


**Influence of public policy actors on the
development of eGovernment in the Slovak
Republic and other European countries**

Political Preferences
2021, vol. 29: 77-97
journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/PP
Submitted: 29/11/2021
Accepted: 27/12/2021
DOI: 10.31261/polpre.2021.29.77-97




Michal Lukáč

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3067-7883>

Ján Ganobčík

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1942-8261>

Abstract:

Information and communication technologies have undergone substantial development in recent decades. These changes have been manifested not only in the economy, but also in people's everyday life, as modern technologies have fundamentally transformed working methods, leisure activities, and administrative processes. The strong influence of advanced trends has also left changes in public administration. The international concept of eGovernment has come to the fore, known in Slovakia due to the development of the Internet public services under the "informatization" of public administration. In Slovakia, as well as throughout the world, the primary objective of electrification is to increase the obligations of the state administration, reduce corruption, improve communication within the public administration itself, increase transparency, save finances, eliminate empty bureaucracy, and simplify the contact of citizens with the authorities. eGovernment allows individual states a range of options for delivering public services electronically, such as interactive collaboration or providing information online. In spite of all the advantages brought by information and communication technologies, the Slovak Republic still lags behind in the implementation of computerization in public administration. In the field of electronic public administration, individual processes are constantly influenced primarily by external changes (political), but also by internal changes (organizational). These are precisely the types of changes that can be described as limiting factors for the development of eGovernment. The objective of the present paper is to analyze how public policy actors in three studied countries influence the development and implementation of electronic public administration. The analysis will then culminate in the proposal of appropriate solutions to remove the identified barriers for the conditions of the Slovak Republic.

Keywords: administration, citizen, eGovernment, factors, service, public administration

Introduction

Electronic public administration is in a constant state of development. Consultation documents, reports, brochures, and various other documents are constantly being produced. While there are

different national interpretations of the term, it undoubtedly crosses borders with ease, likely making it one of the fastest spreading public sector reform ideas in history. In keeping with ongoing progress, terms that begin with the letter ‘e,’ such as *e-mail*, *e-banking*, *e-commerce*, etc. are typical features of the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. We can also include the term *eGovernment* in the bundle of modern, e-chic international terms. In linguistic terms, eGovernment is an abbreviation of “electronic government,” which would be translated as *elektronická vláda* or *elektronická verejná správa* into Slovak language. Today, however, this term is no longer a novelty for the Slovak public, which is why it is not usually translated. At the same time, there is a variety of ways to write the term *eGovernment*. In the current modern period, the form without the hyphen, written “eGovernment,” has become more and more entrenched. The development of eGovernment, to a considerable extent, depends on political factors, especially political actors. The passive or negative approach of these actors may significantly slow down the development in eGovernment. If there is no adequate support during the implementation of the necessary changes in the sector, stagnation comes and, subsequently, proportionally decreases the trust of the public in such kind of service. The present research paper aims to analyze how political actors in the three countries under examination – the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, and Switzerland – affect the development and implementation of the electronic public administration system. Afterward, based on the compiled analysis, we present possible solutions to eliminate the obstacles for the implementation of eGovernment in the Slovak Republic. As a partial method for achieving the aim, we have identified four research questions: To what extent do political factors affect the development of eGovernment, and should they be perceived as insurmountable issues? Is the success of eGovernment related to the political and institutional environment in a given country? Do political actors contribute to strategic eGovernment reforms positively or negatively? How can the Slovak Republic use the knowledge of neighboring countries to further develop its eGovernment capabilities?

eGovernment as a contemporary phenomenon

There are many definitions of eGovernment, as there is no homogeneous conception of the word in terms of its content. Different authors highlight different aspects and different scopes for the term. The broadest definition is given by Heeks who understands eGovernment as “*all uses of information and communication technologies in the public sector.*” (Heeks, 2006, p. 1). The

