59 E-GOVERNMENT IN POLAND AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF OTHER EU COUNTRIES

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E-government – the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations, combined with proper organizational change and skills development – has become an explicit component of public sector reform, as an instrument increasing efficiency, strengthen competitiveness and enhance modernization. E-government enhances the delivery of improved public services and supports active democratic engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present digital revolution and increasing competition in Europe and the whole world make electronic administration a more and more important issue both for both the state and the society. Virtualization of public administration is necessary, if only because of the membership in the European Union and obligations it imposes on particular member states. Another reason is related to the changes in the society. The society becomes better educated and hence – more aware of its rights. People begin to claim for improvement of the quality of public services and for the change of old bureaucratic structures. As public expenses continuously rise, citizens, who pay taxes, are more and more interested in their effective use.

The aim of this article is to present the e-government model as a special kind of virtual organization and to compare the processes of e-government implementation in selected European countries. In the conclusion, the authors of this article evaluate the advancement level of the e-government in Poland as compared to other European countries. Apart from that, the authors also indicate the main barriers to implementation of electronic public services in Poland.

2. THE NOTION OF E-GOVERNMENT AND STAGES OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 E-government definition

The European Commission defines the notion of e-government as "the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organizational changes and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic process and strengthen support to public policies"(eEurope…, 2005).

The European Commission defines e-government as more than just a new model of state administration. According to the definition, e-government means a profound reconstruction of business processes of administration, realized on the basis of information and communication technologies, where the aim is to reach the state of transparency and openness of the public sector, which is to be productive, efficient and above all – citizen-friendly. A citizen has a right to expect the state administration to be foreseeable and understandable. A system designed to fulfill these expectations should allow for being controlled by citizens themselves. Such control automatically results in more efficiency on the part of officials, whose work results in the old system were difficult to be evaluated. The essence of e-government is being enterprise-, organization- and citizen-oriented, since nowadays, they all have the right to expect from the state the same quality of services as they receive in the private sector.

E-government is also defined as providing online access to administrative services. According to this definition, it is a way in which public administration uses new technologies in order to provide citizens with services and information customized to their needs and in a much more practical, useful and user-friendly way. As a consequence, public information and services should be available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week (Haltof, Kulągowski, Kulisiewicz, Kuśnierek, Sobczak, 2002).

2.2 Stages of e-government implementation

The development and implementation of e-government involves consideration of its effects on the organisation of the public sector (Cordella, 2007) and on the nature of the services provided by the state including environmental, social, cultural, educational, and consumer issues, among others.

Implementation of e-government into a traditional public office is a multi-stage process (see Figure 1). The first stage – creating the front-office structures – should lead to providing citizens and entrepreneurs with a full access to services. The service area should include the level of "information" and "interaction" (the levels of providing services by e-government are further described in the point 3 of this study). This stage is currently dominant in the EU countries.

