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eGovernment accelerating digital public services that support the functioning of the single market

European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2023 on eGovernment accelerating digital public services that support the functioning of the single market (2022/2036(INI))

(C/2023/444)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 April 2016 entitled ‘EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020: Accelerating the digital transformation of government’ (COM(2016)0179),
- having regard to its resolution of 16 May 2017 on the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment from the ministerial meeting during the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU of 6 October 2017,
- having regard to the United Nations 2022 E-Government Survey,
- having regard to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study entitled ‘The E-Leaders Handbook on the Governance of Digital Government’,
- having regard to the Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-based Digital Government of 8 December 2020,
- having regard to the European Court of Auditors Special Report on e-Government actions targeting businesses,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 February 2020 entitled ‘A European strategy for data’ (COM(2020)0066),
- having regard to its resolution of 25 March 2021 on a European strategy for data ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 March 2021 entitled ‘2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade’ (COM(2021)0118),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 28 July 2022 entitled ‘Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022’ (SWD(2022)0205),
- having regard to Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1780 of 23 September 2019 establishing standard forms for the publication of notices in the field of public procurement and repealing Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/1986 (eForms) ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012 ⁽⁵⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 307, 30.8.2018, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 494, 8.12.2021, p. 37.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 272, 25.10.2019, p. 7.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 1.

- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/1024 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on open data and the re-use of public sector information (recast) ⁽⁶⁾ ('Open Data Directive'),
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) ⁽⁷⁾,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/694 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 establishing the Digital Europe Programme and repealing Decision (EU) 2015/2240 ⁽⁸⁾,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility ⁽⁹⁾,
 - having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Single Window Environment for Customs and amending Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 (COM(2020)0673),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European data governance (Data Governance Act) (COM(2020)0767),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 as regards establishing a framework for a European Digital Identity (COM(2021)0281),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the 2030 Policy Programme 'Path to the Digital Decade' (COM(2021)0574),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on harmonised rules on fair access to and use of data (Data Act) (COM(2022)0068),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Health Data Space (COM(2022)0197),
 - having regard to the Joint Research Centre report entitled 'GovTech Practices in the EU',
 - having regard to the research paper by the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union entitled 'The digital single market and the digitalisation of the public sector: GovTech and other innovations in public procurement',
 - having regard to the report by the Wise Persons Group of March 2022 on the reform of the EU Customs Union,
 - having regard to Special Report 04/2021 of the European Court of Auditors of 30 March 2021 entitled 'Customs Controls: insufficient harmonisation hampers EU financial interests',
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (A9-0065/2023),
- A. whereas efficient digitalisation of public administration increases the productivity and resilience of the public sector ⁽¹⁰⁾, enhances the quality of public services, enables lower costs and unlocks business potential, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the single market;

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, p. 56.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 166, 11.5.2021, p. 1.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See *The E-Leaders Handbook on the Governance of Digital Government*, 21 December 2021: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/ac7f2531-en.pdf?expires=1666604558&id=idcname=ocid194994sum=2918CC03A7580BA51981657D68E9F7AF>

- B. whereas public services should fully meet the needs of their users, be accessible online, including for persons with disabilities and elderly people, and benefit from easy-to-understand and easy-to-use tools with high security, privacy and data protection standards;
- C. whereas in line with Regulation (EU) 2021/241 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, each Member State should dedicate 20 % of its Recovery and Resilience Facility allocation to the digital transition; whereas the Commission should properly assess and measure the results and benefits of digitalisation delivered to citizens and businesses;
- D. whereas secure, privacy-enhancing digital identity is important for individuals to interact with governments and businesses across the European single market;
- E. whereas despite a trend toward improvement, it is estimated that around 42 % of Europeans still lack basic digital skills, making it necessary to organise information campaigns and training for citizens;
- F. whereas the digital measures taken by governments during the COVID-19 pandemic to organise testing, vaccination or travel registration highlighted the essential role of access to the internet and electronic public services for all;
- G. whereas in 2019, government purchases of goods and services accounted for about 12 % of government expenditure in the EU-27, or EUR 774 billion;
- H. whereas accessible and interoperable data in public procurement will also help to fight fraud and improve transparency, procurement performance and cross-border cooperation;
- I. whereas some 250 000 public agencies in the EU spend around 14 % of the EU's GDP through public procurement;
- J. whereas the European Court of Auditors in its Special Report on e-Government recommends that the Commission should strengthen the implementation framework to encourage Member States to complete the rollout of e-Government services and develop a comprehensive strategy for promoting e-Government services effectively;