United Nations (UN), in turn, defines eGovernment as “*the continuing obligation of public administration to improve the relationship between citizens and the public sector by providing low-cost and efficient services, information and knowledge. It is the practical realization of the best that public administration can offer.*” (2008, p. 10). In addition to its membership in the UN, the Slovak Republic belongs to the European Union (EU) family, so it is appropriate to comment on the EU’s own perspective on eGovernment. This integrated conglomeration defines it as “*a way of improving public services, democratic processes and strengthening support for public policies through the use of information and communication technologies combined with organizational change and new skills.*” (eGov.sk, 2008). Among the definitions of eGovernment, it is also possible to find certain analogies, as Špaček argues: “*eGovernment can be defined as a tool for reducing public administration failure, as a factor enhancing the adaptability of a trusted administration, or generally as an internal factor of its efficiency that can be influenced to some extent by the public administration.*” (2012, p. 49). All of the above definitions capture the role of eGovernment in society with relatively good quality. In synergy with them, we can simplistically say that eGovernment should primarily contribute to the efficient functioning of public administration and the use of public services through information and communication technologies. At the same time, it should reduce the time spent in individual offices, save finances, eliminate bureaucracy and the duplication of paper tasks, and eliminate the costs of running public administration.

The key pillars of eGovernment are explicitly information and communication technologies, which enable the government and the citizen, the individual authorities with each other, the public and private sectors, the employees and leaders of public authorities, as well as the bureaucratic administration to interact with each other in a communicative manner. We can therefore state that eGovernment is primarily about communication. According to the communicating parties and stakeholders, there are six forms of eGovernment, namely:

- G2A (Government to Administration) – electronic communication between public administration and the administrative side, i.e. problem solving within an individual public administration institution. This area includes electronic mailroom, back office, and front office. In addition to the abbreviation G2A, G/inside or G/internal are also commonly used.

- G2G (Government to Government) – the issue of communication between two or more public administration institutions,
- G2E (Government to Employees) – communication between public administration and employees of institutions falling under public administration,
- G2B (Government to Business) – electronic communication between government and the commercial sector,
- B2G (Business to Government) – electronic communication between the commercial sector and public administration,
- G2C (Government to Citizens) – communication between public administration institutions and citizens,
- C2G (Citizens to Governments) – the issue of communication from citizens to the public authorities.

History of eGovernment

eGovernment has come a long way from its developmental stage, yet its history is relatively young in terms of time. The concept began to come to prominence in the 1990s when “*the Internet became a symbol of the new economy, based on a historic revival of the American economic environment.*” (2006, p. 15-19). This period was more about the theoretical definition of electronic government, i.e., alternatives were sought for what could be achieved with the help of eGovernment. The United States of America became a pioneer and a major player in the field of computerization of public administration when the National Performance Review was adopted in the country in 1993. According to this, public administration was to be reorganized, in particular through eGovernment services. The main agitator and promoter of the project was then-Vice President Al Gore. The gradual implementation of the approved concept was only possible thanks to the spread of the Internet, which became the springboard for the real use of eGovernment services. The community of electronic public administration services first created by the United States of America began to be joined by other countries, such as Australia and the Netherlands. At the end of the 1990s, European countries began to deal with the issue of eGovernment, and the European Union also responded to the term electronic government by coordinating and setting up legislation in this area among its Member States.

In 1999, the first unified document called was created, called *eEurope: An Information Society for All*. This European stimulus followed on the informatization programs of virtually all developed countries. Coping with such a European initiative was first and foremost a social and economic challenge. In conjunction with the Lisbon Strategy, the priority of eEurope was to achieve competitiveness, particularly with Japan and the USA. In addition to the eEurope document, eGovernment issues were incorporated into other strategic frameworks, e.g. eEurope Action Plan 2002, eEurope Strategy 2005, and i2010 Initiative – A European Information Society for Growth and Jobs. These projects have been financially supported as part of the Action Plan, within the legislative framework. The EU Commission developed an Action Plan for the period 2011-2015 that focused as a priority on improving policy instruments, in particular on the cooperation of electronic public administration services at the local, regional, national, and European level. The EU's subsequent strategy in the area of information and communications technologies was eEurope 2020, which consisted of seven pillars. The latest strategy is for the period 2021–2027. It simplifies and defines the five main objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy. These include a smarter, greener, more connected, and more social Europe. The last point of this strategy is the sustainable and integrated development of cities and municipalities. Although the European Union is trying to coordinate the development of eGovernment through the strategy documents it issues, there are significant differences among its Member States in the development and application of eGovernment in public administration practice. Slovakia is among those countries that lag significantly behind other EU countries in the use of electronic public services.

