

EU project develops user-friendly e-polling system

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E-Poll 'electronic polling system for remote voting operations' was funded under the information society technologies (IST)

programme of the Fifth Framework Programme (FP5). With a total budget of 3.2 million and with partners from France, Italy and Poland, the project defined the components necessary for bringing about a comprehensive electronic vote process. These include a European virtual ballot network (EVBN); a smart card with the elector's data and finger print stored in its memory; a mobile polling kiosk composed of a computerised touch-screen and finger print scanner; and a cryptographic protocol.

To cast a vote using E-Poll, a voter visits a mobile polling kiosk and inserts a personalised smart card. A voting card then appears on the screen, which the voter fills in by touching one of the active buttons. As Roberto D'Alicandro, project coordinator of E-Poll, told CORDIS News, polling using this system could not be more user friendly 'but it is not so much the technology that is important, but the sociological approach taken in the development of this project.'

'The system that we have developed can be adapted to any voting environment across Europe because when we were developing it, we took into consideration the needs and constraints of the voting systems of different countries,' he continued.

'In terms of increasing inclusion, with the use of mobile kiosks, voting no longer has to be done in a specific location, meaning that citizens can cast their vote anonymously from any location in their country, abroad or even at sea,' he said.

'It has also been built up with people with disabilities in mind,' explained Mr D'Alicandro. 'The kiosks are wheelchair accessible and we also have designed user friendly touch screens and a voice recognition system.'

'In addition, the system helps to free up traditional polling stations. For instance, in Italy schools normally have to close down at election time. But this would no longer be the case with the implementation of our polling system,' Mr D'Alicandro explained.

To test the effectiveness of its design, the E-Poll project consortium carried out six pilot experiments. During the first pilot, voters in the Italian town of Avellino were asked to try to vote twice or try to vote using a smart card of another voter. In both instances, the system was capable of detecting and rejecting the votes cast. According to Mr D'Alicandro, the feedback from citizens who participated in the experiments has been crucial to getting the polling system right: 'Human agreement and communication has been mandatory in the development our system,' he said.

Since its completion, the project has received official compliments from the European Commission, as well as interest from the Italian Ministry of Interior, one of the partners in the project, said Mr D'Alicandro. In addition, Siemens, another consortium partner, is now working with other companies in the field of information communication technologies (ICT) in effort to standardise systems based on open source technology like E-Poll. The aim is to maintain lower costs and encourage take-up by public authorities, explained Mr D'Alicandro.

Countries

France, Italy, Poland

Last update: 10 July 2003

Permalink: <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/20555-eu-project-develops-userfriendly-epolling-system>

European Union, 2025