eGovernment in the digital single market

1. Emphasises that in order to strengthen the single market, it is necessary to carry out a digital transformation that increases the availability of online public services; recalls that eGovernment should improve public service delivery and citizen engagement, enhance government openness and provide a data-driven basis for stronger government accountability; recalls that eGovernment facilitates relationships with citizens, businesses, employees and governments and welcomes the establishment of a European digital identity;
2. Emphasises that the digital transformation should contribute to better law-making in all sectors within the single market by allowing for an evidence-based assessment of the current and planned regulations and more effective identification of regulatory gaps and unjustified barriers; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take advantage of digitalisation and deliver measurable indicators for the impacts and results of projects, regulations and investments;
3. Stresses that digitalisation should be an integral and integrated part of all government policies and administrative procedures; believes that eGovernment should be the primary way in which government services function, while ensuring that public services are fully accessible for all;
4. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue encouraging cross-border collaboration between public administrations, including through awareness-raising and reward campaigns such as the 'Sharing and Reuse Awards Contest' ⁽¹⁾;

⁽¹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/awards_en/

5. Firmly believes that the further development of digital public services can significantly contribute to the reduction of administrative barriers for entrepreneurs, especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; calls on the Member States to redouble their efforts to further digitalise public services;
6. Recalls that according to the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017), stakeholder participation in designing and delivering public policies and services can increase government accountability, broaden citizens' empowerment and influence on decisions, build civic capacity, improve the evidence base for policy-making, reduce implementation costs, and tap wider networks and ecosystems for innovation in policy-making and service delivery;
7. Underlines the need to share best practices from EU and other countries on the execution, implementation and monitoring of eGovernment strategies and plans; calls on the Commission to collect, analyse and publish eGovernment best practices from the Member States and other countries;
8. Believes that digital government services should be continuously updated to reflect the needs of users; underlines that accepting and applying user input and feedback should be a standard part of the way all administrations work;
9. Emphasises that the provision of digital public services implies the use of personal data, and therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to pay special attention to the protection of individuals' personal data, particularly sensitive data such as medical data or electoral records, and ensure that the provision of digital public services fully complies with the General Data Protection Regulation; stresses that the highest levels of data protection are necessary to foster trust in institutions and digital public services and to promote the uptake of these services;
10. Underlines that governments should ensure the highest cyber security standards when processing personal data in order to protect individuals from the misuse or leak of such data, especially taking into account increasingly destabilised international political situations or targeted attacks on government websites; believes that this should include the compartmentalisation and encryption of sensitive data such as biometrics;
11. Calls on the Commission to collect and facilitate the exchange of technologies, experiences, lessons and best practices relevant to eGovernment during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those relating to accessibility and data protection, in order to build resilient institutions prepared for future crises;
12. Stresses that digital solutions, simplified administrative processes and measures that were adopted and proved to be efficient during the COVID-19 crisis should be maintained where appropriate, in particular the possibility to complete administrative procedures digitally;
13. Emphasises that connectivity and stable broadband internet coverage, especially on islands and in rural areas, are of key importance for the development of eGovernment; calls on the Commission, therefore, to ensure the necessary infrastructure for broadband internet access, including via fibre-to-the-home, in cooperation with the Member States; recalls the obligations of all Member States under the Universal Service Obligations (USO) section of the European Electronic Communications Code to ensure broadband access to all households; encourages the Member States to use the option to provide USOs via mobile internet providers as well as fixed providers; calls on the Member States to increase their efforts to protect their infrastructure, including submarine cables;
14. Points out that without improvements to digital skills and digital literacy, especially for elderly people, people with disabilities and economically disadvantaged communities, the European digital single market cannot be built; invites the Commission, therefore, to robustly implement the Digital Education Action Plan, also by publishing the best practices in individual Member States and other countries and by creating a framework for the comparison, monitoring and results evaluation of digital education policies in the EU; underlines the importance of matching education systems and non-formal learning in workplaces with market and societal needs;

15. Recalls that monitoring the digitalisation of public services, including eGovernment, should also focus on its effect on users and long-term changes in society and that digitalisation should not be the goal in itself, but rather the tool to deliver better results for users; points out that digitalisation should reduce bureaucracy and provide quicker, less financially demanding and more efficient public administration services;

