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from : Estonian and Portuguese delegations  
to : Council

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Subject : Creating companies online in Portugal and Estonia: a step forward in bringing Europe together

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Establishing a company in a foreign country usually proves to be a very difficult and cumbersome process (especially for SMEs). In order to overcome at least some of the obstacles on the way – Portugal and Estonia started an innovative co-operation process in order to allow online cross-border establishment of companies in either Portugal or Estonia by using electronic signatures of both countries.

Both countries have established electronic company registration – ‘Portal da Empresa’ and ‘Ettevõtjaportaal’ are equally recognised as best-practice all over Europe. Also secure authentication using electronic (digital) signature has been established in Estonia as well as in Portugal.

Thus in 2007, during the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial eGovernment Conference, it was decided by the Estonian Minister of Justice Mr Rein Lang and Portuguese Minister of Justice Mr Alberto Costa that two countries should learn from each other's experience and try to develop some added value to the existing solutions. Consequently the project on mutual recognition of digital signatures within the process of online company registration took off.

Today, we have come to the point that it is now possible for the holders of Estonian electronic signature to start a business in Portugal and vice versa without leaving their homes – i.e. one does not need to travel to the other country any more. All one needs is a computer, ID-card and valid PIN passwords that come with the ID-card to sign the petitions digitally. The whole project has been carried out in very business friendly solution.

The Estonian company registration and management portal can be accessed at <https://ettevotjaportaal.rik.ee/>. The portal allows one to establish a company, to change the registered information of an existing company and to submit annual reports. All the documents produced during the process can be seen in 2 languages – Estonian and English.

The Portuguese company registration portal can be accessed at <http://www.portaldaempresa.pt/>. The portal is the official Portuguese business website. The service allows incorporation of companies and also provides entrepreneurs with help on a range of legal procedures and administrative formalities, as well as advisory services.

We believe this project to be an excellent example of cooperation and willingness to improve business environment in the European Union. Also – no doubt that this will be the first step to start larger wave of cross-border business start-ups.

The Ministries of Justice of both countries and specialists from the Registre ja Infosüsteemide Keskus in Estonia and the Instituto dos Registos e do Notariado and the Instituto das Tecnologias de Informação na Justiça in Portugal have contributed to make this possible.

The digital signature certification agencies in both countries also played a key role: Estonia's AS Sertifitseerimiskeskus and Portugal's Multicert.

As a result of our work together we have produced an innovative and practical solution which could become the pioneer in cooperation within the EU and make administration between countries significantly easier.

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