

ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF E-GOVERNMENT IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN OUR COUNTRY

ANCA JARMILA GUȚĂ *

ABSTRACT: *The paper presents the stage of e-government in the field of public administration in our country, presenting the level of e-government compared to that of other EU states. Changes in technology have led to changes in the structure and activity of organisations, and in particular, a public institution, for which e-government practices and technologies have become increasingly important for all types of organizations, but especially for public administrations that need to offer citizens the benefits of e-government in order to support the most effective interaction between citizens and the public institutions with which they interact. In this context, the path of a public institution towards greater efficiency goes through a permanent management of the e-government instruments it uses both in its internal and external activity in order to improve and improve its.*

KEY-WORDS: *public administration, electronic governance, public services, civil servants, communication systems, computer applications.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M16, H23.*

1. INTRODUCTION

E-Government is an essential stage of public administration reform, its modernization, and involves a process of digitizing the public sector whose purpose is to facilitate interaction between public institutions and citizens through information technology-based applications. E-government is essential for eliminating or simplifying bureaucratic procedures, improving access to information, reducing public spending, fighting corruption or strengthening the administrative capacity of public institutions, and making it imperative to develop it.

Due to the fact that society is constantly changing, that it has experienced a strong dynamic, it is seen the need to reform the public administration, to modernize it, in order to meet the requirements that society raises. The development of democracy requires the redefinition of the role of the state in relation to the citizens and through the

* *Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, gancajarmila@gmail.com*

reform it aims to adapt to the changes in the world economy and to the requirements imposed by the integration of Romania into the structures of the European Union.

E-Government is the “provision by the State, on the basis of public money, to the beneficiaries of some of its public services and in electronic form, that is, by the use of information and communication technology and, in particular, the Internet”. In a simplistic formulation, electronic governance can be defined as “the interaction between the Government, Parliament and other public institutions with citizens through electronic means”, and its benefits include informing on the draft laws under discussion and issuing opinions by citizens, paying taxes by taxpayers, completing online complaints and petitions, all of which represent “effective means made available by the state for the exercise of citizens’ fundamental rights”. Therefore, the meaning of implementing electronic governance is from top to bottom (from state to citizen).

For the real development of e-government it is essential to focus on the citizen, this being a goal for any institution that aims to meet the needs of citizens – for example, in Romania, law no. 52/2003 on decision-making transparency in public administration lists as objectives the increase of the responsibility of the public administration toward the citizen, as beneficiary of the administrative decision and the stimulation of the active participation of citizens in the administrative decision-making process and in the process of drafting normative acts (Art. 2, a and b).

2. ADVANTAGES OF ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE

E-government exercises its influence over vast areas and has implications in the social, political or economic sphere, radically transforming the way citizens interact with central or local public authorities.

Among the advantages of the electronic governance mentioned in the portal of the National Electronic System we can mention: improving access to public information and services of central public administration authorities, eliminating bureaucratic procedures and simplifying working methodologies, improving the exchange of information and services between central public administration authorities and improving the quality of public services at central public administration level.

The benefits of e-government can be summarized by “creating government websites that provide basic information to users, facilitating interaction with public authorities, providing access to communicational tools (forums, opinion polls), taking into account beneficiaries’ feedback and offering online services, all of which are embedded in a single portal”. It is also redundant to mention the advantages of e-government over the beneficiaries of online services, but we could specify that they have lower costs for the provision of public services, having access to more information in a shorter time, benefit from higher quality public services, the economy of time, because they do not have to travel from one institution to another, the possibility to pay taxes, fines via the internet, send statements to the police or obtain information of any kind from public authorities, etc. Regarding public institutions, they benefit from a computerization of the system, simplification of procedures, professionalization, improvement of employees in the field of information technology, reduction of bureaucracy, lower costs for providing information, efficiency of time, etc.

Another advantage of e-government is the possibility of public institutions to adopt different reorganization strategies such as: computerization without profound changes in offices, profound change in the organization of offices, centralization of office functions and decentralization of office functions, creation of an intermediary center, generic interactions between beneficiaries and agencies, creation of portals, proactive services and control of the beneficiary, through increased participation of citizens.

E-government requires a process of change, but this change is mediated by the trust relationship between citizens and the government and requires stability in this respect. Thus, it is imperative that the governors take actions to strengthen the connection, to cooperate with the citizens so that the policies on e-government are successful. Citizens need certainty and security in relation to public authorities, and they can be reached by electronic means. Security can be provided by assigning electronic identities, securing telecommunications, ensuring authenticity and confidentiality, securing information through encryption, and using digital signatures.

