

Johann Vilanek, Bruno Walter

## **Status and future aspects of e-government in Austria**

Austrian Country Paper

Abstract: e-government law together with e-procurement law forms the statutory framework for realizing e-government and e-procurement applications. Demand for electronic public services has been voiced by the business sector, the citizens and the public authorities. The main reasons were cost and time savings. The Austrian e-government law now enables all citizens as well as the business sector to handle administrative procedures electronically and online.

The e-Cooperation Board (IKT-Board) was founded in 2002 to coordinate the activities of the provinces, municipalities, cities and the business sector. It is responsible for the implementation of e-government and e-procurement. This includes the adoption of the citizen card with all technical aspects, the realization of the electronic file with electronic signature, and the implementation of the procurement strategy.

### **I. E-Government Law**

According to the Austrian e-Government Law, public authorities must be capable of delivering fully electronic transaction services. It was approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2003 and should enter into force on 1 March 2004 after parliamentary adoption.

The e-Government Law covers a wide range of provisions governing unambiguous electronic identification, standard electronic documents, data protection, electronic communications, electronic signature, electronic delivery, procedures and proceedings within all levels of government.

Beside the electronic parts of the e-government law, two fundamentally new components were established: the Citizen Card, which identifies citizens at the public service interface, and the electronic file, which enables the one-stop principle, for all dealings citizens may have with government.

The Citizen Card is to enable secure access to all public electronic services. It is a smart card with an electronic signature and a central identification number unique for every citizen. For public administration access, users need a Citizen Card and a dedicated card reader. The Austrian Central Register authenticates data by matching the information on the Citizen Card against their database. After authentication, every administrative transaction could be done online.

Multi-jurisdictional public administration will be enabled by the electronic file. This part of the e-Government Law describes the legal and technical aspects of back office procedures for electronic data flow. It introduces electronic identification systems to allow data security when transferring documents between authorities or authorities and citizens. Using electronic signatures enables this technique. In the future the original document will be stored electronically, whereas printed versions have the status of a copy.

## **II. E-Procurement Law**

According to the Austrian e-Procurement Law public authorities must be capable of delivering fully electronic transaction services. Traditionally, trade business has been done via mail, facsimile. These procedures resulted in high

transaction costs. With modern electronic media, public e-procurement has become an important rule for modernization and improvement of public procurement. The advantages of public e-procurement are less complexity, faster handling of the procurement procedure, enhanced quality of the procurement process and fewer costs.

Conventional procurement is well known and regulated by law. Therefore, the e-Procurement Law addresses the technical part of the procurement. The buzzwords are communication channels, document format, encryption, time stamp, saving of documents, server break down and archival storage. These legal rules should prevent illegal arrangements.

### **III. E-Government Platform**

The Austrian e-government platform is chaired by the Federal Chancellor and involves several ministers, the representatives of the provinces, municipalities, cities and the business sector. The goal is the design and implementation of a uniform e-government approach for Austria, closely associated with the efforts of the European Union in this field.

The main intention of the e-government platform is to consolidate and improve the present different e-government solutions and to develop new activities common to all authorities. Communication between all members should be ensured by the Executive Secretary of the e-Cooperation Board (IKT-Board).

With the foundation of the IKT-Board the provinces, municipals and cities freeze their own e-government implementations. Therefore, it seems that these public authorities didn't push e-government. But in respect of a national wide unique standard, delays are acceptable. Also the know-how of all experts could be concentrate at the IKT-Board

The IKT-Board's main task is the technical evaluation and implementation of the e-Government Law with two main parts. Part I deals with the online procedures from the perspective of users. Part II stipulates methods within public administration. Therefore, subgroups are currently working on the Citizen Card, electronic file, Internet access for all citizens, security mechanisms, process modeling, forms, encryption, prototypes etc.

User-friendliness and technical quality is always an important part of Internet applications. Therefore, the e-government quality efforts from the IKT-Board lead to the so called "e-government quality seal" ([guetesiegel.gv.at](http://guetesiegel.gv.at)). This seal was created for citizens to recognize at first sight that the application used is consistent with national strategies and guidelines of e-government. The list of e-government quality includes criteria for smart cards, chip cards and transactional services offered on Internet and easy usability.

#### IV. Current e-Government Status in Austria

The illustration of the e-government status in Austria is based on the four phase model published in Auditing E-Government by INTOSAI's IT Committee. As shown in figure 1, the e-government realizations were broken down into four phases.

