**Arr: Besøk av DG Madelin**

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**What can the Digital Agenda for Norway do for Europe?**

Your Excellency, Director General, ladies and gentlemen.

I’m honoured to welcome you to this seminar focussing on European ICT policy making and how Norway plays a part in how it is shaped.

I would like to offer a special welcome to Robert Madelin on his third visit to Norway as Director General at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content & Technology (DG Connect).

Norway’s new government has been in place since October last year.

Our government platform is strongly emphasising ICT as a driver for innovation, growth and modernisation of the public sector.

Digitisation will allow for a simpler and more effective communication with public administration both for citizens and businesses. [

In addition, this government has clearly stated that we want to have a strong focus on EU policy and the EEA agreement.

In fact, we are the first government to appoint a minister for EU and EEA affairs.

Norway’s renewed attention to EU affairs stems from the fact that the EU is our largest business partner.

 Our aim is to take a more pro-active role in Europe.

We want to strengthen our involvement with the processes and policy work going on within the EU.

We want to strengthen participation in the arenas to which we are given access through the EEA agreement.

The EEA agreement gives Norway market access and predictability for Norwegian businesses.

We think that collaboration within ICT-related programmes and arenas is of particular interest to Norwegian administration and businesses.

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So – what is the status of a digitised Norway in early 2014?

The essence of our country is basically a very long rock from north to south – it constitutes our geographical foundation and to a large degree also our cultural foundation.

Our **digital** foundation is in our history as well in our present.

* In 1931 the Norwegian engineer Fredrik Rosing Bull founded Bull – one of the oldest computer companies in the world.

Bull was a pioneer in punch card technology and won a contract to do the first punch card based census in the USA.
Not able to get the funding he needed in Norway (not an unfamiliar problem for start-ups even today) he incorporated the company in France, where he found investors. The consulting arm of the company today is known as Steria.

* In 1964 the first transatlantic transfer of data world-wide happened between the USA and Norway.
A telex machine was set up and successfully used as terminal for a main frame computer at MIT in Boston.
In 1973 Norway became the first country connected to the US’ ARPANET, which was the military forerunner of the Internet. This role of being an early adopter in turn translated into early adoption of the world-wide web in 1993. Norway got a 2-3 year head start on most other countries in Europe, which in turn meant that Norwegian Internet users have always been looked at as a mature market.
* Norway started producing oil from the North Sea in 1971.
This was also the start of a new ICT era for our country.
Combined with Norway’s leading position as a commercial shipping nation, the maritime and off-shore technology development in Norway has been of global importance in these areas, and an important drive for building a community of advanced ICT professionals in Norway spilling over into many other fields than those related to oil and shipping. Modelling Big Data plays a big role in finding new oil fields.
The fact that IBM has situated its world-wide center of excellence for petroleum and gas in Norway is not a coincidence.

In many ways, we were there when important things started and we are a country of technology-savvy citizens, as well as many digitally enabled businesses.

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Norway is a high cost country, which is sometimes making it difficult for our export industry.
But high cost of labour also has the benefit that we are forced to work in a smarter way, which in turn requires smart use of ICT in all walks of civic life as well as in industry.
Add to that, that Norway’s nature is beneficial whether it works for us or against us:
A long sparsely populated country forces us to be good at communications, a rough climate forces us to make robust solutions.

 Today, Norway is still amongst the world’s digital leaders in many fields:

* As a nation with a substantial public sector to support our welfare services – and with a history of a high level of taxation – it was natural that we were early adopters of digitisation of public services.
* We were successful in turning our national telecom incumbent, Telenor, from a state monopoly to rank 6th amongst international mobile operator with 150 million subscribers across the world.
* Norway has one of the most savvy online consumer populations in the world.
Norwegians are e-shopping cross-border like few others: cross-border e-commerce counted for 13% of total retail 2013 and is expected to increase to 23% by 2020 Norwegians are big users of broadband Internet with close to 100% coverage – this opens up for exciting market opportunities:
It means Norway through critical mass of users has the possibility to experiment, validate and roll out commercial or public services on a level few other nations can.
Interestingly, Norwegian hospitals are today testing advanced sensor technology which will lead to more efficient and cost-saving diagnosis and treatment for chronically ill patients.
* We’re getting good at world domination – in niches! In addition to many such niches in the mentioned maritime and off-shore area, Norway has become a super power in specific microelectronics hardware - more than half the world’s low power consuming circuitry used for touch screens and Bluetooth RFID is designed in Norway.
Traditionally Norway has also been a major actor within the niche of Internet search, with Microsoft, Google and Yahoo locating development teams in proximity of our universities.

