

E-GOVERNMENT IN BULGARIA: STAGE OF INTRODUCTION, PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

E-GOBIERNO EN BULGARIA: FASE DE INTRODUCCIÓN, PROBLEMAS Y PERSPECTIVAS

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Abstract:

This paper aims to present in the most systematic way the main aspects of the process of introduction and implementation of e-government in the Republic of Bulgaria. The basic strategic and normative documents, the timeframe and the financial instruments are outlined. The challenges and problems, as well as the more important reasons for the unsatisfactory level of implementation, have been noted.

Keywords: e-Government, stages, problems, perspectives

Resumen:

Este trabajo presenta de manera sistemática los principales aspectos del proceso de introducción e implementación del e-gobierno en la República de Bulgaria. Se citan los documentos normativos y estratégicos, subrayándose los plazos previstos y los instrumentos financieros. Además, se presta especial atención a los retos y problemas surgidos, así como a las razones que han provocado un grado de implementación que resulta insatisfactorio.

Palabras clave: e-gobierno; fases, problemas, perspectivas

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic governance (e-government) in Bulgaria has often been cited as one of the main priorities of several governments over the last fifteen years. Its implementation is a reflection of the vision of democratic leadership of processes and phenomena in society and the application of specific principles of law in the state. The actions of the responsible institutions in this direction need a persuasiveness in their intention to use information technology to improve the interaction between public authorities and civil society. Improving the quality of public services and the efficiency of government. To these expectations can be added the role of individual rights in public life - the right to seek, receive and disseminate information and ideas, protection of personal data and the integrity of correspondence, integration of disadvantaged people.

2. STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AND NORMATIVE BASIS

2.1. Strategic documents

At the end of the 1990s, the first concrete initiatives in Bulgaria in the field of information technologies appeared. By Decree № 40 of 1998 the Council of Ministers a Coordination Council on Information Society Issues (CCISI) has been established, its main function was to "develop and propose for adoption by the Council of Ministers the Strategy and the National Program for the Development of the Information Society in the Republic of Bulgaria" (old.europe.bg/upload/docs/Strategy_InformationSociety). The strategy became a fact in 1999 (Спасов, 2014). A report of CCISI reviews a number of initiatives related to the establishment of basic structures and the development of basic documents.

The "Strategy for Modernization of the State Administration - from Accession to Integration" has been approved by the Council of Ministers Decision No 465 of 2002. A Coordination Center for Information, Communication and Management Technologies (CCICULT) has been established with the support of the Development Program (UNDP) in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding, signed on

06.02.2002 with the Council of Ministers. In the same year a "Strategy for e-Government" has been voted by the Council of Ministers, Decision №666 of 2002. Following is the elaboration of the "Plan for Implementation of the Strategy for e-Government by 2005", adopted by the Council of Ministers, Decision No 10, item 37 of the Council of Ministers of March 11, 2004, as well as a "One-Stop Shop Model", voted by Decision No 878 of the Council of Ministers of 2002. The Council of Ministers Decree No 146 of 2003 established the Council for the Modernization of the State Administration. It includes an "Administrative Service and e-Government" Task Force to coordinate the implementation of the e-Government Strategy. On 24.09.2004 the Council of Ministers Decree № 761 approved the "Vision for a Unified National Database for Territory, Population and Resources - the Basis of Electronic Governance in Bulgaria". In 2008 a National Program for the accelerated development of the information society 2008-2010 became already a fact. A few years later with the Decision № 958 of the Council of Ministers of 29.12.2010 a new General Strategy for Electronic Governance in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011 - 2015 was adopted. According to its authors, it will serve as a basis, on which sectorial policies will be developed - strategies, objectives and activities at ministerial and agency level and it will be valid until the end of 2015. In 2012 with Protocol № 43 of the Council of Ministers of 14.11.2012 a National Program Digital Bulgaria 2011-2015 has been approved (Спасов, 2014). The next strategy has been voted by the Council of Ministers Decision No 163 of March 21, 2014. The Strategy for the Development of e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014-2020) has been prepared as a part of Bulgaria's commitments under the preconditions for European Union funds for the programming period 2014-2020. Its main objective is to outline the framework for all current and new e-Government activities. Approximately at the same time, a Roadmap was published, which includes the measures and activities to implement the strategic goals, set out in the Strategy for the Development of e-Governance in the Republic of Bulgaria for 2014-2020, the responsible institutions and the necessary financial resources. The Strategy for e-Government in Bulgaria 2002-2005 sets the beginning of the processes of creating electronic services for the citizens and the business, as well as the establishment of an administrative information and communication infrastructure, but its objectives have not been achieved. The

