

**IMPLEMENTATION OF E-GOVERNANCE COMPONENT OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY ON BUILDING OF INFORMATION SOCIETY “e-MOLDOVA”**

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**Abstract:** The paper is devoted to the UNDP project on implementation of e-Governance in Moldova.

UNDP is assisting the Government of Moldova in the implementation of e-Governance component of a consensus-based National Strategy on Building the Information Society [1]. With the overarching goal of strengthening democracy in the country, the UNDP e-Governance Project [2] aims to support the Government in advancing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) usage in government processes and services, facilitating the access to public information, improving the quality of public services. Based on in-depth analysis, e-model will be proposed to demonstrate the utilization of ICT for improvement of the quality and responsiveness of services of the local governments provided to the citizens.

**INTRODUCTION**

The future economic prosperity and economic development of the Republic of Moldova depends on a rapid integration into an increasingly competitive regional and global economy. Knowledge is recognized as an essential driver of development. Information is now the as valuable resource as natural resources: metals, oil and others are. The application and circulation of knowledge and information within a society accounts for differential rates of growth between countries, and is a key strategic driver for economic competitiveness in a globalized world. Countries that do not embrace the information revolution and strive to build information societies that maximize the potential for applying knowledge in all spheres of life – education, economy, society, culture, government - are subject to the risk of being left on the margins of the global knowledge economy. As a modern European country that has chosen a democratic path to development, the Government of Moldova recognizes that joining the global knowledge economy is a national priority. Building an Information Society is therefore critical to Moldova’s development and must occur in a manner that is inclusive and equally beneficial for all citizens.

Moldova does not have rich natural resources, but possesses many natural advantages that can be leveraged in its development of a knowledge economy. Geographically it is located near the centre of Europe and enjoys close proximate access to the markets of the Europe, Asia and the CIS. The population is educated, multilingual, young and enjoys the freedom of movement. The country possesses a well developed educational system, with some industrial and research and development specialization in the field of information and communication technologies. *This human and institutional capital is a key resource for the information era that must be preserved, nurtured and invested in.*

### **COUNTRY CONTEXT**

Recognizing the historical and strategic importance of this task, in June 2002 the Republic of Moldova signed the Declaration of Intent among the member states of Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and committed itself to build an Information Society based on principles established in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enshrined in the Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society. This has been followed on March 19, 2004 by a Presidential Decree no. 1743-III [3] directing the Government to begin the process of preparing a National Strategy on Information Society Technologies for Development (ISTD). On June 8, 2004 the Government established the guiding principles for the National Strategy issuing an Official Decision no. 632, “Policies for building information society in the Republic of Moldova” [4]. A National Committee on Building an Information Society has been created as a multi/stakeholder mechanism to monitor the implementation of related policies. A package of fiscal and other facilities for ICT companies approved by the Parliament in December 2004 demonstrates is yet another proof of confidence that the Government has in moving forward towards a developed Information Society.

At the moment, according to the legal framework of the Republic of Moldova the ICT institutional framework in Moldova is formed of the following six agencies of public administration, whom the Government has delegated functions to elaborate and implement its policies in the field of ICT, as well as functions to regulate and monitor the ICT services market:

- State Commission for Radio Frequencies,
- Ministry of InformationDevelopment,
- The State Inspectorate in Communications,
- National Agency for Regulations in Telecommunications and Informatics,
- Coordinating Committee for Audio-Visual activities,
- Local public administration.

As a European country, Moldova's path to development is oriented towards gradual integration into the European Union. Assessing Moldova's progress toward reaching European standards and norms in archiving information society is an important precondition to formulating sound policy approaches. Since 2001, national "e-readiness" assessments are recognized as a meaningful mechanism through which the strategic priorities are systematically assessed. This document summarizes the findings of a yearlong process assessing Moldova's e-readiness towards integration into the European Information Society.

