



Japan Local Government Centre, London

Monthly Report September 2010 (Germany) – New German ID card to become the world's most advanced smart card?

The German government has been working since 2006 on the second phase of implementing e-government. The programme 'e-government 2.0' aimed at co-ordination between government and businesses to establish infrastructures which also enable new forms of business based on electronic means. It included the large-scale projects 'De-mail' which is the new service providing a secure means of sending and receiving legally valid documents which necessitates high security features, the introduction of ID-cards as electronic smart cards, and infrastructure development of 'Deutschland Online', which aims to standardise access to online services at all levels of government, including local government. Due to the federal structure, it demands a lot of co-ordination. The Federal Interior Ministry has a leading role in these processes.

Among these projects, the introduction of the new ID smart card is proceeding at pace. From November 1 2010, new cards will be issued. About 60m of these cards will be issued over the next 10 years to all citizens aged 16 and over. The contactless smart card will contain fingerprint scans and a six-digit PIN digital signature. Apart from its traditional use as an identification document, it can be used as a travel document within the EU borders, but also some countries outside Europe, such as Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt will accept it. The data on it will be protected so that users will be able to selectively authorise use of certain data, for example, to verify enrolment status at university, or in the case of voter registration, provide only residency status. Other uses which demand interaction with the public sector could be for example tax self-assessment, or car registration. Control over the data will rest firmly with the citizen who authorises use of the data.

Further commercial use is also envisaged: transactions such as online banking and airline passenger check-in. For these types of transactions, scanners will be needed for use with home computers. One million scanners will be distributed free of charge, paid for by a 24m Euro fund from a stimulus package.

Fears about the security of the chips holding the data have not been completely put to rest by a very public recent demonstration through a group of computer hackers, who demonstrated successful hacking of a card by using a basic home scanning machine. However the company making the cards insist that the security features of the card are high, as they include protection against reverse engineering and attacks with light and lasers, and a hardware firewall to protect specific parts of the chip.

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More than 150 companies are preparing for the official roll-out in November 2010 by participating in trials.

Although electronic passports have already been introduced in 88 countries, electronic ID cards which also can be used for commercial purposes are the next step. The Federal Interior Ministry says that 'it will set new standards in terms of document security, privacy protection and convenience for the citizens.'

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