EUROPA, EUROPAplus - future developments

EUROPA, the interinstitutional Internet server and EUROPAplus, the European Commission's intranet, are undergoing rapid changes in the framework of the evolution of Web tools and of the administrative reform launched last autumn by the Commission headed by Romano Prodi.

A few milestones

In February 1995, the Commission presented its Internet server, EUROPA, to the G7 conference on the information society convened in Brussels by the Delors Commission. At the time, Internet access was fairly thinly spread within the institution, which meant that very few EC officials could see the Internet server developed by the Commission.

A mirror copy of EUROPA was put on an intranet server so that officials could see EUROPA on-line. This is how EUROPAplus was in fact created, in April 1995. It had been named EUROPAplus, because it offered a plus compared with the mirror copy of EUROPA. The plus was all the internal information which could be put on line under the leadership of the Secretariat general, the former DG X[1], the former DG IX[2] and the IT-Directorate[3]. The intranet grew as quickly as EUROPA and became very popular. An average of 180.000 documents are consulted per working day. In the meantime, all officials of the Commission have an Internet access, which allows making EUROPAplus a very powerful portal.

Nowadays, both servers live an independent life but their management is shared by the same team and many synergies benefit to both internet and intranet servers. But soon, they will be managed from within different DGs, i.e. from the Press and Communication service (PCS) for EUROPA and from DG Personnel and Administration for EUROPAplus.

Some recent statistics

EUROPA	1999-2000	EUROPAplus	1999-2000
Document hits per day		*Document hits per day*	Feb. 172.703
	Jan. 741.483		Jan. 168.808
	Dec. 597.709		Dec. 146.053
	Nov. 695.801		Nov. 157.410
Total document hits per month		*Total document hits per month*	Feb. 3.454.073
	Jan. 22.985.958		Jan. 3.376.161
	Dec. 18.528.988		Dec. 2.190.796
	Nov. 20.874.038		Nov. 3.148.214

Just to give an example, the white paper on the administrative reform published on EUROPA and accessible via EUROPAplus on 1st March has been accessed by Monday 20 March 2000 as follows:

- the first part has been consulted or downloaded 21.000 times from outside (EUROPA) and 9.000 times from inside (EUROPAplus).

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[1] Directorate-General "Information, Communication, Culture, Audiovisual". In the whole text DG stands for Directorate-General
[2] Personnel and Administration
[3] In French "Direction Informatique" equivalent to the Information Technology Department

- the figures for part 2 are respectively 18.000 and 10.000.

Management of EUROPA and EUROPAplus

EUROPA and EUROPAplus are presently managed from within the same unit within the DG Personnel and Administration. It is a very light structure, since centrally only 6 people deal with EUROPA, whereas EUROPAplus central team only has 3. But, in the different DGs people are working for both servers.

Globally around 82 people work in the Commission (Publications Office and DG Personnel and Administration excluded) at managing and developing web sites for DGs and services on EUROPA and EUROPAplus. Only 31% of them work full time for the servers. Thirty-two percent work half time and 35% less than half time. One may estimate that a total of 60 men/year are dedicated by DGs and services to animating their web sites, i.e. less than 2 people per DG and service.

In around 80% of DGs and services, the same team (one to three people in the vast majority of cases) is responsible for EUROPA and EUROPAplus and local intranets (DGs') at the same time. Working for EUROPA tends to absorb more time than working for EUROPAplus. The position in the hierarchy of teams working for EUROPA and EUROPAplus varies a lot from service to service. They can be in units dealing with information, documentation or even with IT.

The following bodies are involved in the management of both servers

a) The GCOM-IT is the strategic body which takes the main political decisions on overall architecture, budget, main streams of orientations of the internet and intranet servers, contents, IT infrastructure and support. It is chaired by the Secretary general, the vice-presidency is in the hands of the DG Administration. The permanent members are: IT-Department, Budget and Audit DGs and the Legal Service. Are also members: the Press & Communication Service, DGs Enterprise, Information Society and Statistical Office.

b) The IT-department and its Data Centre in Luxembourg are in charge of the servers (machines), telecommunications, safety issues and general IT policy.

c) The servers are managed centrally by a small team of people belonging to the Personnel and Administration Directorate-General. The central team is responsible for co-ordinating the non-technical aspects of the interinstitutional server (coherence of approach, of contents) and relations with all the departmental information providers which feed in the servers. It also manages all the new features and the massige flow of information sent by the administration to its staff. This team is also the driving force and catalyst of new initiatives.

d) Co-ordination is ensured via the EUROPA and EUROPAplus Editorial Committees consisting of the representatives of DGs and services. Constant back up is delivered by the DI teams according to the help needed (telecoms, network, officials' Internet access, search engine, etc.). A Guide for the information's providers has been specially designed for EUROPA and EUROPAplus, ensuring a homogeneous look and feel (available on-line on the intranet and on EUROPA but password protected).