Slovak Republic

The introduction of eGovernment into public administration practice has become not only a complicated process for Slovakia, but also a “never-ending story” since its independence. The first signs were partial studies that dealt with the ability to apply individual eGovernment tools to the Slovak environment in both qualitative and quantitative terms (Kupka, 2008). It took another twenty years for our country to adopt a law on eGovernment during the period of its own independence. A draft was approved in May 2013 and came into force as Act No. 305/2013 Coll. on 1 November 2013. As a result, it is now possible to handle some official matters through the web and Internet applications, such as reporting a change of residence, paying and reporting

taxes, setting up a company, or canceling a trade license. These services are provided through the central public administration portal Slovensko.sk. The prerequisite is to log in with a new ID card with a chip, which have been issued by the authorities since December 2013. The new Slovak ID card, the so-called eID card, was inspired by successful concepts from European countries such as Switzerland, Germany, and Estonia. The latter one has one of the most developed electronic public administration systems in the world. Slovakia and Estonia were on a common starting line in the 1990s in the course of their independence, but tiny Estonia took a different path right away in the transition process. As early as 1998, it outlined the use of electronic communication in public administration and has persistently developed this idea to this day. On the other hand, the Slovak Republic not only lags very far behind Estonia, but also its long-time ally, the Czech Republic, in the area of eGovernment.

Contemporary Slovak society is characterized by the fact that significant changes in the field of public administration are taking place in a very short space of time. This radical transformation is primarily due to the implementation of eGovernment with the help of an increase in financial resources. Great expectations were attached to the initial application of electronic government and great potential was attributed to electronic services projects. Due to the implementation of eGovernment in the practice of public administration, over the last twenty years the Slovak Republic has adopted a number of legislative measures, increased the state budget, ratified a number of strategic documents, and adapted to European legislation. However, it turns out that projects that try to change many things at once suddenly fail, and thus “*gradual methods of introducing eGovernment may be less effective, but more efficient and less risky than big bang methods*” (2006, p. 240). The expected results of implementing eGovernment are not as exceptional for citizens as expected, and most of the planned innovations in public administration have brought only modest changes. For this and other reasons, the Slovak Republic needs to implement more new measures, to which every unit of public administration needs to flexibly respond and adapt. Thus, it can be said that the operation of Slovak public administration is determined both by external stimuli (political) and internal changes (organizational). All these circumstances clearly influence the development of eGovernment, and in the vast majority of cases also become the structural obstacles to its further development.

With the advent of the Internet, cheap computing devices, and increasing availability of broadband access in offices and homes in the late 1990s, governments around the world began to

discuss how to use ICT to enhance government. Electronic government characterizes the beginning of the digitization of governments as a new mindset of technology-inspired civil servants. The first strategic objectives were set by the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. They focused on general innovation, information and communication technologies (ICT), and particularly on promoting economic progress. The Strategic Memorandum paved the way for more detailed action plans for electronic government. Political factors are a relatively large barrier to the effective deployment of ICT and to harnessing the potential of these modern features to improve the efficiency of public administration. *“Institutional barriers in the form of reluctance on the part of political leaders or public actors can present significant obstacles to the implementation of eGovernment.”* (2010, p. 2). It is precisely political factors that have played a very significant role in the development of Slovak eGovernment. Therefore, it is the task of the political elites to legitimize the system and eliminate these perceived barriers. There must be sufficient support across the political spectrum to stand behind the project and not only promote its credibility, but also motivate citizens to change their behavior and switch to the new electronic model. In the early days of the development of electronic government, public policy actors clearly erred, when an area as important as eGovernment was given such an ill-conceived and incorrect institutional arrangement. Responsibility for the growth, accountability, and implementation of electronic public administration has also been shifted several times. Consequently, the government made several legislative changes in 2002, 2003, and 2004 to improve the conditions for the implementation of eGovernment in Slovakia. Despite these efforts by the government, Slovakia achieved a below average score in these years according to the EU assessment. On the basis of these results, a Government Council for Informatics was created. It was composed of representatives of the ministries, the private sector, academia, and civil society and was tasked with developing proposals for the concept of the state information system and its components, as well as proposals for inter-ministerial projects and proposing standards for the state information system. Standards for networks, accessibility, and data in information systems were led and developed by the Commission for the Standardization of Public Administration Information Systems, which fell under the Government Plenipotentiary. It was composed of representatives from the government, local regional governments, the private sector, and civil society. This commission focused on the security of communications using online services. In 2006, the Law on Public Administration Information Systems (*zákon o informačných systémoch verejnej správy*,

