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THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF E-GOVERNANCE FOR MOLDOVAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: The article proves the necessity of the e-governance implementation in modern society. The old methods of communication and data exchange are no longer actual in the information age. Electronic Governance means reforming the Governance from a vertical to a horizontal model in order to reduce the duration of services provision and, as a result, to increase the level of citizens satisfaction with the services quality and accessibility. As the relations between the Government, the civil society and the business will adapt to the information society, the consolidation of the electronic democracy will undergo substantial positive changes. The article also describes what are the main beneficial effects of e-Governance in Moldova and which are the obstacles that are met. It emphasizes the most important objectives that were achieved by e-Government Agency under the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: *benefit, communication networks, e-services, e-transformation process, information society, information technologies, public services.*

Rezumat. Prezentul articol reliefează necesitatea implementării guvernării electronice în societatea modernă. Vechile metode de comunicare și schimb de date nu mai sunt actuale în epoca informației. Guvernarea electronică înseamnă reformarea modalității de activitate a guvernării, de la un model vertical, la unul orizontal, pentru a reduce durata prestării serviciilor și, ca urmare, pentru a crește nivelul de satisfacție a cetățenilor în raport cu calitatea și accesibilitatea serviciilor. Pe măsură ce relațiile dintre Guvern, societatea civilă și mediul de afaceri se vor adapta societății informaționale, consolidarea democrației electronice va cunoaște progrese substanțiale. Articolul descrie, de asemenea, care sunt principalele beneficii ale guvernării electronice în Republica Moldova și care sunt obstacolele cu care aceasta se confruntă. Plus la acestea, prezenta cercetare, subliniază cele mai importante obiective care au fost atinse de către Agenția de guvernare electronică, din cadrul Guvernului Republicii Moldova.

Cuvinte cheie: *beneficii, rețele de comunicare, servicii electronice, societate informațională, tehnologii informaționale, servicii publice.*

Introduction

The changes that take place in the information society determine the consolidation of a new type of social relations and also of a new legal framework that is regulating the interaction between citizens and their representatives. As the relations between the Government, the civil society and the business adapt to the information society, the establishment and consolidation of the electronic democracy takes place. E-governance is a basic component of the information society and constitutes a complex system of informational governance assurance through the application of information and communication technologies. Consequently, e-government becomes a social and economic necessity by the beneficial effects it brings, directly and indirectly, to the whole society.

Methodological part

In the 21st century, information technology (IT) became an indispensable element in the daily life of every human being. Nowadays, IT is considered to be an essential factor for achieving and implementing governance reforms. Thus, governments around the world are trying to keep up with the technical progress and use of more and more information technologies in their institutional and functional work. As a result, the governments that capitalize on the opportunities of information technology become more efficient and better able to face the challenges of the 21st century. The effective realization of the e-governance, however, demands overcoming of several challenges [1]. These challenges generally relate to system and technology, processes, organizational issues, legal issues, security, citizen relationship management, inter-departmental collaboration and integration, building public-private partnerships, change management, etc [2, 3]. On the other hand, technologies improve public services, efficient government activity and facilitate democratic participation of every citizen, bringing governments closer to them.

Moldovan society is also looking forward to have a modernized government that uses technological innovations to improve quality of life, but this process of modernization impedes certain *obstacles*. Even though our country is included in top ten countries with the highest Internet speed in the world and our citizens are using information and communication technologies enough often, the public sector in Moldova is still delayed in taking technology to modernize public services and effective governance. This is due to the fact that our citizens (including those that are working in public institutions) are either not sufficiently informed about the opportunities of e-government, or are afraid to access and benefit from e-services or do not trust their efficiency and credibility. Citizens and businesses still receive public services in the traditional way, making queues at counters of authorities for certificates, forms and information. As a consequence, Moldovan citizens face a series of problems in accessing public services, such as corruption, bureaucracy and inefficiency of public institutions, long waiting counters CPA authorities, poor communication and incomplete information on how to access and provision of public services. Citizens seeking public services are forced to travel long distances thus wasting time, effort and money to obtain information or services from the public institutions.