Some development work (formatting in html, conception of indexes, graphical design, setting up of entire sites, etc.) is being subcontracted in a very limited way to external firms under special call for tender contracts.

The institution has been able to develop the servers extensively whilst relying on the goodwill of its employees. Future developments will have to be based on solid foundations, i.e. on professionalisation of information production and dissemination.

EUROPA , EUROPAplus and the reform

The new site on EUROPA (http://europa.eu.int/comm/reform/index_en.htm) was launched on March 1st 2000. On EUROPAplus, the administrative reform site was launched on November 11th 1999. Both sites are very popular as seen from statistics mentioned above. In the hit parade of most requested documents on the intranet, the reform site has been in 10th position in February and in 10th position in January 2000, in 9th position in December 1999, in 16th position the month it was launched, i.e. November 1999.

a) The white paper on administrative reform

The white paper mentions EUROPA in part 2, the action plan, notably in Chapter II, a culture based on service. In point VI of this chapter, one finds a text relating to "Towards the e-Commission".
Action 1 is targeting ICT and communication networks
Action 2 is at the core of EUROPA and EUROPAplus missions and is defined as meeting users' needs, internally and externally, which implies:
- "feed-back mechanisms and technology developments
- moving to interactive policy consultations using Internet
- constant improvement of the "EUROPA" Web site. The Commission must allocate the necessary financial, technical and personnel resources for constant maintenance and upgrading of the "EUROPA" site. Defining the necessary resources will thus be the first step. "EUROPA" is already a well-known site, and maintaining it up to highest standards is vital for the e-Commission's image and credibility."

b) Thematic sites and DGs sites on EUROPA

Reform of the structures of the Commission has an important impact on EUROPA. The appointment of a new Commission in September 1999 was accompanied by a reorganisation of the Commission administration. There are now 36 departments. Directorates-general are no longer referred to by number. Changes are being made to the Commission's web site to reflect the new structure. Users can choose between thematic (area of activity) or institutional (Commissioner or department responsible) navigation.

Thematic navigation is now being designed and developed but the whole operation is far from being finished.

What follows is just an outline of present thinking and can in no way be considered as the final word. Negotiations between DGs will still be necessary, and it is now difficult to tell when this exercise will be over.

The aim is to have on EUROPA all sorts of sites subdivided in different categories:
- DGs' sites (administrative information only)
- thematic sites (like environment, research, health, etc.) is the core information
- service sites (like libraries, publications, translation service, etc.)
- target group sites (like business, campus, citizens, media, youth, etc.)

Each DG is responsible for updating and improving its DGs sites. DGs are free to adapt their sites to each DG's or theme's specific needs as long as they follow certain rules like:

- compliance with the general guidelines of the Information Providers guide
- keeping the distinction between the DG site and thematic site
- keeping if possible the same URL for the DG site
- keeping the 11 languages of the DG homepage
- creating the 'theme' homepage in 11 languages.

Most subject information should be located on the "thematic site", the DG site being a "passport" or profile of the DG as illustrated by following table:

DG Site	Thematic site
All information directly related to the DG as an organisational structure of the Commission	All information directly related to the theme independently from any DG
- What is the DG doing ? - Who is doing what ? - Which Commissioner is responsible for the DG ? - What service does the DG offer ? - When does the DG do what ?	- definition of the subject of the site - legal basis and references - programmes/projects managed by the Commission in this field - publications/press releases/speeches.. - tenders - statistics
This site is managed by one DG	The content of the site might be managed by several DGs led by one "leader" per theme
In case of reorganisation of the Commission, this site would have to be adapted considerably (might even disappear!)	In case of reorganisation of the Commission, this site wouldn't be affected (except some minor adaptations)
Standard minimum information:	**Standard minimum information:**
- Mission - Organisation chart - Commissioner - Thematic web site(s) links	- Legislation - Press Releases - Statistics - DGs (link to DG web sites of all DGs involved in the management of the theme - Policy (link to interinstitutional page) - Sub-themes

Many thoughts are being given to improving or alleviating the transfer procedures (FTPto enable the DGs to be more autonomous. Compliance with the Information Providers' Guide (IPG) rules is being centrally checked. The IPG is available on-line on EUROPA but with a password, after its updating it might be available openly on EUROPA. The Information Providers have FTP access to the test server and can trigger off the transfer onto the production server. But physical access to the production server remains in the hands of the IT team at the Data Centre in Luxembourg.

c) Impact of the reform on EUROPAplus

EUROPAplus has not been affected to the same extent by the reform. A special site has been created on the Commission's intranet on November 11th 1999. Since its inception, this site has been very popular. It hosts all documents related to the reform (39 documents) plus all the contributions from all DGs, gives access to related sites (UN, OECD, etc.), hosts a forum dedicated to the reform, which is an integral part of the in-house newspaper (Commission en Direct). It also gives to staff the possibility of sending suggestions or comments to the Vice-President in charge of the reform, Mr. Kinnock himself.

