The eID system on (a collision) course?

Digital service provision by the government must aim to reach a higher level. In order to improve its services, the Dutch government has started the 'Digitaal 2017' programme, which should enable citizens and businesses to conduct all their transactions with the government by 2017 at the latest. Services include applying for a permit or lodging an appeal. Non-digital alternatives continue to be available for those who need them.

Secure access in various ways
The government is working with the business sector to set up a standard secure for access to its online services. This standard (identity and access management for citizens), aka the eID system [1], has to supply online identification. The main starting points are to provide more certainty about digital identity, enhancing the reliability of personal details and targeting a multi-means-strategy. The latter entails that as a consumer you can log in in various ways – both at the government and the business sector. It is comparable to iDeal, which enables you to pay through your own bank within one and the same system. Apart from all this, an organisation must be able to check someone's age through this eID system.

That is quite a long wish list... That is why the Dutch government has collaborated closely with the business sector for the past three years to mature our digital passport. The implementation of the eID system has been tempestuous and is by now part of a political sparring match. While the safe harbour of successful result is not yet in sight.

Pilots
Nevertheless, the development of the eID system is entering a new phase. This year will see the start of the so-called eID plateau, aka idensys. By introducing this plateau the government will build on the format of eHerkenning ('eRecognition') [2], the DigiD for businesses. Within eHerkenning, which has by now existed for six years, business conduct transactions with the government digitally. Applications are 'Omgevingsloket [Environment desk] online' and the fairly new TenderNed, the online public tender market place.

Recently, the Dutch cabinet agreed to start up pilots in the consumer domain. Both businesses and government bodies can take part by joining the new eID system. Businesses cannot join as a matter of

course, however. A higher threshold applies for connecting to eHerkenning. At least ISO270001 certification (or being in the process of certification) is required. Also, the necessary system interfaces need to be developed and tested. Only after extensive testing and approval by the entry experts are suppliers admitted to this eID plateau. Participating in the eID system pilots primarily serves to enhance the reliability of DigiD.

How reliable do we want it to be?
STORK [3] is a European classification that entails reliability levels, level 4 being the highest. In the afore-mentioned eID pilots the means must be supplied at reliability levels 3 and 4. Currently, DigiD is compatible with level 2.
If we want to progress to reliability levels 3 and 4, the citizen will first need to submit a valid proof of identity to the organisation in question – a process that will cost about 70 million euros. In case of a private identifier, these costs will have to be borne by the business sector, since DigiD has so far been supplied to citizens free of charge. Thus, unless a sound business model is developed, the affordability of the project appears to be a problem. And past experience shows us this is not an easy task.

Other projects have been set in motion, for that matter, such as a pilot of the so-called Plasterk-card, which is due to start begin 2016. This concerns an investigation of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior regarding the use of a public identifier to replace DigiD. Moreover, a number of banks and the Betaalvereniging (Payment Association) are working on a pilot regarding electronic identification and payments, the BankID.

It is therefore clear that the eID playing field is very much in motion. All the more unclear is which direction these pilots are heading, and whether we are coursing for that safe harbour – or for conflicting interests. Anyone with a crystal ball, please come forward. One thing is certain: transparent and effective collaboration between the public and private sector is a condition for a good result. The ambassador of the Digitaal 2017 programme, the so-called Digicommisaris, has to align the parties involved and safeguard the necessary funding. The government has to work out a number of matters, but the market needs to take action as well…
There is the key to success. Now, all we need to do is find the right lock.

[1] http://www.eid-stelsel.nl
https://www.nldigitalgovernment.nl/dossiers/identity/
[2] https://www.eherkenning.nl/english
[3] https://www.eid-**stork**2.eu
[4] https://www.nldigitalgovernment.nl