The Report [5] follows the framework adopted by the European Union which identifies areas critical to the information society. It provides a comprehensive analysis of Moldova's present day situation in each of these critical areas: Access to ICT infrastructure; the "enabling" legal and regulatory environment, e-governance and e-democracy; e-education, e-science, e-culture and e-health.

Moldova lags behind Europe in all of these key areas. At the same time, significant progress has been achieved in several areas, the pace of change, combined with sound policy making, promises to significantly narrow the gap within a relatively short period of time. An assessment using established e-readiness indices (Harvard methodology) and the Digital Access Index (DAI) indicates that Moldova has high potential in quickly closing the gap in many key area.

Overall the report concludes that while Moldova is well positioned to become a member of European Information Society, however, this will not happen without government leadership and a clear vision of how to achieve it.

The formulation of the National Strategy for Building of Information Society in the Republic of Moldova (2005-2010) approved by the Government in March 2005, occurred within the framework of a special Government project supported by United Nations Development Programme in Moldova. The preparation process was undertaken by a group of experts and benefited from inputs from a wide range of sources and public consultations with representatives from academia, government, the private sector, and civil society. The National ICTD Strategy builds on the intent of above-mentioned Presidential Decree and Government Decision, and elaborates the Government of Moldova's commitment to building an inclusive Information Society that prepares the Republic of Moldova and its citizens to compete in the emerging global knowledge economy.

Several strategic documents are guiding now e-development (EGPRSP, National e-Strategy, EU-Moldova Action Plan). According to the National Strategy for Building Information Society, the Republic of Moldova must become an active and competitive member of the emerging global knowledge economy to ensure its democratic path to development and secure future economic prosperity. To accomplish this *strategic goal*, the government of Moldova (with its specialized

agency – the Department of Information Technologies) *will take* a leading role in developing appropriate conditions that favour emergence of a national information society fully integrated within European Information Society.

The European Union - Moldova Action Plan provides [6]:

“– Further implement the national policy and strategy for the Information Society and provide sufficient funds for its implementation.

- Promote the widespread use of the new technologies by business and administration, in particular in the health and the education sectors (e-commerce, e-government, e-health, e-learning), via the provision of advanced infrastructures, the development of content and the introduction of pilot projects.
- Improve the use of Internet and online services by the citizens via public computer training programmes.”

### **E-GOVERNANCE**

E-governance is defined as the use of information and communication technologies as a tool to achieve better governance, by enabling better policy outcomes, higher quality services, greater engagement of citizens, and other locally identified results.

There are three areas commonly believed to be addressed by e-government: *service provision, electronic democracy, and economic development*.

The first area - *Service provision* - refers to continuous access to public services. *E-democracy* refers to the active participation and the knowledge people have about the government (e-mail/web appointments or correspondence with officials, electronic voting, discussion forums etc.). In terms of e-government role in *economic development*, many states regard access to information and use of technology as a vital tool for its sustainable support.

The key actors involved in this process – the government, the citizen, and the businesses – interact in several ways, and mainly: Government to Citizens, Government to Businesses, Government to its Employees, and Government to other Agencies.

Moldova e-Readiness assessment Report [5] contains the following general conclusions about the current state of e-governance:

1. Few e-governance applications have been so far implemented at the local and central levels. The existing applications have been developed independently of each other, without taking advantage of inter-platform standardization and communication. At integration stage, many of these applications will have to be rewritten, which will postpone transition to operational stage.

2. Public administration sites are insufficiently promoted through search engines or through headings of all official documents issued by the respective institution. These sites do not pay attention to such problems as confidentiality of information and copyright. They are hardly interactive, do not care for accessibility, are built with frames and flash, which makes navigation a difficult process, etc.
3. Public administration's sites are not audited at all. No analysis is done to answer such questions as who are the visitors, what is the most demanding item on the site, where are the access problems, etc. Answers to these questions would be an excellent basis for building more efficient applications.
4. At the local level, many political leaders and public officers lack ICT education, there is a significant deficit of IT system management.
5. IT departments are insufficiently staffed due to scarce salary funding from the budget.
6. Public officers have little possibilities for training in new technologies. There is no subscription to foreign magazines, no conference is held, no exchange of experience is organized.

