

III IPAIT General Assembly Country report: Finland

Honourable Chairman, distinguished delegates and ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen

First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to extend the heartfelt gratitude of the whole Finnish delegation to our Brazilian hosts, not only have you been successful in your efforts in setting up a splendid IPAIT General Assembly, but you have also succeeded to make us all feel most welcome in your beautiful country as well.

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Finland has often been labelled as a forerunner information society, and in some respects that may be true. But there are areas where we are lagging and where we have made mistakes. I hope this country report allows you to benefit from the lessons we have learned, to take advantage of corresponding opportunities in your societies, and to avoid the comparable pitfalls.

I will focus on three issues:

- Firstly, I will shortly describe the current status of the Finnish information society, particularly from the inclusion point of view.
- Secondly, I will describe to you some of our new legislation concerning information society, for example security and safety of internet and mobile communication.
- And finally, I will tell you what the information system of the Finnish parliament will look like in spring 2007, when the new MP's arrive to the parliament after the next elections.

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Finland has done well during the first, technology oriented stage of information society development. Finnish companies, particularly small companies use Internet more than in any other country in the world. A year ago, 80% of the Finnish work force used a computer at work, and 75% used the Internet. The share of ICT professionals in the Finnish work force

is among the highest in the world, but still, only about a third of Finnish households have a wideband Internet connection.

This contradiction reflects the fact that Finnish companies have been much faster to adopt Internet than Finnish households were. What is more, the prices of the wideband connections were for several years artificially high as the operators failed to have a real competition. Their prices were suspiciously identical. As a result, many Finns still use their employers' computers, not only to work but to take care of personal matters as well. For example, many Finns do not have a private email address but use their employers' email addresses for both private and work email.

As a remedy, Finnish authorities have successfully encouraged telecommunication companies to compete with each other more aggressively to dispute any suspicions of a cartel agreement.

From the inclusion point of view, the most disturbing development is that there are significant differences in Internet use between various demographic groups in Finland. These digital divides need to be addressed or we risk dividing our society into those that are able to participate and success in information society and those who drop outside and need assistance for example in order to apply for public services.

One third of Finns over 30 years of age and 12% of those below 30 years of age feel that they have been trampled by the development of information and communication technology. The figures are coming down, yes, but painfully slowly.

As can be expected, younger Finns use Internet more than older ones. While 95% of twenty something Finns use Internet regularly, only 60% of fifty something Finns do. This also explains why people living in rural areas use Internet less than those living in urban areas. Younger, active Finns have been moving from countryside into cities for decades now. There is an exception, though. Finnish farmers are among the most active Internet users in our country. That is mostly because there are a lot of public services available for Finnish farmers in Internet, ranging from support for applying for agricultural support from the European Union to advice on environmentally sustainable pesticide use.

But maybe the most worrying development is that that in spite of the fact that Finland has one of the smallest income differences in the world, those with a higher socioeconomical position are much more likely to use Internet than those in a lower position. A year ago, 81% of higher functionaries had an Internet connection at home, while only 42% of workers had. One can only guess how this affects their children's abilities to excel in information society.

In order to remedy this, Finland has invested on public Internet services in public libraries and integrated computers into curricula of Finnish schools. In spite of economic pressures to reduce library services, the Finnish public library network is one of the most comprehensive ones in the world.

At the moment, Finnish children use computers even in kindergartens, not to mention schools. Each and every school class has an Internet connection. Each and every child even in lower elementary school uses them. Not only do they learn to use computers, they use them as efficient learning tools as well. For example, my 10 year old son just submitted a report on Northern countries. He had written it with a computer and it was based on material he had found from the Internet. I believe this policy is one of the reasons behind our success in recent international Pisa studies that have rated Finnish school children the best readers and math students in the world. I am confident that when they grow up, the risk of our society becoming divided is greatly reduced.

But there is one area where we Finns can be proud. Finnish women use Internet as actively as men do. There is no new gender gap growing in Finland. As a small nation we cannot lose the talent of half of our population just because they are women or men.

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Next I will tell you about some recent legislation concerning the use of information and communication services. The most important is the new Act on the Protection of Data and Privacy in Electronic Communications.¹

¹ <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040516.pdf>

The printed version of this report has a link to its English translation. I will not analyse each paragraph, but I'll point out some issues you as parliamentarians interested in information and communication technologies may find interesting.

The main principle is that electronic messages and related identification data and location data are confidential. No-one must know, who communicates what, where, or with whom. Privacy and freedom of speech are the key values behind the act.