The second stage involves reconstruction of structures and inner processes of public offices, according to the needs of users. This should contribute to moving from the level of "interaction" services to the level of "transactions".
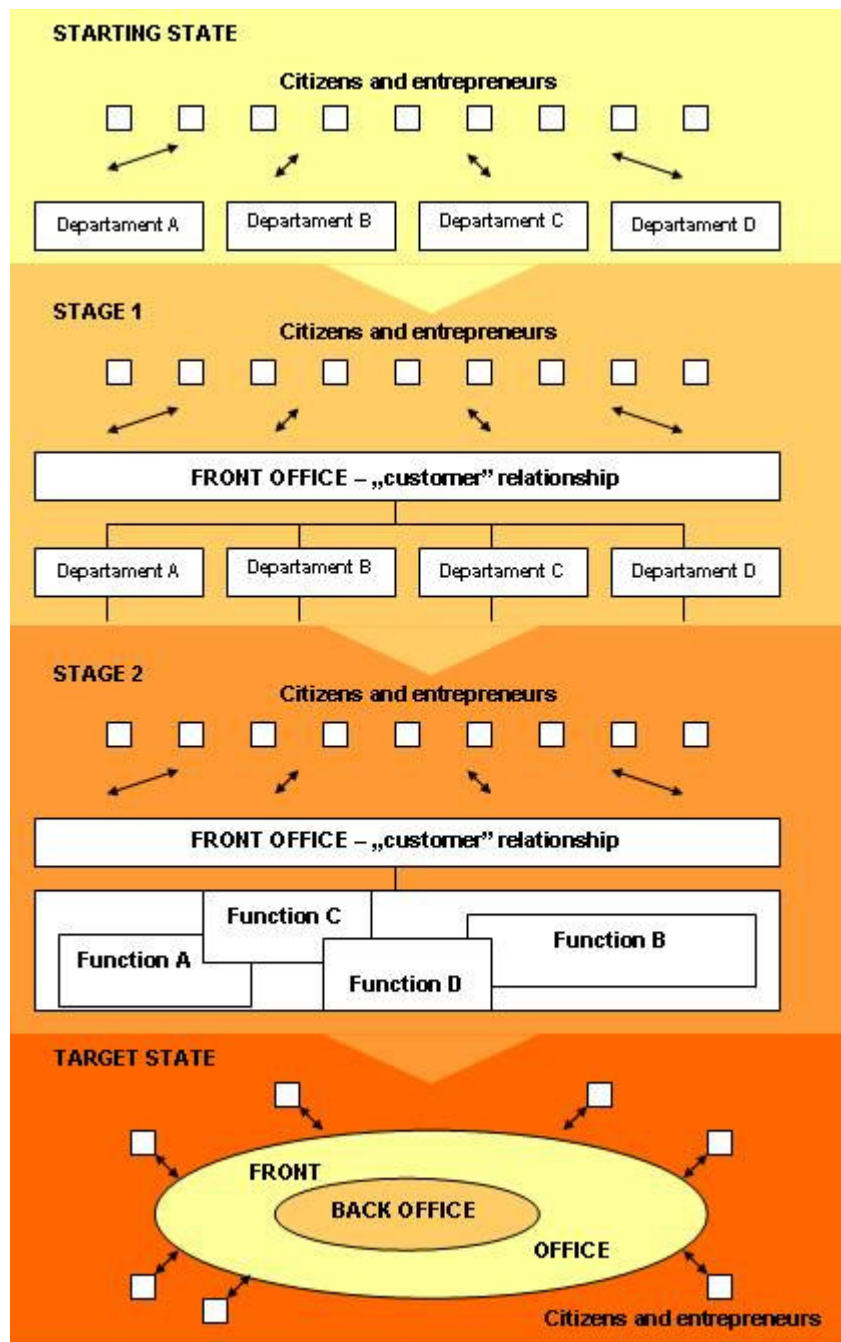
Figure 1 – Exemplary model of e-government implementation

[Authors' study based on J. Florek, Elektroniczny kontakt środowisk lokalnych z urzędem administracji państwowej i samorządowej, Instytut Łączności, Zakład Rozwoju Sieci i Zastosowań Informatyki w Telekomunikacji, Warszawa 2002]

Having integrated particular functional and problem areas (front- and back-office sub-systems), we arrive at the target state and can speak of a completed transition from a traditionally functioning office to e-government. The target model is an office providing full integration of the processes essential for citizens and entrepreneurs, full online customer service, customers' insight into the process and stages of handling their case, supervision and monitoring of the progress of cases by the office's employees and managers, as well as the use of elements of knowledge management (Florek, 2002).

3. PUBLIC SERVICES PROVIDED BY E-GOVERNMENT

Types of services that should be available on-line by the state administration, local governments and other public entities (e.g., schools, hospitals, libraries, etc.) have been classified by Capgemini Ernst&Young and approved by the European Commission (Analiza…, 2002; Online availability …, 2004).

The public services have been divided into two groups: those addressed to all citizens and those whose recipients are entrepreneurs. In the first group there are: (1) Income taxes (declaration, notification of assessment), (2) Job search (obtain job offerings as organised by official labour offices, no private market initiatives), (3) Social security benefits (obtain: unemployment benefit, child allowance, medical costs and student grants for higher education), (4) Personal documents (obtain: an international passport and a driver's licence for a personal vehicle not for professional use), (5) Car registration (register a new, used or imported car), (6) Application for building permission (obtain a building or renovation permission for a personal building (regular, initial request, i.e. not taking into consideration contesting and appeal)), (7) Declaration to the police (officially declare a theft of personal goods to a local police office), (8) Public libraries (consult the catalogue(s) of a public library to obtain specific information regarding a specific carrier), (9) Certificates (obtain a birth or marriage certificate), (10) Enrollment in higher education (enroll students in a university or another institution of higher education subsidised by an official administrative body in the country), (11) Announcement of moving (announcement of change of address of a private person moving within the country), (12) Health-related service (obtain an appointment at a hospital officially recognised by a national, regional or local authority) (The User Challenge…, 2008).