In order to ensure security, functional responsibilities are important, managers must take responsibility for the information systems under their management, protect data and systems by implementing security controls and procedures, ensure that employees have been notified of the obligation to keep data confidential and that they are aware of and comply with the policies and standards of use of information systems and, last but not least, ensure that the latter are used only for the approved purposes. Therefore, security management needs to carry out a proper risk assessment and understand its systems to ensure that services are not dysfunctional and appropriate to citizens' requirements.

Electronic communication offers countless advantages, from the rapid and secure dissemination of information to a large mass of receivers, in this case citizens and civil servants, to the relief of substantial costs. E-communication shortens the administrative process, the time wasted at kiosks in the offices of local governments, and the burden on public officials of a series of routine activities. The e-communication administration provides officials with efficiency in managing contracts and institutional issues, but also in direct communication with citizens and other officials.

The computerization of institutions plays an important role in the communication process. The development of the e-administration information system will redefine the relationship between the citizen and the public administration or between the business environment and the public administration, but also within the public administrations. Thus, access to public services and information will be facilitated through information technology.

E-government or digital governance defines generically the use of new communication technologies and its applications by central and local public administration in order to streamline the activity of the administrative apparatus and increase the quality of public services. E-Government is the use by the public sector of information and communication technologies to improve the provision of information and services by encouraging citizens' participation in decision-making and accountability of the government in a transparent and efficient manner.

The implementation of e-government brings a number of advantages for the public administration, namely:

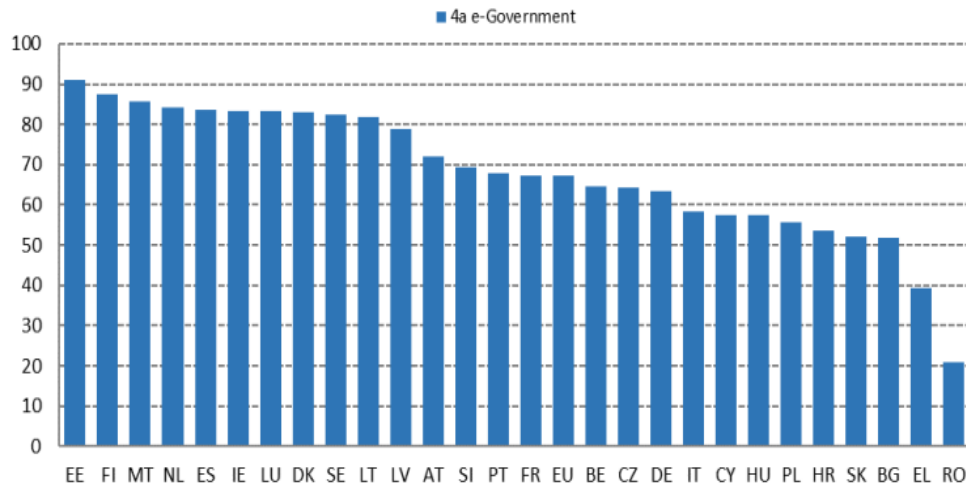
1. creating a more efficient and effective public administration for the socio-economic benefit of the romanian society;
2. improving administrative efficiency by introducing into current practice an e-communication system - modern administrative management tool;
3. the beneficiaries are both officials and citizens;
4. developing the online communication skills of officials, the training of the public management, execution and contract staff in the modules organized for this purpose;
5. Equipping it equipment and training a certain number of officials in the field of e-communication, and achieving qualitative objectives meant to lead to the efficiency of public administration services. These include:
 - improving the performance of result-oriented management and efficiency of public services;
 - acquiring and introducing into current practice innovative communication methods as support for the decision-making process;
 - introduction of new modern management tools;
6. the implementation of such a secure electronic communication system, both at intra-institutional and inter-institutional level, aims to achieve a high degree of performance in improving and efficient public services, by ensuring and sustainability of a secure, timely communication flow;
7. reduction of the financial costs allocated by channels and administrative cooperation instruments.
8. from the perspective of the administrative reform and modernization process, the introduction of this modern management system is meant to guarantee the sustainability of results-oriented and performance-based administrative management;
9. increased collaboration between institutions;
10. The following functionalities are provided: secure e-mail; archiving and indexing of all messages and documents received or officially transmitted by system users; securing the entire information system; authentication of all users producing messages and documents circulating in the system through digital certificates and electronic signatures; introduction of electronic signature, digital agenda.
11. e-communication shortens the administrative process, the time wasted at the counters of the local government offices and the release of public officials from a series of routine activities.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN OUR COUNTRY

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important it is to ensure the continuation of government activities when there are social distancing measures. A successful exit strategy from the pandemic has required the emergence and development of sound digital public services in all Member States, including e-health (such as

telemedicine, e-prescriptions and the exchange of health data) and the use of advanced technologies to improve public services.

