

Discours d'ouverture d'AWG au Global Forum – 17 novembre 2014 - 10 minutes de parole

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am very happy to welcome you on behalf of the Government of the canton of Geneva, for this new edition of the Global Forum. This year, the canton of Geneva is not only a participant as usual, but also one of the partners. We have worked together..., hand in hand, the Chancellery of State and the organizers, to offer you the best topics and speakers about digital future issues.

The Global Forum was created in 22 years ago and defines itself as an "independent, international and neutral think-tank on digital future issues". Independent, international and neutral are qualities often used to describe Geneva or Switzerland in general. This is why it makes great sense that finally an edition of this forum takes place here.

When I see the number of participants and the number of sponsors in front of me, I have to confess, that I am not very surprised with regard to the quality of the program and the topics selected about digital future.

"A connected age : opportunities and disruption in a time of transformation" is the title of this year's edition of the Global Forum. Educated as a political scientist, concepts such as "opportunities, disruption and transformation" have always fuelled my curiosity. Today, as a government official, issues about change and innovation are at the core of my activities and interests.

If there is no doubt for me that technology is a driving force of change, its impact on politics and on public management is not as straightforward as it might be in the private sector.

No fear, I am not going to list the differences between the private and the public sector and their respective abilities or disabilities to adapt to technology: the literature is full of knowledgeable and insightful analyses on this particular issue. As the first speaker, I have the honourable opportunity to humbly raise some issues that might fuel discussions in the coming sessions of the forum. So here is my question:

"What if technology did not matter at all ? What if we were wrong in assuming that technological innovation is the driver of social and political transformation ?"

It is often considered that public authorities are bound to understand the innovative business models and the new mechanisms induced by technological change that highly impact our societies and the public sector in particular. It is true that governments and administrations are constantly challenged by these innovations and their speedy development, and they have to adapt rapidly to this new environment.

But what if the obsession to adapt and to implement new digital tools under the concept of e-government, for example, made us miss the point of change, the meaning of change ?

I can see some of you raising eyebrows : "Where is she heading to ? What is she saying ?"

What I am trying to say is simple. Governments, public administrations are clearly in a dire need of technological innovation. This usually is what is meant when we are talking about "e-government" or "e-administration". The public sector has to develop digital platforms and innovative tools to interact with citizens. No question about that. But technology is not an end. It is not THE end. It is the beginning.

One of your sessions is entitled "21st Century Challenges – The Situation of the Digital Citizen Now"

I am sure that discussions will revolve around what the public sector must do, to address the needs of connected citizens, or around how public sector should organize its structure towards more flexibility and responsiveness. These are legitimate questions.

The canton of Geneva has already started to take part in these new dynamics. Following the global trend of open big data, Geneva has recently offered access to a wide range of data regarding our IT Geographical system, which is one of the most sophisticated of the world. This new approach is undoubtedly reversing the usual model by granting public access to data that were previously reserved to the administration. As side effects, this also concurs to add value to our know-how by rendering it public, to extend autonomy levels of the individuals, and to increase significantly transparency of the public sector.

One of the duties of the State Chancellery on Geneva is to organize elections and ballots.

As you know, the citizens of our country are called to vote every three months to decide on a very wide range of different subjects. The big challenge for the authorities is to find and offer the largest possibilities to allow people to express their vote in the safest conditions. It is in this sense that the Canton of Geneva has decided more than 10 years ago to look into new technologies, and develop its own "home made" and public electronic voting system. Recently upgraded with new security measures, this system was, from the start, supposed to increase the turnout of the electoral process. Although it is undoubtedly a huge success, the global turnout has not been significantly increased by this new technology. It appears that people who used to vote via the postal system rather shifted to the electronic version of the ballot. And while it was expected to increase the involvement of young voters, it did not have a significant impact on this section of the electorate.

Don't get me wrong! The Geneva electronic voting system is a brilliant innovation, ahead of many competing systems developed by private firms. And as you know, these days for governments it is the more and more important not to depend on private foreign companies. It is the illustration that the public sector is capable of innovation and flexibility. And while we are planning with determination new developments in the very near future, one must admit that it did not modify the relationship between the citizen and the public authorities, and that it did not boost significantly the participation of the citizen.

This conclusion lead me to think that technology alone is not the solution and that if we want to transform this relationship to have an impact on people, one has to do more than rely on technological tools. Technology is not enough for change.

That is why I decided last year to launch an online video-movie contest to encourage the young voters to take part in the political decision process. The second edition of this contest, called CinéCivic, just ended last October with three mini movies being awarded by a prize, upon 23 received. The main goal of this project is not only to encourage young people to vote, but to empower them and to offer them the opportunity to speak to other young people, in their own words, using their own language and codes.

For this contest, we exclusively relied on the Internet as the primary communication channel together with intensive use of social medias like Facebook and Twitter. As a result, we have received, over the past 2 years, more than 45 video-movies, mostly very well designed and creative. In addition to the films we started an interactive debate and discussion with young people on politics and democracy to better hear and understand their needs and their suggestions. In fact, as less than one young citizen out of three is voting and the category which is voting most are adults between 70 and 75 years old it is not possible for a region as Geneva to do without the young generation when is goes to solve today with creativity the

problems of tomorrow. Imagine a private company trying to find new products for the future by a survey of their elderly clients.

I do not know yet if this will have an impact on younger citizens participation in the electoral process. But what I have learned is that we need the ability to challenge our way of communicating with our citizen, having a two-way discussion with citizens is essential. Technology is a mean, not an end. Public organisations can have the best and most innovative digital tools to interact with the citizens, if they are unable to adapt the way to conceptualize and organize their relationship with the outside world, they will end up with a nice website or a trendy Iphone App, but will fail to accomplish their mission.

In that sense : "Technology does not matter at all ! But just a little bit !"

On behalf of all the members of the Government of the State of Geneva, I would like to thank you again to have chosen Switzerland and Geneva for this new edition.

I hope you will enjoy the sessions and the discussions and also, of course, your stay in our beautiful city.

Thank you for your attention.

Question à la fin qui sera posée par Mme Toporkoff:

Q: You mentioned that the evoting system has been recently upgraded, could you give us additional details about this evolution?

A: This second generation system implies the introduction of the principle of individual verifiability. This concept basically means that the voters are now able to check if their vote has been cast as intended and correctly registered by the server. This

constitutes an additional security element on the voter's side. By using the evoting system a citizen has more security than by all other, he knows that his ballot arrived and if it has been counted right. When he uses postal voting, although the excellent reputation of swiss postal services one doesn't know if his ballot arrived in time and has been counted the right way.

In addition to this new module, we also decided to cease using Java Applet as this was not user-friendly due firstly to the numerous updates required and, secondly, to the fact that the evoting system could not be used on a tablet or iPad.

This new platform will be used for the first time for the next referendum in March 2015.