The public services for businesses are: (1) Social contribution (declare social contributions for employees affected by corporations), (2) Corporate tax (declare corporate tax for income from normal activities of a corporation), (3) VAT (declaration and/or notification for transactions regarding normal activities of a corporation), (4) Registration of a new company (most important registration procedure to start a new company), (5) Submission of data to the statistical office (at least one statistical questionnaire with data to the National Institute for Statistics of the country), (6) Custom declaration (declarations related to the normal activities of a corporation), (7) Environment-related permits (obtain at least one environment-related permit, delivered at the lowest administrative level, concerning the start of a corporate activity (not taking into consideration contesting and appeal)), (8) Public procurement (Tender for public procurement, subject to national public announcement) (The User Challenge…, 2008).

It is worth mentioning that when analyzing public services from the perspective of their implementation, it is assumed that they may be available on one of the four stages of development: Stage 1: the information level - refers to on-line availability of information necessary for starting a process. Stage 2: the one-way level – refers to the possibility of downloading forms from the official website of a public entity, so that after printing a given form, it is possible to start the process related to a given service. Stage 3: the two-way level– refers to the possibility of fulfilling the form on the official website of a public entity (a system of auto-identification necessary). Stage 4: fully electronic transaction system, providing all services online, including the decision-making and -giving. The paper form is unnecessary on any stage of the realization of a service (The User Challenge…, 2008).

4. E-GOVERNMENT IN POLAND COMPARING TO EU

4.1 The actual state of e-government in European Union

European Union constantly monitors e-government developments in member countries. Web-based survey on electronic public services delivered inside EU is held every six months. Member countries are expected to ensure interactivity of basic public services.

On 25th of April 2006, the European Commission adopted the i2010 e-government Action Plan. The action plan defines five priorities: (1) No citizen left behind, (2) Making efficiently and effectiveness a reality, (3) Implementing high-impact key services for citizens and businesses, (4) Putting key enablers in place, (5) Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making.
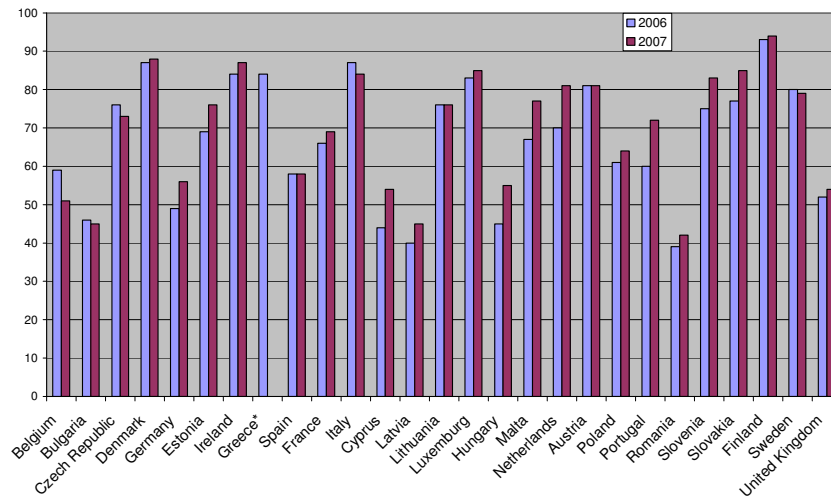
In this paper we discuss three core e-government indicators: "*online sophistication*" (based on a renewed 5 level model), "*fully-online availability*" (it continue to be measured on the existing 4 level model. This indicator will allow the evaluation on a historical continue basis), and "*user centricity*" (new indicator comprising four sub-indicators: data security, reducing administrative burden, multi-channel access, compliance with accessibility standards).

In UE online sophistication is on average 76%, at the level classified as "transactional". This shows advancement from 2006 where services were classified on average as "two-way interactive". Against the "fully-online availability" indicator Europe has advanced from 50% in 2006 to 58% in 2007. The variance between countries remains important. Austria is located at the top of the EU27+ league table with very impressive ratings at or near 100%. Malta, Slovenia and Estonia again stand out as three of the newer member states that have embraced e-government and achieved continued high levels of online service delivery – well above the average (The User Challenge…, 2008).