16. Welcomes the ambitious digital targets set out in the policy programme for 2030 entitled 'The Road to the Digital Decade', taking into account the different national framework conditions in the various Member States; believes that consultation and close cooperation between Member States and with stakeholders will be necessary to achieve those targets; underlines the importance of the annual report on the 'State of the Digital Decade', especially taking into account information on the relevant national policies, programmes and initiatives and their impact on users;

17. Believes that e-health has untapped potential, and therefore welcomes the Commission's intention to create a European health data space; emphasises, furthermore, that e-medical records can be extremely useful for stimulating cross-border research, providing cross-border healthcare and fulfilling the promise to European citizens that they should be able to access and exchange their health data across borders; emphasises the need to ensure the highest level of data protection in this field; believes it necessary to ensure that e-health services meet high safety and security standards, and that these services require human supervision in order to achieve this; urges the Commission and the Member States to properly measure results in order to deliver benefits to individuals and create a basis for comparing and identifying best practices;

18. Points out that the aim of e-justice is to improve and simplify access to information in the field of justice, as well as to support the digitalisation of cross-border judicial and extrajudicial procedures; notes, however, that during the coronavirus pandemic, consumers and entrepreneurs had limited access to courts; believes therefore that the European e-Justice Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2023 must be upgraded with plans for further digitalisation and adaptation to possible future crises in order to ensure unhindered, resilient and transparent access to justice systems, for example through the eGovernment system;

19. Emphasises that digital solutions in legal enforcement proceedings can both significantly reduce their costs and speed up the process; calls on the Commission to assess how digital solutions can reduce the costs of enforcement proceedings for consumers;

20. Deems it necessary to link participation in public consultation procedures to the eGovernment system; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure access to the public consultation procedure through digital public services;

21. Points out that individuals have grown accustomed to online purchasing and services, where needs are met with only a few clicks; underlines that during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a shift to almost all activities being online, which has shaped people's expectations for public services, which they now expect to be available online; believes that citizens' contact with public administration and its services should deliver on their expectations and services should seek to be convenient and efficient;

22. Calls on the Commission to present recommendations to allow individuals to monitor administrative processes that involve them and to engage with stakeholders in the design and delivery of eGovernment services;

23. Notes that a very high number of individuals in Europe use mobile devices and many do not have a fixed desktop or full-sized laptop computer; stresses that government websites and services should be fully compatible with mobile browsers and the limited screen size on most devices; notes equally the declining ownership of printers and asks governments to ensure that forms can be completed, signed and submitted without the need to print;

24. Notes that due to the lack of physical copies of government documents, governments need to provide secure cloud storage of official documents and ensure that all documents are maintained as long as there is a legal basis for doing so and not deleted unless by citizens themselves; stresses the need for a legal way for families to access official documents on deceased family members, including property, tax and other vital records;

The role of eGovernment in stimulating business, especially SMEs

25. Underlines the importance of removing remaining barriers in the single market and emphasises that improving access to finance will encourage the entry and growth of innovative companies and foster competition; believes that eGovernment could help to speed up this transition; notes also the importance of cross-border online access to information, administrative procedures and assistance services for EU businesses and consumers; emphasises in this respect the need to ensure interoperability to avoid fragmentation and allow a seamless provision of digital services throughout the EU internal market;
26. Points out that land registers are not fully digitalised in the Member States and that the data from land registers are often not aligned with the actual status of real estate, which leads to problematic legal transactions; calls for the complete digitalisation of land registers as soon as possible;
27. Emphasises the role of eGovernment in issuing building permits; believes that significant progress should be made in simplifying applications for building permits and in shortening the deadlines for issuing them in each stage of a building's development, from building permit to final inspection;
28. Calls on the Commission to encourage interconnection between all Member States' business registers to facilitate transparency and the availability of up-to-date information and financial reporting on companies and beneficial owners;
29. Recalls that unprecedented investments in digitalisation, including eGovernment, attract illicit behaviour; calls on the Commission and the Member States to allow transparent and free access to public data, contracts, documents and databases, including free access to the business registers and financial statements of companies and beneficial ownership information, which would help to fight corruption, including the misuse of EU resources;
30. Emphasises the important role that GovTech plays in developing eGovernment innovations; highlights its main aspects, namely citizen-centric public services that are universally accessible, a whole-of-government approach to digital government transformation and simple, efficient and transparent government systems; encourages Member States to establish GovTech programmes to promote transparency, innovation and benefits for users; welcomes the initiative to develop the European market in GovTech under the Digital Europe Programme, with a strong focus on SMEs and start-ups;
31. Supports the greater automation of internal governmental services and services between governments, regulators and private businesses; stresses the need for governments to create application-programming interfaces allowing for the direct submission of data via automated or other means;
32. Supports also the creation of government sandboxes for testing new ways to engage with users and for developing innovations in eGovernment;
33. Encourages governments to be more data-driven and to use available data to better predict and adapt to users' demands and needs in line with the GDPR;
34. Recalls that in line with the 2030 Policy Programme entitled 'Path to the Digital Decade', Member States have to reach the target of 100 % online provision of key public services for European citizens and businesses, which will considerably reduce the administrative burden for businesses and increase the quality and efficiency of public services;