strategy has not been updated until the adoption of the Common Strategy for e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011-2015 in December 2010 and no "lessons learned" analysis has been done. Its implementation envisages the implementation of 20 administrative services executed electronically (12 for the citizens and 8 for the business), but for more than one third of them are not envisaged to reach the last stage of realization "Transaction".

2.2. Normative basis

Regarding the normative base there is considerable activity of the respective institutions. In addition to the existing ones, a number of laws and regulations have been adopted concerning e-government in Bulgaria. These are as: The Administrative Procedures Code (APC); The Electronic Document and Electronic Signature Act (EDESA); The Personal Data Protection Act. The main applicable by-laws currently in force are:

- Decree No 153 of 05.07.2004 on the designation of the bodies under Art. 41, of EDESA;
- Ordinance on the activity of certification service providers;
- Ordinance on the Requirements for Enhanced Electronic Signature Algorithms;
- Ordinance on the procedure for registration of the certification service providers;
- Internal rules on the order and the form for execution and storage of electronic documents by the bodies specified in Decree No 153 of 05.07.2004 under Art. 41, of EDESA
- Instruction for building and functioning of the Register of Information Objects;
- Instruction for the establishment and operation of the Electronic Services Register

One of the important conditions for transition to e-government in the Bulgarian administration is The electronic manage Act adopted in 2007.

On 24 February 2010, the Access to Spatial Data Act was adopted, the purpose of which is to bring the Bulgarian legislation in line with the requirements of the EU INSPIRE Directive and the creation of infrastructure for spatial information (geodata

and geoinformation) in Bulgaria and respectively in the European Union, facilitating the cross-border use of spatial data. (Михалева, 2008).

3. STAGE OF INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the e-government development policy in Bulgaria primarily involves the different stages of e-government development.

3.1. Preparatory phase (2002 - early 2003)

This initial stage of development is related to the establishment of a legal framework for the implementation of e-Government and the adoption of an e-Government Strategy. The strategic goals for implementing the e-government model are based on the contribution e-government will have for the overall social, economic and political development of the country. The main tasks related to the implementation of this model are: electronic delivery of quality, cost-effective and easily accessible administrative services to citizens and businesses; Expanding the technological capabilities of citizens and business to participate in government; Creating an organizational, communication and information environment for the efficient functioning of the state administration in accordance with the principles, norms and best practices of the European Union.

3.2. Stage of initial development or experimental stage (2003 - mid 2005)

The e-government policy at this stage focuses on two main directions - development and implementation of separate technical and organizational decisions in some units of the state administration (ministries, state agencies, regional administrations, municipalities) and implementation of some major projects at central level.

During this period the main efforts and tasks were focused on the introduction of "Indicative e-Government services to citizens and businesses," defined by the European Commission as well as the introduction of electronic documents and electronic signature in administration.

3.3. A veritable stage of purposeful and dynamic development (2005-2008)

The last stage of development of the Bulgarian e-government is characterized by the restructuring of business processes in the administration and the introduction of electronic services, including cross-border services within the single European market. The priorities are related to several main directions. Emphasis is placed on creating conditions for the development of cross-border services for citizens and business, as a pan-European market and the Unified Information and Telecommunication Environment for e-Governance.