With an average of 19% the overall results of user centricity e-service delivery measurement stay modest. Three countries score more then 30% user centricity/ Austria, Norway and Bulgaria (The User Challenge…, 2008).
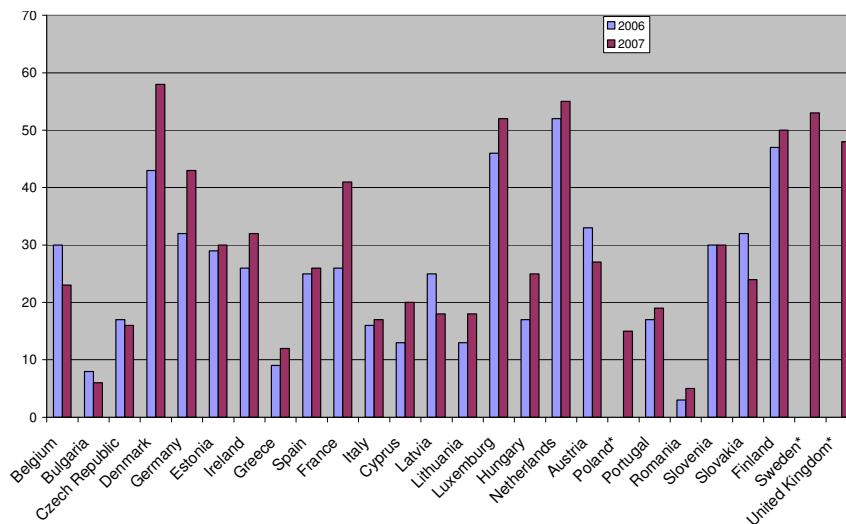
Citizens and businesses across Europe are discovering the benefits of e-government. A recent Eurostat survey (see figure 2 and figure 3), found that around half of Europe's businesses with internet access now use it to interact with the public authorities, with peaks of 88% and 94% in Denmark and Sweden.

As can be seen from statistics the major lag in EU concerns the usage of e-government by individuals rather than enterprises. Citizens, too, are increasingly visiting government offices on line, rather than queuing outside them. There are still major differences between level of e-government.

* Data for 2007 not available.

Figure 2 – E-government usage by enterprises[1]

[Authors' study based on Eurostat data]

* Data for 2007 not available.

Figure 3 – E-government usage by individuals - total[2]

[Authors' study based on Eurostat data]

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[1] Percentage of enterprises which use the Internet for interaction with public authorities.

[2] Percentage of individuals aged 16 to 74 using the Internet for interaction with public authorities.

Europe continues to make sound progress on the supply of online public services as a key enabler to deliver the i2010 e-government action plan and Lisbon goals. However much remains to do to serve citizens who are increasingly exposed to and versed in web services (The User Challenge…, 2008).

E-government is progressing at varying speeds in 10 countries that joined EU on 1st of May 2004, where it remains on average less sophisticated than in older Member States. All new members have now established e-government portals that serve as one-stop-shops for citizens and businesses. They have also made significant progress in e-enabling basic public services.

4.2. The development of e-government in Poland

The origins of the first e-government strategies in Poland go back to 2000 when was published a strategy document „Aims and Directions of the Information Society Development in Poland.", edited based on seven opinions prepared on order of State Committee for Scientific Research (Report on e-government…, 2005). One of the strategic objectives consists in using ICT to help establishing open, transparent, citizen-friendly structures of public administration and ensure greater efficiency of the public sector.

The continuation of above concept is the action plan ePoland - The Strategy on the Development of the Information Society in Poland for the years 2001-2006. The plan provides the detail of the actions to implement in order to reach the objectives of the Information Society strategy and of the eEurope+ Action Plan. E-government is one of the main elements of the action plan (ePolska…, 2001).

In Poland as well as in European Union (EU) there is a need to improve access, dissemination and exploitation of public sector information. The development of electronic public services in Poland does not look good when compared to EU Member States.