The National Strategy on Building of Information Society in Moldova sets the stage for solving many of the problems described above by making e-Governance a priority component in Moldova's efforts for developing and Information Society that functions according to recognized European standards.

Consolidate democracy and state institutions by actively involving of citizens in political life, by facilitating non-discriminatory access to public information and improving the quality of public services.

The Strategy establishes inter-alia the following Specific Objectives:

- to ensure transparency of public administration activities and involvement of citizens in political life with the help of ICT;
- to ensure non-discriminatory access to public information and observance of confidentiality of personal data;
- to offer public services electronically to citizens and businesses;
- to reform public administration in order to make it consistent with the requirements of e-governance;
- to create informatics systems and applications necessary to maintain political, social and economic reform in the country;
- to develop information infrastructure meant for implementation of e-governance;
- to raise the level of ICT training among the public employees;

- to develop a legislative framework for implementation of e-democracy;
- to use on-line consulting facility in order to make some more efficient political decisions;
- to establish a strong partnership between the civil society and public authorities for building information society.

**Areas of Intervention established in the National Strategy:**

**Legislative and procedural framework, Technological framework, including:** to standardize the format of messages used for communication with the access portal to the e-governance services; to implement the protocol for transmission of documents to the access portal to e-governance services; to elaborate, adopt and recommend for use unified guides for uniformization of Web access method, **Institutional framework, including:** to organize e-governance services in public administration agencies; to organize training centres for e-governance users;

The priorities of the Action Plan for 2005–2007 include: growing transparency of public administration's activities and involvement of citizens in political life by use of ICT; elaboration of standards for e-governance applications, elaboration of necessary procedures for implementation of these standards; detailed studies at the level of public institutions in order to determine the degree of development of e-governance applications and perspectives of their development on a standardized national basis; non-discriminatory access to public information ensured for all users, including to disabled ones, training of personnel of public institutions in use of e-governance applications; implementation of basic government-to-citizen services; elaboration of procedures regarding implementation of e-democracy.

*Generally the strategy places the **citizen** in the centre of all the efforts oriented towards modernizing the public administration into an efficient and transparent system*

In 2004 the Government of Moldova has finalized and approved the first EGPRSP – the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy. The EGPRS is the first attempt to approach poverty reduction from a multi-sectoral perspective, and could become a good medium-term strategic framework. The EGPRS recognizes that an efficient telecommunication and information technologies sector could have a substantial impact on the pace and quality of economic growth and the population's living standards. ICT is viewed as one of the most dynamic economic activities in Moldova, which can play a significant role in sustainable development. The inefficient development and operation of telecommunication and information technologies in Moldova is one

of the factors constraining growth of business activity and undermining the development of foreign trade and investment attraction. EGPRS stipulates to create the preconditions for the establishment of the information society and to develop international cooperation in the field of telecommunications and information technologies.

The recently adopted European Union - Moldova Action Plan stipulates: ***Accelerate progress in the development of Information Society services and in the integration of Moldova into the ICT research programme***, further implement the national policy and strategy for the Information Society and provide sufficient funds for its implementation; Promote the widespread use of the new technologies by business and administration, in particular in the health and the education sectors (e-commerce, e-government, e-health, e-learning), via the provision of advanced infrastructures, the development of content and the introduction of pilot projects.

### **Next steps Objective of the e-Governance Project:**

In line with the above mentioned 2 national strategic documents, aiming to support Moldova in the start-up of the implementation of the e-governance, the e-Governance project is **assisting the Government in the implementation of the e-Governance component of the National Strategy on Building the Information Society**. When implemented, it should make a long-term contribution to strengthening and expanding e-governance-based democratic practices, consolidating democracy and institutions of a jural state by active involvement of citizens in political life, by facilitating non-discriminatory access to public information and improving the quality of public services

The project will also facilitate meeting by Moldova the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with special focus on Target 12 which includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally, and Target 18 which reads “In cooperation with private sector to make available the benefits of new Information and Communications Technologies.”