In the 2022 European Union report on the level of e-government in various Member States, our country is at the bottom of the ranking alongside Bulgaria, Greece and Slovakia even though the years we went through in the pandemic meant major progress for our country in this area. This is shown in the following figure:



Sursa: DESI 2022, European Commission

Figure 1. Digital economy and society, digital public services

The first initiative in the field of e-government took place in 2002 with the launch of the eProcurement system, which aimed to improve transparency and control of public procurement, but the launch of the information society portal took place only in 2003 and provided access to all information of central and local institutions, it was allowed to download forms used by different public institutions and it was possible to fill out certain forms via the internet. The Ministry of Communications and information Technology launched in 2006 an online system for payment of taxes and other financial obligations, a fast, transparent, efficient and secure system, in 2007 being adopted Emergency Ordinance no. 73/2007 on the organization and functioning of the Agency for information Society Services (ASSI), under the aegis of the Ministry of Communications and information Technology, with specific attributions in the field of electronic governance.

The responsibilities of the Agency include: The development and operation of the e-government system, the electronic public procurement system and the it system for the electronic award of international road freight authorizations, for the electronic assignment of national routes from transport programs through county, intercounty neighboring and intercounty regular services; regulation of activities specific to the provision of governance services by electronic means; the implementation, coordination and operation at national level of its own information and communication systems, in

order to provide services for governance by electronic means; collaboration with national, regional and international institutions and organizations in its field of competence, etc.

In 2008, ASSI publishes the first e-government strategy in Romania, defining its objectives by increasing the comfort of people and improving the performance of public institutions, in support of which the Center for Advanced Studies for Electronic Services (E-CAESAR) was established, a non-profit association whose main objectives are research and development in the field of interoperability, efficient and secure e-government architectures oriented toward services, infrastructures and systems (e-caesar.ro). ASSI initiated in 2009 a project called “Platform for the Integration of e-Government Services in the National Electronic System (SEN)”, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the main objective of which was to improve the quality of services provided electronically by the central public administration and to introduce the electronic single contact point – ePCU. In 2010, the Ministry of Communications and information Society together with the National Management Center for the information Society initiated a National Supercomputing program through which 36 its systems of public institutions could be improved and implicitly had a modernization effect of the services offered to citizens.

The National Electronic System (SEN) is the portal of public administration in Romania, managed by the Authority for the digitization of Romania. As a result of the update of the content in the portal, carried out in December 2020, you can access:

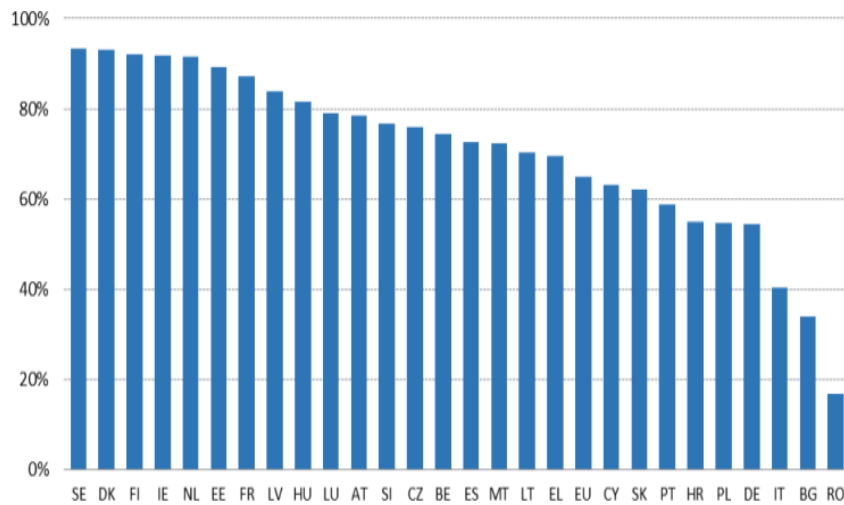
- Information, procedures and support and problem-solving services for citizens and companies in the European Union, within the Single Digital Gateway - the Single Digital Portal, hosted by e-guvernare.ro
- Contact links of the main public institutions in Romania
- National Register of public institutions in Romania
- The contact link for submitting the declarations to ANAF
- register accredited certification service providers for electronic signature