Poland's "*fully-available online*" indicator has risen from 20% in 2006 to 25% in 2007, which shows modest progress in online service delivery. Poland remains in the lower quartile. The assessment of *online sophistication* of Poland according to the new method shows an average of 53% which is below the EU27+ average. Services for businesses are performing slightly better with 62% against 47% for G2C services. None of the nine defined *pro-active* "stage 5" services attain the maximum score. Thus the user-centric pro-active and automated development of online public services stays in a very preliminary stage in Poland.

Concerning *user centricity*, Poland scores with 13% below the EU27+ average of 19%. Polish entrepreneurs as EU ones are able to run on-line much more errands than citizens. In 2006 in EU percentage of transactions for enterprises on average amounted to 67,8%, for citizens – 36,8%. Whereas in Poland 37,5% and 8,3%. An availability of public e-services is a little, and also a little is usage of already existing on-line services. Poland with 15% of citizens using information or forms from public authorities' websites considerably lags behind the EU average (34%).

Rather high is share of the enterprises that contact with public administration via Internet – in 2007 it reached 64%, what places Poland near to EU-25 average – 66% (Grodzka, 2007; Eurostat).

The development of polish e-government depends on accomplishment of many sectorial and national data communications projects such as: (EU Inclusive

e-Government…, 2008): e-PUAP - Electronic Platform for Public Services, Administration to Citizen - A2C, Administration to Business - A2B, Administration to Administration - A2A.

One of main barriers to supply and uptake of e-government is a lack of leaders at central, regional and local level (Goreczna, 2007). Small understanding of e-government issue by politicians is also one of the main obstacles. The other urgent problems related to e-public services development in Poland concerns: legal regulations not adjusted to e-government and knowledge-based economy, underdeveloped ICT infrastructure of households, insufficient funding for development of ICT infrastructure in local public administration, *back-office* infrastructure not prepared to deliver comprehensive eservices, insufficient understanding of e-government and scarce ICT qualifications of public servants.

Local government in Poland is not very much involved in building e-government. It is not interested very much in introducing electronic services. The latter are usually perceived as another task to be fulfilled, not another way of delivering public services that were hitherto accomplished traditionally. Local institutions are predominantly function-oriented, not goal-oriented; basically bureaucratic, that could not "go forward" without instructions "from above"; on the other hand, being resistant to new developments in public sector. Limited access to ICT infrastructure doesn't allow the majority of citizens to experience advantages of Internet therefore – as yet – they don't put pressure on public institutions to develop e-government. Though, citizens are more and more aware of their rights as customers, they expect to be served quickly, effectively and in transparent way.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An increasing number of countries and international organizations are realizing the benefits of e-government in the economic, social and administrative sector. The drive to implement e-government has resulted in the formulation of many e-government visions and strategies, driven by their own sets of political, economic and social factors and requirements.

This new vision of e-government encompasses the provision of better public administration, more efficient, transparent, open, and participative governance and the implementation of more democratic political processes. Government in the EU emerges as a tool for better government and, ultimately, for increasing public value. To respond to the challenges posed by these trends, e-government will need to be more knowledge-based, user-centric, distributed and networked.

The future of e-government is very uncertain and requires to be approached by depicting different scenario in which a wide range of contextual factors, such as social, cultural, institutional and economic should be described. Bearing in mind the equal opportunity principle, the common access to e-government services in Poland and other EU countries is conditioned by providing all citizens with Internet access, or at least by establishing a network of public Internet access.

Comparing to EU countries Poland is located in the minority of countries which do not have e-government very well developed and a lot of work must be done in that domain. In 2007-2010 for computerization of public administration is assigned more than 2,5 mld zlotych from the budget, UE funds, Schengen fund and

Norwegian Financial Mechanism (Computerization Plan, 2007). The planned investments shall permit to catch up the other countries in EU.

Actually Poland is in the process of developing a new concept which could rival the use of e-Signatures to access secure public and private on-line services.
The monitoring reports on the implementation of the ePoland Information Society strategy show insufficient progress of the development of electronic services in Poland.

By the end of 2010 twenty public tasks shall be done by means of electronic way. In order to extend current state of e-government, mainly limited to making information available and saving forms from websites, it is essential that to:
- accomplish planned data communications projects,
- amend the law on electronic signature, that enables its implementation and application in wider range,
- simplify and supplement a valid legislation concerning the computerization of administration,
- prepare the infrastructure of the offices,
- provide easy, common and cheaper access to broad-band Internet.

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