Despite these obstacles, our country has registered some relevant achievements in the process of launching and implementing e-government in the last ten years. Starting with 2010, the Government of the Republic of Moldova has committed itself to the e-transformation process, aiming to make the government more efficient by using information technology intensively. To this end, in August 2010, the State Chancellery established the e-

Government Center of the public entity - which aims to bring leading technologies into the Government, rethink processes, improve public services and modernize the public services in order to bring the Government closer to the Moldovan citizens [2]. In order to achieve this mission, e-Government Center has set the following goals for the coming years: to **modernize public services through re-engineering and digitization; to increase governance efficiency by ensuring data exchange between public service providers; to diversify access channels to public services and to ensure information security. In 2018, the** "e-Government Center changed its status into e-Governance Agency (EGA). The main areas which the EGA is responsible for were the modernization of government services, digital transformation, interoperability of informational systems and cyber security of the e-Governance platforms.

In September 2011 eight founding governments (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, UK, Philippines, South Africa and the USA) officially launched Open Governments Partnership (OGP). OGP means action. By using advanced information technologies, governments around the world seek to increase the access to information, promote transparency in governance, fight corruption and ensure citizens participation in the governing process. Seventy-eight countries and a growing number of local governments - representing more than two billion people - along with thousands of civil society organizations are members of the OGP [4]. Moldova joined the initiative in April 2012 during the first annual meeting of the OGP held in Brazil. Thus, the government has embraced global and EU's efforts to improve the governance through technologies. According to the *Open Government Action Plan 2019-2020*, the Republic of Moldova aims [5]:

a. to increase the access to information on Government activity by ensuring the access to information to citizens, promoting the use of opened data by citizens and increasing budgetary transparency and public procurement;

b. to improve cooperation with civil society and support participation in the governance process by strengthening of platforms and mechanisms for collaboration with civil society and involvement of the diaspora in the decision-making process; c. to ensure the accountability of the public administration regarding the exercise of functions and duties and the modernization of public services according to the principles of open government by developing citizen-centered public services in order to optimize and streamline the processes of public service delivery.

Results and discussion

Since 2011, Moldova e-Governance Agency (EGA) has successfully implemented lots of digital transformation projects, building a sustainable platform for the further modernization of public services and other governance related innovations. Among the most relevant achievements we mention: 2012 - the Launch of *e-Reporting*, *Particip.gov.md*, *Unique Public Services Portal*, *M-Pass*, *Registry of Personal Data Operators*, *e-Record*, *e-Licensing and of Open Government Partnership*; 2013 - the Launch of *SIGEDIA*, *Mobile signature* (an integrated, secure and flexible mechanism of various solutions for the application and verification of the authenticity of the advanced digital signature by users), *Normative e-documents in construction*, *e-CNAM*, *MCloud*, *e-Public Procurement*, *MPay* (that currently offers Moldovan citizens the opportunity to pay for over 250 public and private services) and of *e-Civil Status*; 2014 - the Launch of *The special water use authorization*, *State Register of Inspections*, *e-InVoice*, *e-Traffic and of e-Visa*.

In 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers has approved the Action Plan on Modernization of Public Services Reform for 2017-2021. The Action Plan provided for the establishment of a unique call center for providing public services, implementation of a single format for e-signed contents, regardless of their type, and modernization of several services provided to citizens, among which is the property registration service, simplification of financial and statistical reporting, as well as improvement of the public procurement process. In 2018 the Government of the Republic of Moldova, in partnership with the World Bank Group, has launched the Project "Modernization of Government Services", to be implemented during a 5-years period (2018-2022). The project aims to improve the access, efficiency and quality of the government services delivery through elimination of obsolete services, diversifying of service provision channels, digitization of relevant processes, reducing of number of documents and visits required to obtain a service. The most important benefit of this project is the fact that citizens can require a wide range of services only with the ID card, due to the electronic exchange of data between the institutions.