E-procurement and electronic customs

35. Considers that full access to public procurement data could significantly improve public probity, promote innovation and support single market objectives, as well as improve transparency and accountability in public spending; calls on the Commission, in this respect, to consider including public procurement in the list of 'high-value datasets' under the Open Data Directive, while respecting legal obligations, including data protection requirements and the confidentiality of commercial secrets; calls on the Commission to evaluate the efficiency of public procurement rules in terms of their time-efficiency and to publish best practices in this regard;

36. Highlights the fact that one of the objectives of e-procurement should be to simplify the tasks of contracting authorities when conducting procurement procedures and to make business participation easier while increasing the efficiency and accountability of public procurement; considers that the interoperability of procurement systems and open data systems can be useful to that end;

37. Stresses the need to improve the assessment of the results, progress and impacts of open data policies; notes that from a government perspective, it remains critical to support investment in order to open up government data-counting on the basis of a sound business case, to provide clear value propositions, to present the potential benefits of facilitating open data use and to show, using ex post assessments tools, how these benefits can be implemented;

38. Welcomes the Commission's initiative to create a European data space for public procurement as a cornerstone of the future public procurement data strategy; considers that improved publication of procurement data above and below EU thresholds as well as better quality and aligned data sources and formats will particularly help the Commission in this task;

39. Notes the 12 public procurement indicators under the Single Market Scoreboard; calls on the Commission to regularly identify best practices in order to improve the overall score of the Member States, including in e-procurement and digital innovations; stresses the need to also measure the results of digitalisation on a global scale in order to properly assess progress made; calls on the Commission to regularly measure the eGovernment strategy according to international indices and identify the Union's strengths and weaknesses;

40. Calls on the Commission to support Member States in the comprehensive implementation of Tenders Electronic Daily (TED) eForms, including by encouraging Member States to use eForms to publish data about the whole procurement cycle, including data below EU thresholds and beyond the mandatory scope of coverage;

41. Emphasises that in addition to establishing the right technical infrastructure, tools and standards, transition towards a full e-procurement system requires investment in training and capacity-building for public procurers;

42. Recognises the importance of innovation procurement and encourages the Member States to integrate it into the general e-procurement framework; calls on the Member States to improve the interoperability of procurement systems, implement advanced technologies when necessary and ensure compliance with future legislation;

43. Notes that the abusive practice of filing appeals with the sole aim of prolonging the electronic public procurement procedure causes legal uncertainty and hampers investments within the single market; calls on the Commission and the Member States to assess, the extent to which this legal instrument is misused and consider ways to remedy it, while fully guaranteeing the right of appeal;

44. Notes the potential of open source for Europe's digital sovereignty and for preventing vendor lock-in by allowing IT solutions to be shared and reused; calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor and make publicly available among public administrations data on the use of open source technologies;

45. Considers that electronic customs procedures play a crucial role in the digitalisation of public services and that they are therefore beneficial for businesses operating in the single market as well as for consumers; considers that electronic customs procedures can contribute to a well-functioning digital single market and to a more efficient exchange of data between the Member State authorities;

46. Welcomes the Commission's interim evaluation report on the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 952/2013⁽¹²⁾ laying down the Union Customs Code (UCC); calls on the Member States to remove risks for the orderly and timely deployment of electronic systems related to the entry and import of goods and of the trans-European systems for transit and export, and to deploy and fully integrate the electronic systems laid down in the UCC by 2025;

⁽¹²⁾ Regulation (EU) No 952/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 October 2013 laying down the Union Customs Code (recast) (OJ L 269, 10.10.2013, p. 1).