The Digital Agenda for Norway is of course very much inspired by the Digital Agenda for Europe, and as a framework for policy development we find the dialogue between the two initiatives particularly useful.

While the economic crisis of the later years is the current main driving force behind the European Digital Agenda, Norway has been fortunate to have been hit less hard by the same problems.
Thus, the goals for our digital agenda are slightly different, although the results may be almost perfectly aligned.
Where the EU’s focus must be on creating jobs and growth, Norway is driven by a need to further optimise our ICT sector and services.
At the same time, we also need to stay ahead and continually ensure that our businesses stay competitive and our public services get ever more efficient.

My ministry has chosen “Simplify, improve and modernise” as its slogan. We can tie different ICT developments where Norway has a leading edge to these three words:

We are **simplifying** a lot of services:

* Today, taxpayers can do all their tax reporting online, they can even choose just to check if the tax authority has all the correct information and even confirm their tax report by not doing anything.
* The state business and tax reporting platform Altinn is connecting directly with most accounting systems. The platform itself is not just a tool for sending in accounting forms, it is also a virtual collaboration platform between the authorities, the accountants and the businesses.
* The Norwegian State Educational Fund has since long been 100% digitised, and followers such as Norwegian State Housing Bank, are on the verge of making substantial savings by digitising their services offering.
In the private sector, insurance companies and banks are also near full digitisation. The results are reduced costs and reduced time for customers applying for loans or insurance - in some cases the reply will be instantaneous.
* The solutions provided by the Norwegian-led EU-project PEPPOL have been widely adopted by Norwegian businesses, and as a first country we now have an eco-system related to e-invoicing with subcontractors and a large and rapidly growing number of invoices sent electronically.

We are **improving** services and skills:

* Our guidelines on net neutrality have been considered as a benchmark document for soft regulation on the topic.
* Our national accessibility for disabled regulation is pioneering, the adoption of a wide set of rules applied to both public and private sectors, covering ICT solutions comprising not only web sites but also public automats.
* Norway has a large population of Internet users amongst the elderly. Now measures are being put in place to increase the digital competency in this demographic group – which is destined to be one of the largest in society in the near future.
* A public “plain language” project has led to significant reduction of time spent both by citizens and public administrations. By simply making public communications clearer cases of 40% improvement have been identified.

Finally, we are **modernising** services:

* Norway is still alone world-wide in having developed an Electronic Public Records collaborative tool which central government agencies use to publish their records online. Public record data is stored in a searchable database. Users can search this database to locate case documents relevant to their field of interest. Having located relevant case documents, users may submit requests to view these.
* Norway has updated its Public Administration Act in order to make all communication digital-by-default
* Approximately 60 percent of the pension cases will be processed automatically online in 2012. Previously, users had to wait months for a reply to their pension application, but now it only takes a few minutes.
* Electronic ID systems are widely used by banks. Usage of such IDs has reached critical mass to the extent that also public services can be used using the same ID systems.

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I realize I might come off as a bit proud of our ICT achievements as a nation – and I am!
And I believe it is important for a small nation to be proud of – and build on - its successes.

However, pride alone will not take us further in the global digital fairy tale. Our government has pledged to be one of action and within the ICT field this means a strong focus on our ability to implement.

We’re not only governed by laws we issue on behalf of the Norwegian people, we’re also governed by regulations and guidelines expressing the will and interests of more than 500 million fellow Europeans.

We think we are quite good at ICT in Norway.

However, in business as in government complacency should always be a danger signal:

We have been surpassed in many areas of ICT by many EU countries.

The need to stay competitive and create growth is a constant reminder for us that we are a part of a global, rapidly developing market, and an integral part of the European common market.

I have tried to outline some points on how Europe might learn from Norway when developing the ICT policies and actions for the future.

Let me now introduce Robert Madelin, Director General at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content & Technology (DG Connect) in what may well turn out to be a dialogue as he will counter my points by examining how Norway can learn from Europe in developing our future ICT policy.

After Mr. Madelin’s speech there will be a brief Q&A where we will jointly reply to questions from the audience.

Thank you for your attention.