Over the past few years, various projects regarding electronic governance have been initiated in Romania. In Romania, the strategy proposed by the Ministry of Communications and information Society, “eRomania”, is carried out, whose main objectives are three groups: Group of public institutions, group two related to European recommendations or legislative provisions specific to Romania and group three related to the specific characteristics of the service “eRomania”.

The first group of objectives includes the development of the information infrastructure and the digital content necessary for the implementation of electronic governance at national level, improving the quality and efficiency of the provision of electronic public services, based on the simplification of administrative procedures and their transposition into electronic format; increasing the degree of trust of the beneficiaries of electronic public services by ensuring the security of technical equipment and program products, the protection of personal data, as well as the respect of the right to privacy; collaboration within the public administration for the provision of integrated, secure, accessible and relevant electronic public services through a central access point; developing the interoperability of national e-government systems; promoting interoperability at local level; the establishment of national electronic

registers; increasing the role of information society specific means in the act of government; increasing the performance of public administration employees in the field of information and communication technology. Also, among the objectives of group two we mention: Customs clearance of goods within a portal, processing of public tenders, request for obtaining the building permit, request and obtain certificates from the civil status register electronically, electronic voting, etc.

However, the same European Union report for 2022 also shows the number of online interactions with public administration of citizens from different EU Member States, an indicator where our country is also at the last place in the ranking.



Source: Eurostat, *Community survey on ICT usage in Households and by Individuals*.

Figure 2. Citizen-public administration interactions in the online environment

4. CONCLUSIONS

E-Government is an essential stage of public administration reform, its modernization and involves a process of computerization of the public sector, the purpose of which is to facilitate interaction between public institutions and citizens through information technology-based applications. E-government is essential for simplifying bureaucratic procedures and working methodologies, improving access to information and the quality of public services at central public administration level, reducing public spending, fighting corruption or strengthening the administrative capacity of public institutions.

One of the conclusions comprehensively captures the pressing reality in which Romania persists, being worrying the position of our country in the general ranking regarding the adoption of electronic governance at the level of the Member States of the European Union and of the candidate countries. The development of e-government within the top states regarding its adoption at the European Union level was the basis of a progressive model, by achieving successive objectives, which guaranteed the success of e-government.

Considering both the multiple initiatives of the European Commission to promote the Digital Single market/Digital Agenda, as well as the studies carried out within the Romanian population, from the perspective of civil society, but also from the perspective of the public managers responsible for implementing e-government procedures, it can be said that although Romania is still at the beginning of the road toward the effective and efficient digitalization of public services provided by central and local public administration agencies and authorities, the European Union's policies and legislative initiatives have encouraged the use of online means and promoted ICT in the Romanian society, this is demonstrated by the number of people accessing the websites of the national public administration.

REFERENCES:

- [1]. **Guță, A.J.** (2013) *Comparative analysis of public management in Romania and EU countries*, Annals of the University of Petroșani, Economics, vol. 13(2), pp. 85-92
- [2]. **Guță, A.J.** (2015) *The Role and the Importance of Communication in the Manager Activity*, Annals of the University of Petroșani, Economics, vol.15(1), pp. 155-162
- [3]. **Guță, A.J.** (2015) *Analysis of the Public Management Administration in Romania Based on Diagnostics and SWOT Analysis*, Annals of the University of Petroșani, Economics, vol.15(1), pp. 147-154
- [4]. **Isac, C.** (2019) *Clusters as catalysts of the economy competitiveness*", Studia Universitatis Moldaviae, Seria Științe exacte și economice, nr.2(122), pp.159-163
- [5]. **Norris, P.** (2019) *The public sentinel: News media and governance reform*, DC: World Bank, Washington
- [6]. **Sandu, A.** (2019) *Relații publice și comunicare pentru administrația publică*, Editura Tritonic, București
- [7]. **Vos, M.** (2016) *Setting the research agenda for governmental communication*, Journal of Communication Management 10(3), pp. 250-258
- [8]. **DESI** (2022) *Thematic_chapters_Digital_public_services*