

...Continued from page 5

BPS is planning to install up to four of the ATMs in Warsaw by the end of the year and a total of 200 across its 365 branches in Poland.

* In the US, the First United bank has signed a deal with Hawk Systems to install up to six biometric ATMs in New York. This is a trial and, if successful, First United plans to use the systems – which employ fingerprint scanning – across its ATM network.

Smart Card Alliance reports on immigration reform

The Smart Card Alliance – the multi-industry group that promotes smartcard technology – has released a report, ‘Securing Identity and Enabling Employment Verification: How Do Immigration Reform and Citizen Identification Align?’ which, predictably, concludes that secure ID is fundamental to successful immigration reform.

Not surprisingly, given that biometric ID cards are a key element in immigration reforms currently being sought in the US, the report includes a section on biometric options. This is a very brief overview of the technologies available, but – perhaps significantly – it focuses on privacy issues and highlights how the use of biometric templates protects a user’s personal information.

The report also asserts that: “An upgraded Social Security card incorporating biometric identity credentials enables a true authentication process that will benefit workers, employers, and government.”

A PDF version of the report is available for download at: <http://bit.ly/btt201006-smartcard>

E-PASSPORTS

Gemalto personalises Turkey’s passports

Gemalto is providing the personalisation services for Turkey’s e-passport programme. The company has implemented its Coesys Issuance solution at two centres in the country – one at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other in the Turkish Police centre in Ankara.

The personalisation service includes a certificate authority solution and associated integration services. Gemalto is also providing training to the staff operating the service. The company already has a strong presence in Turkey and was

able to respond to the programme’s tight deadlines, which required the issuing of the first e-passports on 1 June.

Turkey’s President, Abdullah Gül, was the country’s first citizen to receive a biometric passport. His wife, Hayrinnisa, got the second one. Turkey has marked the switch to e-passports by changing the colour of the new documents: diplomatic passports are now black, regular passports have changed from blue to maroon.

PATENTS

Cross Match seeks ban on Suprema products

The patent dispute between Cross Match and two other companies, Suprema and Mentalix, continues.



COMMENT

The cancellation of the national ID card scheme by the UK’s new coalition Government was hardly a surprise – in fact, it was a campaign promise from

both parties. And this act is part of a cull of biometrics-based projects.

The National Identity Register – the database underpinning the scheme – will be destroyed. The UK will not proceed with plans to move to second-generation biometric passports. The Government has pledged to put a stop to the use of biometric ID schemes in schools, unless parents give consent. And it plans to put stricter limits on the retention and use of DNA data.

For the biometrics industry, the significance of all this goes beyond lost business opportunities. For while cutting costs is clearly a key objective in all this, the Government’s actions are being presented as reversing the erosion of civil liberties in the UK. And there’s the possibility that, in the minds of UK citizens, there will be a reinforcement of the idea that biometric technology automatically means infringement of personal freedoms.

You can’t escape the politics in all this. It has been suggested, from more than one quarter, that killing the ID card scheme is an easy target for a new government wanting to score points with the public, be seen to be acting on campaign promises and looking to save money. On the other hand, you could just as easily argue that the Government is living up to its promises to protect privacy and other personal freedoms.

Cross Match has now filed a complaint with the US International Trade Commission (ITC) alleging infringement of four of its patents by biometric scanners made and sold by Korea-based Suprema, which manufactures products such as RealScan scanners and Texas-based Mentalix, which distributes Suprema products.

Cross Match has asked the ITC to issue an exclusion order, preventing ‘infringing’ Suprema products from being imported into the US, as well as seeking a cease and desist order to stop the sale of any such products already in the country.

This follows the original patent infringement suit filed in February in the District Court in Tyler, Texas. This case is ongoing.

Suprema signed a deal with Mentalix in January 2010 to supply fingerprint scanners to the US Census Bureau.

The problem is that these issues are very subtle. For example, you might reasonably say that India’s massive adoption of biometric ID will help give an official existence to vast numbers of people who simply do not currently have any documentary proof of their identity: and through that, you can give them easy access to government-supplied services that could significantly improve their lives. But to what extent does that concept apply in the UK?

Countering those arguments are valid concerns about mission creep, the surveillance society, the protection of personal data and who owns your identity – you or the state.

These are important areas of social policy. Biometrics has a part to play in all this, but there are complex issues (ones not easily reduced to sound bites) around the proportionate use of biometric data, what challenges do they present (for example, encryption, public key infrastructures and so on).

Biometrics are often presented as a simple solution – such as the taking of fingerprints. There is no public awareness that there exists a range of biometric solutions, many of which can actually help to protect personal data and privacy.

Perhaps government organisations need to put a better case for the use of biometrics. In the meantime, the UK biometrics industry has a difficult task on its hands. As the previous Government’s ID plans are ditched in the name of civil liberties, how do you stop people associating the technology itself with its alleged misuse?

Steve Mansfield-Devine