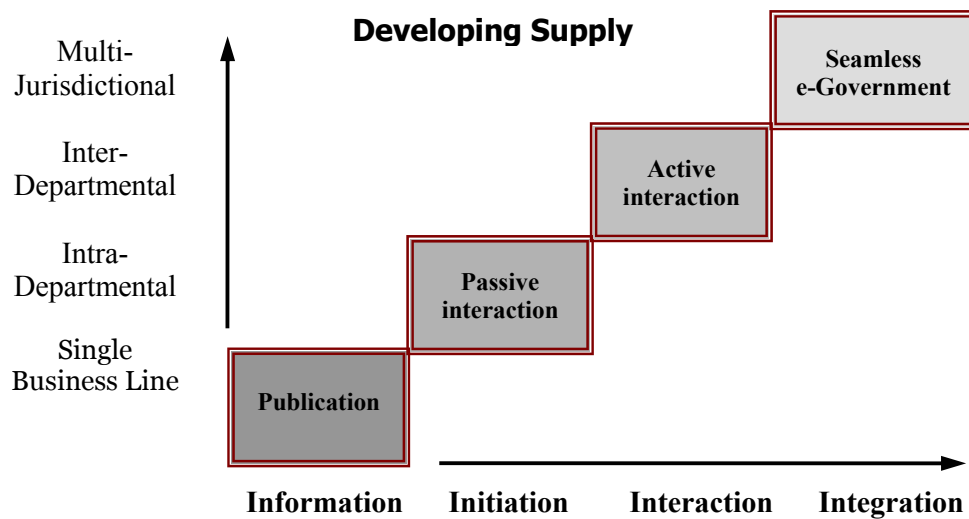


Figure 1: E-Government implementation phases

##### Phase 1 - Publication

Austria's regional and local authorities offer a considerable amount of e-government websites. Useful information about most frequent questions of traditional government is available on the web. The help.gv.at portal was designed for a first access.

##### Austrian E-Government Web Information Site

Help ([help.gv.at](http://help.gv.at)) is an Internet platform with links to a large number of public authorities. It provides information on all dealings with Austrian authorities required in the most frequent life situations such as, childbirth, marriage, housing, or passport matters, and permits the electronic processing of some of these procedures.

It constitutes an interface between authorities and citizens, with special emphasis on criteria such as transparency, readily understandable format, clarity of information, and focus on essential facts.

Beside other acclaims, the Austrian help.gv.at portal received the e-Europe Award 2003 in the category "A better life for European citizens" and the e-Media Award 2003 for the best Austrian website in the category "Information".

Further examples: [austria.gv.at](http://austria.gv.at), [ktn.gv.at](http://ktn.gv.at), [wien.gv.at](http://wien.gv.at), [rechnungshof.gv.at](http://rechnungshof.gv.at), [bmvit.gv.at](http://bmvit.gv.at), [help.gv.at](http://help.gv.at)

### **Phase 2 – Passive Interaction**

All regional and most of the local authorities also assist phase 2. Forms are available at help.gv.at and on local websites in RTF and PDF formats. The files are downloadable, are to be opened with tools free of charge, completed on home-PCs and printed out. Almost all currently available word processing programs can read RTF forms. The approved starting point for information and form downloads is also [help.gv.at](http://help.gv.at) website.

Examples: [help.gv.at](http://help.gv.at), [wien.gv.at](http://wien.gv.at)

### **Phase 3 – Active Interaction**

Phase 3 enables the intra-departmental electronic handling of public services. This service is offered by the Federal Ministry of Finance and by several provinces.

The provinces offer standard services like the Senior Pass and the Family Pass as remote applications. These documents do not require interaction between citizen and the official. The administrative authorities provide an input mask on their websites. This mask requires information about first name, family name, birthday, citizenship and address. This information enables the officials to issue the required document. The transaction is completed by postal delivery. Some provinces require prior authentication by physical presence before online solicitation.

Example: [noel.gv.at](http://noel.gv.at), [ooe.gv.at](http://ooe.gv.at), [wien.gv.at](http://wien.gv.at)

A more powerful application is the electronic filing of tax returns by the Federal Ministry of Finance. The system functions similar to the popular e-banking applications. After a first registration, users may login by member, name and pin.

The system is open to citizens and the business sector. Registration is done by forwarding personal or company data to the Federal Ministry of Finance. If the personal or company data match with the data of the Ministry, a registered letter which includes access data is delivered. After logging on, the masks are self-explanatory. Electronic filing of tax returns has speeded up the process by several months.

Example: [bmf.gv.at](http://bmf.gv.at)

### **Phase 4 – Seamless e-Government**

Phase 4 requires extensive changes and implementations in the field of legislation and used electronic techniques. The implementation of the multi-jurisdictional concept as propagated in the one-stop principle will result in the ready availability in electronic format of all documents of every citizen, located at different departments, for the official processing the request. Therefore, specific tasks will no longer be traditionally tied to dedicated public offices.

At present, multi-jurisdictional authority visitations are not supported. The legislative part, called e-Government Law, will take force in March 2004. The implementation of the electronic service delivery is in progress and will be established on a step-by-step basis. Fully online transaction service including payments and delivery has been announced for 2008.

The first step of every electronic transaction demands the authentication of the user. This is a process with high-security implications regulated by law. According to the provisions of the e-Government Law the Austrian Central Register is held to authenticate every user before electronic transactions occur. Consequently, the secure user data are available to the public office executing the transaction.

### **SUMMARY**

The implementation of e-government and e-procurement in every field of the Austrian public administration is strongly supported by the Austrian authorities. The e-Government Law and the e-Procurement Law were enacted to provide legal certainty. The e-Cooperation Board was founded in 2001 to synchronize and push forward activities. Seamless e-government should be fully operational for the federal and province authorities by 2008.