	Reform site	consultation figures	

February 2000	January 2000	December 1999	November 1999 (launch 11th)
64.118	89.162	52.534	35.411

The fact that EUROPAplus is now run by the DG Personnel and Administration has probably made the DG more conscious of the fact that it has at its disposal a tremendous tool for internal communication.

But many new features do not necessarily depend on the place EUROPAplus occupies in the organisation chart of the Commission. So the year 2000 will be full of novelties.

Internet address

EUROPAplus should in the course of the year migrate onto an internet address. This will make it easier for all sorts of new to define populations to access EUROPAplus. The intranet would then host everything which by definition does have a restricted distribution. DGs would then define themselves what should be restricted and what should be accessed widely by groups of people belonging to the wide family of the European institutions, thus making redundant the interinstitutional intranet EUROPATeam. Technically, this will be quite a challenge and will split information into two categories.

Best practice

EUROPAplus has been selected by the Commission as a best practice to be shown in Lisbon in May 2000 during the conference on best practices in public administration in the European Union. This is certainly the proof that EUROPAplus has been recognised in its function as vector of information.

Local intranets

We hope that local intranets, i.e. those only accessible to limited populations (e.g. within a DG), will migrate onto EUROPAplus. DG Development has for instance already put its intranet on EUROPAplus, which is then accessible to everybody within the Commission, except some sub-collections of documents with restricted access.

Platform for exchanging information

Lately, some DGs have asked whether they could not use the intranet as a sort of platform for information exchange between DGs. In other words, the "leading" DG (in charge of a dossier) would like to know what other DGs think of its documents on a given subject. So it puts documents on the intranet for everybody to see. So instead of using heavy procedures like electronic inter-service consultations, it puts on the intranet a site containing all the information it would like other DGs to read. This information is seen, read or downloaded by others and after being processed within a given DG, it is sent back to the leading DG. The latter can then put on its site the new documents. This is fairly similar to a workflow procedure. The advantage is that participants can interact without the intervention of a central team, which only sees to it that certain rules, mostly web site management rules, are complied with. A lot of information is already exchanged between producers and users without any interference of EUROPAplus managers.

Contents and customising information

EUROPAplus hosts around 360.000 static pages. But databases, used for the management of internal procedures, do generate dynamic pages that are significantly more numerous. All in all EUROPAplus gives access to 4.000.000 pages or documents, or even more.

EUROPAplus contents are largely concentrated around three functions:

3.1. administrative information for the personnel
3.2. news information (newswires from press agencies but also internal news sources)
3.3. document production (legislative procedures)
3.4. information retrieval (thematic index, search engine, proprietary databases)

After five years of existence, EUROPAplus has matured. Information and knowledge are embedded in thousands of documents and databases. It remains a difficult task to tap information the way you want to have it. Retrieval tools have their limits but organising or reorganising information in a user-friendly way is a challenge for the years to come.

There are simple ways of organising information in order to make it easier to retrieve it:
- improve the search engine
- organise the server in sub-collections of documents, whenever possible browsable with the search engine
- never stop creating and adapting alphabetical and thematic indexes, searchable with a search tool
- use the newest technologies to facilitate users profiling (this has intrinsic limits).

Conclusions

This quick overview of the subject shows how important and efficient the Web tools have become in the last five years. Millions of pages or documents are available on-line. Retrieving information becomes crucial. Information providers must of course improve the way they organise information on their Web sites, but users will also have to make an effort to make a better use of these tools, which are and remain complex for the sheer bulk of information available on-line.

EUROPA and EUROPAplus could very well live separate lives in the future. Internal and external information are in fact two sides of the same coin.

EUROPA has become the European Union source of information for all sorts of publics, citizens, students, European information specialists, academics and policymakers.

The main conclusion one can draw from the success of EUROPAplus is that it is a rich mine of information. Will it also help officials to convert this information into knowledge, which can be shared among all concerned and thus contribute to enhancing the overall performance of all teams at work? The present state of EUROPAplus is probably only a partial answer to this question but its evolution is on the right track. This involves sharing information, thus sharing knowledge and in the end sharing decision-making. Managers should not shun this development, since their co-ordination role always will be necessary.

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