Estonia Today

E-ESTONIA

E-government

"Check out the world's most high-tech cabinet room. This e-cabinet doesn't just look cool. It is cool – and it promotes efficiency and saves money, too." Newsweek, March 11, 2002

In August 2000, the Government of Estonia, as a world pioneer, changed its Cabinet meetings to paperless sessions using a web-based document system.

The objective of the new web-based system is to automate the preparation process and the proceedings of Cabinet meetings, which includes preparing as many materials as possible digitally, which reduces copying costs and delivery time.

Ministers peruse draft bills and regulations, make comments and suggestions, and vote entirely online at computer terminals. The system, coupled with the use of digital signatures, eliminates the need to send mountains of papers between ministries for consultation. It gives ministers a possibility to participate in the session from any location. The system, created by Estonian IT companies, saves approximately three million Estonian kroons (192 000 EUR) per year in paper and copying costs.

Already before the Government started e-sessions, an Internet portal called the *Estonian State Web Centre* (*www.riik.ee*) was created in 1998. It contains links to all governmental institutions' websites and everybody has access to almost all the official documents. Together with the development of Internet services, the domain *riik.ee* has become an inseparable part of the Estonian e-government and the symbol of Estonia in the Internet.

E-Government

E-elections

The Estonian e-voting system has been under development since 2002. For the first time it is used for local government council elections in October 2005. The system allowes citizens to sign their ballots electronically via Internet at home computers. Electronic voting does not eliminate traditional voting, but it provides a convenient option for voting.

Electronic voting takes place only on advance polling days (sixth to fourth day before election day) and government-issued ID-cards are used for voter identification. In September 2005 80% of voters had an ID-card.

By voting electronically the voter has the opportunity to change his/her vote as many times as desired. The last vote given, will be the one recorded in the final election results. One's electronic vote can also be changed in the traditional way by visiting the polling station, but only during the advance voting period. On Election Day the registered electronic vote cannot be changed or made void.
The National Electoral Committee will record the results of electronic voting on Election Day.

E-society

In the summer of 2001, the Government created a web page *Täna Otsustan Mina* ("I Decide Today", www.eesti.ee/tom/). Ministries upload all their draft bills and amendments there, allowing people to review, comment on and make proposals on the legislative process as well as propose amendments to existing legislation. Ideas that gain substantial support will be reviewed by competent bodies. Approximately 5% of all ideas are used as amendments to bills.

The Government and a number of private companies announced a project in 2001 (Look @ the World project), as a result of which the percentage of Internet users in Estonia should increase from the present numbers to over 90% or exceed Finland's corresponding indicator within three years. The project focuses on further improvement of access to the Internet in Estonia and private companies have announced that they are willing to invest a sum equal to the Government's yearly IT budget.

In April 2002 the Look @ World Foundation started an ambitious training project – the goal being that by spring 2004, 100,000 Estonians will have been taught basic computer and Internet skills. At the end of the project on 31 March 2004, 102 697 people I.e. some 10 % of the adult population of Estonia had passed the training. Over 70 per cent of the participants have become regular Internet users.

Since January 2002, the Citizenship and Migration Board (www.id.ee) has been issuing a new primary domestic identification document - the ID card. In addition to many advanced security features, the card has a machine-readable code and a microchip containing the visual data on the card and two security certificates (long number series), to verify the individual and supply digital

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signatures. Possible future uses of the card include integration of ID cards and banking cards and various access cards. By September 2005, 845 479 ID-cards were issued.

ECitizen www.riik.ee/ekodanik - a nation-wide project for developing co-operation between Estonian citizens and the public sector through the Internet. Vision: all state and local government agencies should be providing services through the Internet, 60 per cent of the population are everyday Internet users. A citizen's portal that attempts to meet individual needs is in operation.

According to the European Commission report on March 2005, Estonia is the only new EU member occupying a high place on the list in terms of availability of public services via the Internet. In comparison with other EU members, Estonia stands out for the ease of application for various environment-related permits on the Internet, registration of a new business, filing a statement with police and conducting various medicine-related procedures.

The Estonian Penal Code has included articles on security-related computer and data crimes since 1997. Data-related criminal legislation is constantly updating and developing.

Daily e-readiness

Already in February 2000, the Estonian Parliament approved a proposal to guarantee Internet access to each of its citizens, just like any other constitutional right.

With its policies and innovative initiatives the Estonian Government is helping companies make the information technology sector one of the fastest growing in the country. Research undertaken by the World Economic Forum on the use of Information technology in 104 countries (The Global Information Technology Report 2004-2005 – The Networked Readiness Index, www.weforum.org) also indicates a strong Estonian standing in government and the community readiness to participate in and benefit from ICT developments. Estonia leads for the 2nd year the Central and Eastern European countries with a rank of 25 (out of 104), thanks to its regulatory framework for ICT.

People all over the country can access the Internet from over 700 Public Internet Access Points (PIAP), 51 PIAPs per 100 000 people (spring 2005). The PIAP has a special traffic sign, with the @ symbol, showing its location. Most of PIAPs are located in libraries and other municipal buildings across the country. One can easily locate the nearest PIAP by accessing this website www.regio.delfi.ee/ipunktid. As a rule, no fee is charged for using the Internet services at PIAPs. PIAPs should guarantee everyone's free access to electronic information, and to training where necessary.

There are more than 600 areas (city squares, hotels, pubs, airports etc.) that currently provide high-speed wireless Internet access. More information: www.wifi.ee.

TNS Emor Internet usage surveys show that 54% of 6-74 year old Estonians are using the Internet, which means that the community using the Internet has reached 648 000 people. Compared to the previous year, an additional 2% of the Estonian population of the aforementioned age group i.e. 27 000 people have become Internet users.

The most active Internet users are 10-24 year old people, almost 90% of whom are Internet users. This age group has learnt to use the Internet at an even younger age. Two thirds of 6-9 year olds are already using the Internet. 58% of people aged 25-49 are Internet users (Spring 2005, TNS EMOR).

34 per cent of the households have computers at home and 82 per cent of home computers are connected to the Internet (e-Track Survey, TNS EMOR, Spring 2005).

72 per cent of Estonian Internet users conduct their everyday banking via Internet (Spring 2005, TNS EMOR). Internet banking has become a common channel through which people perform transfers, pay for services, pay taxes, communicate with the Tax Board, etc. Access to various information and bank services through mobile phones using *Wireless Application Protocol* (WAP) are popular, e.g. the financial institution *Hansapank* alone has 36 000 WAP-clients (June 2005).

The high level of Internet use in Estonia is largely correlated to the early adoption of the Internet in the research and higher education sector and the existence of a developed telecommunications network.

All Estonian schools are connected to the Internet, as a result of the state-run "Tiger Leap" programme, implemented from 1997-1999. Even the three-student schoolhouse on the geographically isolated Ruhnu Island, with about 40 inhabitants, has an Internet connection. Thanks to the "Tiger Leap" programme, school children are above-average users of the Internet. A short-term goal is to have at least 1 computer per 20 pupils in every school.

More information:

Estonian State Web Centre
www.riik.ee

The E-Governance Academy
http://www.ega.ee

Internet Sites of Information Society
www.vm.ee/eng/kat_136/288.html

Ministry of Foreign Affairs about Modern Estonia
www.vm.ee/estonia/kat_175

Principles of Estonian Information Policy
http://www.esis.ee/ist2004/105.html