The main objective of the new project derives from *the national strategy priority* to implement e-governance in the Moldova: **Supporting the Government of Moldova in promoting the use of ICT to exercise its functions in a transparent and efficient way.**

The priorities of the Action Plan of the National Strategy for 2005–2007 include: growing transparency of public administration’s activities and involvement of citizens in political life by use of ICT; elaboration of standards for e-governance applications, elaboration of necessary procedures for implementation of these standards; detailed studies at the level of public institutions in order to determine the degree of development of e-governance applications and perspectives of their development on a standardized national basis; non-discriminatory access to public information ensured for all users, including to disabled ones, training of personnel of public institutions in use of

e-governance applications; implementation of basic government-to-citizen services; elaboration of procedures regarding implementation of e-democracy.

In order to support the Government in advancing the ICT usage in governments processes and services the project will support key activities into 3 main directions: assessment, training, and e-services.

### **1. ASSESSMENT**

An assessment of selective agencies will be conducted comprising detailed and comprehensive data on the existing ICT infrastructure and capacities. based on which, an e-Governance Concept will be produced to outline the steps needed to improve by means of ICT the Government efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness to the citizens. The assessment will then serve as a basis for the Department of IT to foster creative solutions based on existing infrastructures. The project will identify common and regional recommendations/key areas for advancement of ICT usage in government processes and build the capacities of the specialized institutions in this area.

### **2. TRAINING**

The project team in cooperation with the main partners the Department of Information Technologies and the Academy of Public Administration will develop a Framework for training the public servants in efficient use of ICT in their work **including** a certification mechanism (ECDL-type). Currently the Academy of Public Administration is the institution, which serves as a mandatory training facility for public servants. The project will use local and international expertise (study visits to Estonia, round-tables, workshops, missions etc.) in assessing the current situation at the Academy and support the creation of a new training module, a new publication (that will be revised together with the partners). The Government committed to improve the existing infrastructure and equipment at the Academy. Other partners will be involved in this activity including the Academy of Sciences, private sector and NGOs. A regulatory mechanism will be sought that will allow the enforcement of new requirements for public servants (e.g. adjusting the Law on the public servants). The training Framework (module) will mostly aim at increasing the civil servants understanding of ICT as a means to help serve the citizens better. The idea of a Government that is service (citizen) - oriented would be the central idea of this activity.



### 3. E-SERVICES

This type of activity aims at creating a framework for building the e-governance portal, including the following actions:

- a) establishing a regulatory mechanism for the implementation of the on-line services – a user's guide;
- b) setting a standard for the governmental web-sites and the data storage and communications protocol;
- c) establishing the e-Governance portal and launching a pilot service for the citizens.

It is important to study what are the most frequent services which citizens access (notary, tax payment, benefit applications, driving licenses, etc.) and come up with ways to make citizen's access much easier. Also, given the ICT penetration, this portal and resultant services should be a hybrid technology solution. That is, not only accessible by Internet, the information on the web-based portal should be accessible through such medium as via telephone (like tape messages of various different services and explanation), fax, SMS, and even in printed format.

### PROJECT BRIEF

The project, financed by the Government of Japan, will build on the past experience of the previous activities, mainly Monitoring & Evaluation and ICT awareness. The project team will seek new sources of financing in order to fulfil the expected tasks. The team will provide advice and soft assistance to the Ministry of Information Development in Monitoring and Evaluation of the e-Strategy implementation. The project will also help in raising the awareness of ICT benefits among the general population. The duration of the Project 12 months.

**Expected impact:** Improved governance, citizen participation in decision-making, and access to information with a Government functioning in a transparent and efficient way.

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