or ISVS) was also approved. Another important step forward in terms of political will came in 2013 when the eGovernment Act was passed, which was just the beginning in building a unified legal framework. And yet laws were still lacking that could have managed the development of the ISVS more effectively. This same year also saw the creation of a new structure of local government bodies, referred to as the ESO Reform, which stands for *efektívna, spoľahlivá a otvorená verejná správa* (“Efficient, Reliable, and Open Public Administration”). The substance of this reform was the integration of specialized local government bodies into a single state office now called the District Office, which has had a major impact on the positive development of eGovernment in Slovakia.

In this context, the computerization of society represents an important element in the creation of a knowledge-based society. As a part of its economic policy the government proclaims the necessity of ensuring systematic, coordinated, and interconnected action through the various departments that directly influence and shape it. These include, in particular, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finance (informatization of public administration and the capital markets), and the Ministry of Transport and Construction (information and communication infrastructure). It is precisely the lack of coordinated action at the government level in this area to date that forms one of the main reasons for the weak development of the digital economy in Slovakia. The Government identified some problems and ways of solving them in its Program Statement for 2010–2014. An effort by the government has also been declared in the area of promoting the competitiveness of the business environment. These efforts are primarily focused on reducing the administrative burden of doing business in the relationship between public administration and the private sector. According to the Government (2010, p. 11): *“By computerizing state and public administration, the Government will eliminate multiple repetitive requirements for the information, documents, and data of entrepreneurs. By accelerating the introduction of eGovernment services, it will streamline processes in all areas where public administration interacts with business entities. The Government of the Slovak Republic will thus create stimulating conditions for the widespread use of electronic communication between entrepreneurs and state administration, including an electronic verification system, with the aim of reducing the administrative burden on business.”* In the subsequent period, electronic public administration in the Slovak Republic underwent two more important changes, namely in 2016 and 2020, when central authorities of state

administration were established to coordinate the management of eGovernment. At the same time, the strategy for the computerization of public administration determines the method of financing eGovernment, which presumes a combination of state budget resources, EU structural funds, and other sources (municipal budgets, funds from EU Community programs, public-private partnerships, grants, etc.).

Chart 1. Total amount of eGovernment expenditures in the Slovak Republic (mil. EUR)



Source: Author's calculations based on the document *Revision of Expenditure (MFSR, 2020)*, 2021.

Total IT spending has been increasing over the long-term, with an average of EUR 703 million budgeted for 2020–2022. The largest item in the long-term consists of the operating costs financed by the state budget, which doubled between 2016 and 2019 from EUR 170 million to EUR 337 million. From 2019 onwards, expenditures are expected to increase by leaps and bounds due to the implementation of EU co-financed projects.

