

# Information Society and eGovernment Development in Sweden

**Speech by Gunnar Lund, Minister for International Economic Affairs and Financial Markets,  
at the ITAPA 2004 Congress in Bratislava, October 20, 2004**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank you for the invitation. It is certainly symbolic that the new technology is making it possible for me to address this conference by link all the way from Stockholm.

I am very honored to be one of the keynote speakers at the ITAPA (Information Technologies and Public Administration) 2004 Congress. I understand it is the largest event in Slovakia focusing on information society and eGovernment topics. You have in Slovakia, along with the other new EU-members, worked hard in achieving the eEurope+ Action Plan launched on the occasion of the European Council in Stockholm in June 2001.

Considering European integration and EU enlargement I see this congress as a symbolic part of an enhanced cooperation between our countries on Information Technologies as well as in other areas. For us in Sweden the new member states are very important. I am personally looking forward to visit Bratislava in the of end this month and among other things meet with Your Minister of Finance. We would also like to use our new embassy in Bratislava and other channels to build our bilateral partnership within the EU, not least in the economic and industrial fields.

I see three factors determining public sector development in the years ahead.

Firstly, citizens are demanding more value for money. The rapid development of online banking and other online services make people press for public services to be delivered online as well and to demand the same standard of service from government as they do from the corporate sector.

Secondly, growing internationalisation competitive pressures in trade and enterprise are mounting and today a country's administrative system is far more important as a competitive tool than it used to be. An administration that has the capacity to act quickly and vigorously and is accessible and open plays an important role for international competitiveness. A modern and efficient administration can be a powerful help to our companies in their exporting efforts and in attracting foreign investment.

And thirdly there is the issue of demographic trends: An ageing population will be demanding more and better services of our public administrations, at the same time as public administration will have to do with fewer employees. These demographic trends

will not make it easier for the public sector as a competitive employer to attract a generation of employees.

These challenges call for new ways of working, new ways of structuring public services and new attitudes and relations with citizens. Obviously, we need increasingly to adapt public services to the needs of the citizens.

To meet these challenges, to reach these objectives, the development of e-government will play a vital role.

I will not focus today on Sweden's success so far in e-government - although that may be tempting - but rather on how my Government will step up its ambition in developing what we call the 24-hour public administration in the years ahead in order to create a public administration genuinely at the service of our citizens.

But before I'll get in to our present goals I'd like to present three important milestones in the Swedish development towards an Information Society for all.

- \* The use of computers and electronic information is widespread in Sweden. One explanation for this is the staff-computer reform implemented in 1998. In 2003 nearly 50% of all Swedes used online banking facilities, and the number of users who sees this as a convenient and secure way of managing their bank transactions is steadily increasing.
- \* In the bill 'An Information Society for All' from 1999 the Government sets out its position on the technical aspects of the IT infrastructure. The goal was that over the next few years, household and business in all parts of Sweden should acquire access to IT infrastructure with a high transfer capacity. Today one out of four in the Swedish population are connected to and using broadband. The main obstacle to broadband deployment on our behalf is of course the dictate of the geography. Sweden's 20 inhabitants per square kilometre can be compared with Germany's 230. This illustrates the divergence in potential investment costs per inhabitant.
- \* In 2000 the Government adopted an administrative-policy action programme, 'Public Administration in the Service of Democracy'. This programme seeks to make public administration user-friendlier and improve its scope for meeting stringent requirements in terms of the rule of law, democracy and efficiency.

Our goals for the next few years are ambitious and this demands an equally ambitious strategy.

Our overriding goal is this: all government services which can be delivered electronically should be delivered electronically, provided that this is technically feasible and economically defensible.

We have also stated as a goal that different needs and conditions must be met so that no citizens are excluded from the new opportunities offered by e-government. Citizens must be able to choose between different service channels and e-services must have a design and a language that facilitate access for everyone.