Even identification data of publicly receivable messages are confidential. That is, one can, for example, write anonymously to Internet chat pages, without fear of being identified or prosecuted. This confidentiality was added to the law by the Constitution Committee of the Finnish Parliament, as freedom of speech is one of the key rights in our constitution.

What is more, also information concerning web browsing is confidential. No-one must know which web pages a Finn visits.

It is also illegal to own a system the main purpose of which is to open other people's encrypted messages. This is a total change of policy as only a few years back Finland signed the so called Wassenaar treaty that banned spreading of encryption technologies. Now it is unwanted decryption that is prohibited.

But maybe the most interesting chapter of the act states that telecommunication service providers must save information on processing of identification data. That is, whenever someone uses or changes or even accesses identification data, a detailed event log has to be made. That is, if for example a neighbour of mine working in a telecommunication company looks who do I send emails to, this violation of my privacy is recorded and he can be apprehended. This so called lex Sonera is a result of a recent telecommunications scandal where a leading Finnish telecommunication company, Sonera, used identification data of its clients not only for its own purposes but also provided this data under the table for police and security authorities without proper authorisation from a court of law. The lawsuits are still going on in Finnish courts and involve some of

the highest officers from both Sonera and our national security and police authorities.

Our concern for people's privacy has caused some problems too, as the act sets strict rules for analysis and filtering of electronic messages. Only header information can be used for identification of so called spam messages, or junk email. Even search for viruses and other malicious messages does not permit analysis of the message content unless there is a justified doubt that the message to be analysed actually contains malicious code. As a result, efficient spam and virus filtering has become impossible, or at least illegal in Finland.

Another, involuntary mistake involves location data. While the act includes specific exceptions that allow identification data to be used for marketing, development and analysis of malpractice or technical problems, no such exceptions exist for location data. That is, it is actually illegal to develop or market or fix location based services in Finland if real life location information is to be used. This, of course, was a slip, which will be fixed shortly.

There are also some other new acts that you may find interesting. I'll list the most relevant points:

The new Privacy Protection on a Workplace Act states that Finnish employers now have the right to access their employees email messages, but only when the employee cannot be reached and only those messages the employer has a justified need for. In addition, the employer must have to set up technologies that allow employees to forward or autoreply to received messages.

The same act addresses also workplace surveillance cameras but forgot workplace webcams that are connected to the Internet. That is, it may be forbidden to have a closed circuit camera at a certain workplace but is legal to have a public webcam in the same place.

And finally, the Finnish Parliament is now working on the new Copyright Act. The original proposal includes a chapter that would make it illegal to transfer computer programs and databases in the Internet. I do not have to

tell you what this would mean in practice and I trust that we'll manage to remove that chapter from the act before it is finalised.

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Finally a few words about the new or planned computer systems of our Parliament.

The main task of our computer systems is communication. Communication within our Parliament, with colleagues, with civil servants, with assistants, with party group offices, but also with people outside our Parliament, with media, with support groups, with voters, even with foreign colleagues.

While email and mailing lists have been the primary methods of both internal and external communication, this is about to change. As the number of email messages has grown to excess a hundred a day, more and more messages are being left unanswered, even unread. Thus, new tools are to be taken into use after the next parliamentary elections in 2007.

In internal communication, email will be replaced by an intranet that includes a work group system that allows web based discussions and document management. A party group or a committee or even an ad hoc group can set up a closed or an open work group where the issues at hand can be discussed, background documents managed and new documents authored.

In external communication, email and passive web pages are going to be replaced with more interactive tools. MP's will be able to set up internet questionnaires, host discussions and even to provide voters with RSS feeds.

Another task for our information systems is document management. Parliaments are actually document processing plants. The trouble with document management is that that the documents involved are not compatible. The ministries providing law proposals have different computer systems and document formats, and it is left to the parliament to convert them all into a single form and format. We look forward to remedy that.

Another major change is mobile information services. Our mobile phones already contain calendars that can be manually synchronised with the parliament calendar system, but beginning next week the system will be replaced with a new one. The new system not only keeps the calendars in our phones and in our computers synchronised automatically via GPRS, but also keeps automatically track of our emails.

Also our plenum hall information system is going to be replaced with a new one. In 2007, the traditional piles of paper will disappear from our desks and be replaced with laptops. The phone booths will be replaced with printing spots where MPs can print those documents they want to read from paper. And finally, I want to conclude in a lighter note, with a computer game that was launched a month ago. The game allows younger people to actually play through the law making process. What is more, in each game, there are several players involved, each playing a member of one of the eight parties in our Parliament. We hope that the game will help us to educate and involve younger people to our work in Finnish parliament.

I hope that one day I will get a chance to play the game against some of you. It is fun, I can assure you.