Another focus is the launch in 2007 of the Integrated e-Government System (ESIP), a new portal providing access to all electronic services offered by the central administration from one point. (Лозанова-Белчева, 2009).

4. PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Successful implementation of e-Government projects requires timely preparation of documents for participation in public procurement and compliance with deadlines for conducting them. Due to retardation of public procurement procedures, contracting for eight of the nine activities of the project for the development of electronic administrative service delivery was made with a delay of one year and five months, compared to the deadlines set in the implementation plan, which has significantly delayed the implementation of the project. (SMART Association, 2011).

Another major problem in the implementation of e-Government is the lack of interoperability, unified standards and rules for dealing with electronic documents (Gankova-Ivanova, 2012).

Yes, this problem still exists and creates inconveniences despite that in 2006 the government adopted a National Framework for Interoperability of Information Systems in the Executive. It also includes the creation of a Register of Interoperability Standards, a Register of Information Objects and a Registry of Electronic Services.

An instruction has been prepared for the certification procedures of the departmental information systems according to the European standards (Михалева, 2008).

For a period of three years (01.2010 – 06.2012), in a detailed report, the Court of Auditors points to a number of significant weaknesses in the introduction of e-government in Bulgaria.

The remarks and recommendations are in three main directions:

1. The strategic goals of e-Government are tied to current priorities and current trends, and additional measures are needed to adequately protect personal data

a. Potential for reforming public governance with active citizen participation

- Problem implementation of the e-government strategy since 2002

- The new e-Government strategy is synchronized with the main priorities and trends in Europe but not with regard to the protection of personal data in electronic format.

b. The benchmarks do not allow the measurement of the effects of e-government developments

c. There is no adequate mechanism to implement the e-Government strategy

- No intermediate goals with deadlines and indicators defined

2. Organization and resource provision of e-government at national level

a. An adequate institutional framework for management and control has not been established and there is no effective coordination of the e-governance activities

b. The activities of the National Roadmap for e-Government are not financially guaranteed. Adequate organization has not been set up to establish the budgetary framework for financing the activities of the National Roadmap for e-Government.

c. The administrative capacity for coordination and monitoring of e-government development activities is under construction and insufficient.

- There are no analyzes of the administrative capacity, including the necessary size in terms of the functions performed.

- The qualitative training of the state administration employees is a key instrument for ensuring the necessary prerequisites for the effective implementation of the strategic priorities of the Republic of Bulgaria.

- Independent competence is a guarantee against subjectivity in project management and public procurement.

3. Implementation of e-government building activities at national level.

a. The projects and activities implemented by the Ministry of Transport Information Technology and Communications (MTITC) are suitable for the introduction of e-government in the Republic of Bulgaria.

- Problems with key elements for the technology and information model of e-Government.

b. The process of selecting contractors in the field of electronic management is not managed successfully.

- Failure to observe the terms of the tendering procedures and the conclusion of contracts set out in the project implementation plan and creates risks for the implementation of the projects.

- No conditions have been created to cover an optimally wide range of suitable candidates in public procurement.

- Evaluation criteria do not guarantee quality performance of the activity at a reasonable price.

- There is no evidence supporting the link between the forecast values of public procurement and their actual market price.

c. Reporting to the progress of e-Government

- There is no system for monitoring the implemented projects and the e-government activity

- The Risk Strategy of the Ministry of Transport Information Technology and Communications (MTITC) has been adopted, but no activities have been carried out for the implementation of its Action Plan. (<http://obuch.info/doklad-0300000812-za-izvrshen-odit-na-razvitiето-na-elektronno.html>)

The analytical part of the Strategy for Development of the State Administration for the period 2014-2020 describes the main problems for the effective functioning of the state administration in Bulgaria. Some of them refer to:

- the administration has not achieved the necessary level of openness;

- open data initiative has not been introduced in government;

- lack of standardization and unification when implementing e-government in the institutions;

- the information systems of the institutions are incompatible;

- the existing fragmentation of the administration leads to duplicating and overlapping functions and impedes implementing sectoral and horizontal policies;

https://www.eufunds.bg/images/eu_funds/files/common/.pdf

The slowdown in the development of e-Government in Bulgaria is confirmed by the last three UN reports on e-government status research on a global scale. The comparative data show that according to the index of the e-government development in the last six years, Bulgaria from 43 place in 2008 has lagged with 30 positions at 73 place in 2014 (<https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Global-Survey>).