A third objective is that citizens and businesses should always be able to use single points of access, regardless of how the responsibility is divided between different parts of the public sector.

A fourth objective is to provide easy access to public information online and indeed electronic channels whereby the public can participate in policy-making and decision-making.

Now to the strategy:

In carrying out this strategy we are fortunate enough to be able to rely on a public administration, which is highly decentralised in notion, made up as it is by some 250 public authorities enjoying a high degree of autonomy. A government policy has been defined – by me and by the government – the heads of these agencies become powerful instruments in making things happen at the agency level, providing leadership and designing solutions adapted to the needs of its particular activities.

The Government shoulders the responsibility for setting the overriding goals, removing obstacles and legal barriers and supporting the agencies by providing them with guidelines and working methods; and by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure for e-government is put into place.

By and large this approach has proven quite successful and has made possible a rapid development of e-services. To be honest it has also resulted in an uneven development, with some parts of the public administration making very rapid progress while others are lagging somewhat behind. Collaboration between national, regional and local government is also slowly developing, and there are several local projects under way.

Our new strategy is to significantly strengthen the management framework for e-government. We will combine the advantages of our decentralised model with a bit more central co-ordination.

The four main elements of this strategy as we have defined it over the past year are:

Firstly, To create a high-level 'Commission for the 24/7 Agency'. The commission was set up a year ago and brings together expert members from central government, industry, academia and local government. The Delegation's task is to serve as a catalyst in the public sector's e-service development and use.

A main task is to foster and increase co-operation between the different layers of Government. Another prioritised task is to promote the flow of know-how between research and development, on the one hand, and production of practical and beneficial e-services on the other. Last but by no means least, the Commission will also have to propose funding arrangements for helping both central and local authorities to implement the 24/7 Agency concept. The presence of representatives from industry and research in the delegation will ensure that co-operation between public and private sector is exploited to the full in developing electronic services.

Secondly, to ensure interoperability, the Government has set up a new board comprising representatives for large central government agencies that provide extensive e-services. The Board will issue regulations and recommendations on standards for the electronic

communication between central government agencies and between agencies and citizens. The areas with a need for common standards are:

1. Electronic identification and signatures.
2. Secure and reliable communication between agencies.
3. Storage and labelling of information, and
4. Quality norms for agencies' websites.

Thirdly, develop institutions necessary for secure identification. We seek to establish a solution in co-operation with the private market so that citizens can use the same certificate for all kinds of e-services. A framework agreement has been reached with several banks and other actors offering services for electronic signatures.

Fourthly, remove legal obstacles to electronic communication. The Government has undertaken a review of all laws, which prescribe written procedures of one kind or another. The aim of this review is to promote the use of electronic documents and electronic signatures by identifying and eliminating unnecessary legal requirements for written procedures. The first report shows that out of 2000 requirements that were found in different legal acts, 1200 allow electronic signatures. The next phase of the work is to make adjustments in the remaining 800 legal acts.

The fifth measure is to develop a coherent monitoring system of e-government. Today we have a pretty good picture of the supply of e-services. Equally important is to monitor the demand-side and the benefits and cost-effectiveness of e-government and, thereby, make sure the development creates maximal value for citizens, businesses and government itself.

Summing up,

To achieve the "Lisbon" goal of making Europe the world most competitive knowledge based economy by 2010 we need modern and innovative administrations, administrations that can communicate and co-operate in a simple and effective manner with citizens, businesses and between each other.

Our public administrations are in the process of a radical transformation. Information technology is both a prerequisite for this process and an important component of it. The modernisation of public administration is a long-term task, requiring tenacity and creativity.

However, technically, most public administrations have already made considerable progress. Now is the time to take the next major step – to renew our ways of working. It is therefore important that we co-operate and co-ordinate our efforts in sharing knowledge and examples of good practices. It is equally important that we in our daily work in developing our administrations put citizens and businesses in the centre.

Thank you for listening.