

Within these more stringent economic times, it is however vital that European public services continue to contribute to essential policies in areas as diverse as climate change, energy and security. It is also crucial that the quality of public services is not

compromised through issues of funding. What I hope to see in the next 5 years is economic pressures acting as a catalyst for greater efficiency in the delivery of European public services.

In light of this, the EU intends to strengthen support for electronic cooperation among European public administrations in the next 5 years. The ISA programme I mentioned earlier will run from

2010 to 2015 with a financial envelope of 164 million Euros.

This is just one example of how the EC can work with public services to help them adapt to the challenges faced in forthcoming years. But of course different problems require different solutions. That is why the presentations and discussions which have surrounded this EPSA Awards ceremony are so

important. Without them, invaluable sharing of practices in the public sector would be lost. I hope that in 2011, EPSA will be able to provide the same platform in which to showcase public sector achievements.

Thank you.