Also, at the 2019 Media Forum, the Government of Moldova, through the EGA, announced the launch of the Government Data Portal – a one-stop shop of public data, which aims at substantial diversification of categories of data offered to users for viewing and reuse, the range of users, the data view mode and the processing of available data, the types of access to data held by public authorities. The Government Data Portal includes 3 basic modules and provides access in real time and in a transparent manner to different types of data held by public authorities, including public interest data, which can be retrieved or viewed upon authorization and under legal basis. While leveraging the potential of other e-governance products, such as the Government Interoperability Platform, as well as electronic authentication, the Governmental data portal provides users with a substantially extended, enhanced, simplified and much more user-friendly experience of accessing, browsing and viewing public sector data. Also, in 2019, the EGA launched a new version of the MSign - Government service for digital signature - version 2.0. which offers the possibility to sign and verify multiple files in one action. It can be installed as a mobile application (PWA) and has a user-friendly interface. At the same time, in order to increase the user experience, was improved the performance for all usage scenarios and was created the "FAQ" section. The exchange of information between Informational systems via MSign is accomplished through secured channels using cryptography as information security mechanism.

As a result, electronic services have facilitated the interaction and communication between citizens and the Government, generating accessible, inclusive and efficient services for the citizens. Public institutions have overcome isolation, operating and interacting on a joint technologic platform for data exchange – MConnect. In order to diversify the public service delivery channels citizens were offered the choice to receive services either online (which is comfortable and time saving) through government portal of public services <http://servicii.gov.md> or offline at the Universal Centers for Public Service Delivery. An equally important achievement is the fact that the National Social Insurance Office, with the support of the e-Governance Agency, has integrated the payment of all the compulsory social insurance contributions in the Government e-Payment Service MPay. In this context, starting in January 2020, citizens have the opportunity to pay any compulsory state social insurance contribution, including late interests and fines related to the state social insurance budget through MPay, by making a few simple steps and choosing the preferred method of payment from those proposed by the MPay Service: bank card, Internet Banking and cash,

through payment terminals or banks. Nevertheless, e-Governance Agency jointly with its partners is taking complex legal, organizational and technical measure, in order to guarantee the confidentiality, integrity and availability of required information [4].

Due to e-governance the public sector will cease to be a fragmented one, the government agencies acting more coherently, changing the way of providing services - from traditional to modern methods, involving the use of IT. Citizens and business will be able to benefit from lower costs for information and services, which will become more accessible, integrated, inclusive and customer-oriented [5]. Online participation in government will become a norm for citizens, who will benefit, at the same time, from an advanced level of information education and extended access to state services. In addition, governance processes will be more transparent, impartial and more efficient [6]. Nevertheless, in order to achieve its objectives, the government is investing in IT solutions that contribute to delivering qualitative and efficient public services at minimal cost. Saved resources can be used for investment in priority areas for citizens as education, health, social protection, and to develop an economy based on research and innovation [7].

Conclusions

In conclusion, the implementation of electronic governance in the Republic of Moldova created a favorable environment for the transition to the information society. E-government allows citizens easy and fast access to public services and government data, in electronic format, thus eliminating the bureaucracy encountered in this type of relationship and, in addition, ensuring transparency, quality and trust. It is also an instrument that contributes to the consolidation of relations between citizens and public authorities, based on mutual respect and interested cooperation between the state and citizens. As a result, our country will be able to fortify its position among European countries with a high level of use of new technologies.

In other words, the re-evaluation of democratic politics can be done by us, the citizens, both from the position of governors and from the one of governed. Everyone who uses the levers of e-government, all who fight side by side against injustice and inequality, corruption and trafficking of influence, discrimination and abuse, dogmatic thinking and physical violence are those that will defend democracy from the dangers of it, promoting instead empathy and tolerance, critical and independent thinking, human dignity and human rights, common peace and security. Today, we must cross borders and identify ourselves as citizens of a global democratic community, who share universal values and interact on the basis of universally valid principles, such as tolerance, respect and collaboration through solid partnerships that result in products and services of common utility, in creativity, innovation, personal and community development. Today, our common identity must become a democracy, where education is done through participation and e-participation and where participation and e-participation generate trust and solidarity, thus overcoming vulnerabilities and strengthening a stable democracy.

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