Towards a new eGovernment strategy

47. Welcomes the Commission's initiative to create European data spaces in various sectors, including health, justice and public procurement; considers it crucial for these data spaces to be interoperable so that consumers and entrepreneurs, especially SMEs, can achieve their full potential; points out that the interoperability of data spaces should be the starting point for all future digitalisation strategies; welcomes, in that regard, the Commission's legislative proposal, which should ensure the interoperability of data spaces in the European single market;

48. Underlines that digital public administration should be inclusive and by default easily and fully accessible for people with different needs, such as elderly people, people with disabilities, economically disadvantaged communities and others; stresses that eGovernment applications should be future-proof, easy to understand and have functional and simple interfaces; calls on the Member States to make every effort to ensure that no one is left behind; reminds the Member States of their obligations under the Web Accessibility Act, while encouraging them to go beyond its minimum obligations;

49. Emphasises the importance of the 'digital by default' principle, which means that public administrations should deliver services digitally as the preferred option; stresses, at the same time, the need for support to be given to users who are unable or unwilling to complete all government procedures online; asks all governments to ensure that services are available to help users to complete administrative tasks despite any limitations; underlines that eGovernment should not lead to the exclusion of any user;

50. Underlines that the development and use of AI in eGovernment may come with risks as well as advantages; stresses that humans must continue to be central to decision-making and that they need to be able to override or reverse automated decisions; notes the frustration of citizens faced with unsolvable errors in data entry forms on government websites, which leads to them being unable to submit forms online;

51. Asks the Member States to ensure that their legal frameworks support and allow the use of digital solutions wherever possible, including the use of digital signatures and the submission of digital copies of documents instead of original physical documents;

52. Highlights the importance of the development of digital public services that are environmentally friendly, sustainable by design and interoperable; believes that eGovernment services can lead to environmental benefits if they rely on sustainable and energy-efficient digital infrastructure, processes and software;

53. Takes note of the findings of the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors on e-Government, but especially of the fact that the Court concluded that the Commission had not assessed businesses' awareness of available e-Government services and had not analysed needs in this area, even though this is a key step for the take-up of e-Government services; calls on the Commission to implement the Court's recommendations without delay;

54. Acknowledges that an analysis is needed of the implementation of the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016 — 2020 in order to gain insight into its efficiency and results; calls on the Commission to report to Parliament on the implementation of the Plan;

55. Encourages the Member States to follow up on their policy actions and five-year objectives under the Tallinn Declaration of 2017; further encourages the Member States to accelerate their efforts to reach the objectives that have not been achieved in order to enhance joint action and further digital evolution;

56. Emphasises the importance of the continuity of European eGovernment policies; calls on the Commission to propose a new evidence-based long-term action plan for eGovernment with a quantified cost-benefit analysis, indicators and targets for delivering results for individuals and ensuring that modern public administration is fit for the digital age;

57. Recalls that public spending in the digitalisation of public services should be effective and ensure the greatest value for users; stresses that, in this respect, it is necessary to monitor and enhance the principles of good financial governance and plan, publish and monitor national and European spending on digitalisation;

58. Emphasises that the largest number of interactions between users and governments is at local and regional level; considers that special focus and support should be given to local government, which often does not have the funding to fully adopt eGovernment solutions; stresses that this should be a key part of any future eGovernment action plan;

59. Acknowledges that the new eGovernment strategy should aim to incorporate the 'once-only' principle (OOP), which will simplify contact with public authorities by enabling public entities to share data with each other so that information only needs to be entered once; stresses that the OOP will reduce the administrative burden both for individuals and for businesses, as information that has already been provided can be reused and public authorities will be able to communicate with each other, thus facilitating more efficient procedures in general, but also across borders;

60. Notes the problem of a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) experts within governments and of governments' competition for trained employees with the private sector; asks the Commission to take this into account and to help seek potential ways to encourage ICT professionals to work for the public sector;

61. Welcomes the Commission's work on the 'Joinup' platform and the European Interoperability Framework (EIF); believes that sharing tools, best practices and joint software projects between different administrations can cut costs and increase the speed of digitalisation; underlines that the 2017 EIF version 3 should be revised and a new EIF version 4 proposed soon; welcomes the work carried out on a European Interoperability Framework for Smart Cities and Communities (EIF4SCC);

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62. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