The process of introducing e-government in Bulgaria is lengthy and difficult, accompanied by many shortcomings and attempts to correct it later are expressed in a new strategic document.

The General e-Government Strategy 2011-2015 presents the vision for e-Government in the Republic of Bulgaria which includes:

- Achieving coordinated planning and realization of the projects at national and local level;
- Introduction of business models in the work of the administration;
- Achieving interoperability at national level;
- Orientation to results
- Building a "digital administration";
- Easy access to administrative services.

https://www.mtitc.government.bg/upload/docs/Obshta_Strategia_eGovernment_2011_2015.pdf

The Strategy (2011-2015) was repealed and the Council of Ministers adopted the next one - Strategy for Development of e-Governance 2014-2020. One of the changes for the 2014-2020 programming period is that two European programs, "Administrative Capacity" and "Technical Assistance", are grouped into one Operational Program "Good Governance" (OPGG). OPGG is a core instrument supporting the implementation of the e-government vision in the Republic of Bulgaria until 2020:

- efficient business models to be introduced in the administration – from routine activities to citizens and businesses oriented services;

- digital administration to be achieved – administration structured in line with modern management technologies and achievements in the area of information and communication technologies; OPGG is a core instrument supporting the implementation of the e-government vision in the Republic of Bulgaria until 2020:
- efficient business models to be introduced in the administration – from routine activities to citizens and businesses oriented services;
- digital administration to be achieved – administration structured in line with modern management technologies and achievements in the area of information and communication technologies;
- interoperability at national level to be achieved – from fragmented and closed solutions to integrated and technologically independent ones;
- a mechanism for coordinated planning and implementing all e-government initiatives to be introduced;
- administrative services to be delivered through the single e-government portal at any time from any place and via different devices.

https://www.eufunds.bg/images/eu_funds/files/common/pdf

The priorities of the National Reform Program "Europe 2020" in the field of e-government are:

- construction of a secure administrative electronic communications network for the state administration and e-government;
- implementation of the Roadmap for of the adopted Strategy for e-Governance of the Republic of Bulgaria (2011-2015);
- establishment of a unified system for management of the processes in the administration (central and municipal); Upgrading of software tools for e-government development.

In this respect, it is envisaged the phased construction of public terminals for information services. Integration of terminals with automated information systems (AIS) of administrations and their transition to real-life mode. With this, a "digital administration" will be built and a gradual transition from paper to electronic document exchange and electronic administrative services will be provided.

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/nrp2015_bulgaria_bg.pdf

5. CONCLUSION

The strategic e-Government documents, developed and adopted in Bulgaria, have the pretensions to follow the contemporaneous trends. But the lagging behind in the implementation of concrete activities in Bulgaria necessitates their periodic updating.

One of the main conditions for the successful implementation of the planned projects is the provision of financial resources. The e-government concept, however, has emerged as an example of irrational investment. This requires an improvement of the system for coordinating and controlling expenditure at national and regional level.

There are still no clear criteria for defining the impact of e-government on improving the quality of administrative services provided to citizens and business, limiting administrative costs, increasing national economic indicators, and curbing corruption.

There is a significant lag behind in the introduction of e-government in sectoral policies, such as health, justice, culture. Rapid and decisive action in the healthcare system can lead to greater transparency in the spending of funds on clinical paths and in the judicial system to facilitate the proceedings.

No solution to the problem of electronic voting has been found. Many Bulgarian citizens ask the question of what is due to the hesitant behavior of the authorities and puts into question their civil rights and the application of democratic values. A secure environment for protecting citizens' personal data has not yet been established.

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