Switzerland

Electronic public administration in Switzerland is a tripartite organization. It includes the Federal Council, the Conference of Cantonal Governments, and the Union of Swiss Cities. The Federal Office of Information Technology serves as an advisory body. The latter one in turn consults with the ministries and the Federal Chancellor, particularly in cases of the specific issuance and approval of exemptions relating to compliance with technical data. Coordination is the

responsibility of the eGovernment Switzerland Programme Office. It serves as an administrative unit of the Steering Committee, and as a Federal IT Steering Unit (FITSU) is directly responsible for it. Furthermore, the Interdepartmental Information Society Committee (IISC) is involved in coordination. Its task is to coordinate the realization of the national level objectives of the information society in Switzerland as well as its implementation efforts. The Steering Committee is responsible for implementation. The Steering Committee manages electronic public administration from a strategic perspective and is responsible for the implementation of an electronic public administration strategy for the entire Confederation. The Committee has a total of nine members, three representatives each from the Confederation, the cantons, and the municipalities. The Committee is chaired by the Head of the Federal Ministry of Finance. Another committee involved in implementation is the planning committee. This committee manages the electronic administration from an operational perspective, plans and coordinates the implementation of the electronic public administration strategy, and is responsible for its implementation plan. The committee is composed of three members who are experts in electronic public administration, each from the Federal Administration, the cantons, and the municipal administration. The eGovernment Switzerland Programme Office serves as support to the Steering and Planning Committees. The office is responsible for the communication and monitoring of the organizations involved in electronic public administration in Switzerland. The Federal Administration unit acts as the main actor in the field of eGovernment support. The FITSU coordinates cooperation between the Confederation, the cantons, and the municipalities, and manages reports and analyses for information security ([Digital Inventories of Switzerland, 2020](#)).

The strategic objectives of the Swiss government regarding electronic public administration were very much in line with the strategy that was implemented in the EU, even though they are not members of the EU. The Swiss Federal Council, confronted with rapid technological and societal changes, began its transformation in 1997. The aim was to devise a strategic plan and set priorities for the emerging information society, as well as to reallocate responsibility for oversight and the coordination of ICT efforts at the federal level ([eGovernment Action Plan, 2010](#)).

In conjunction with these discussions, the Swiss Federal Council ordered a complete reorganization of federal ICT efforts, leading to the creation of a new Federal IT Steering Unit in

1999. It was responsible for the overall management of the ICT program and for the first federal strategy. This strategy included the preparation of an online platform for citizens and businesses, known as the Virtual Counter, which became operational in 2005. This also included an electronic voting project. This project was made available in the initial phase only to Swiss expatriates. FITSU launched other initiatives in 2002; the first was designed to increase interoperability and strengthen cooperation between the confederation, cantons, and communities ([eGovernment in CH, 2015](#)).

To this end, a non-profit association, the eCH Association, was established. It consisted of volunteers from all levels of government, industry, and academia. It defined technical and non-technical promulgation standards. It further focused on exemplary process models as well as data to facilitate the deployment of electronic public administration services. It created a common platform for information exchange among stakeholders, increased the visibility of successful public administration projects, and evaluated the impact of digital services ([Mettler, 2019](#)).

On 21 October 2008, the Swiss Federal Council passed an updated Identification (ID) Act and subsequently legislation was created that served as a precursor to the definitive implementation of the e-passport. Subsequently, the Federal Law on Temporary Employment was adopted by the Parliament. This law brought economic stabilization measures in the areas of the labor market, ICT, and purchasing. The main objective was to promote a reliable and functional electronic economic space. Facilitating the secure authentication of identities on the Internet during electronic transactions was relevant both for businesses and the public. In 2009, the Federal Department of Justice and Police introduced a new service to make it easier for citizens and businesses to order electronic, digital, and signed criminal records. The relevant digital services were implemented in the form of modules in cooperation with the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs ([eGovernment in CH, 2016](#)).

In November 2010, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) implemented ID at the national level as part of short-term stabilization measures. At a meeting of the Swiss eGovernment Steering Committee held in 2010, each member of the committee received a personal ID as proof of the first secure electronic authentication at the national level. The committee also implemented the program for public administration in the electronic environment and appointed the leading partners in these priority projects. Subsequently, in November 2011, the Swiss Federal Council approved a new framework agreement between the

confederations and the cantons in the field of electronic public administration. This plan aimed to promote targeted projects and a set of measures to strengthen cooperation and coordination at the federal level (eGovernment, 2021).

Subsequently, political actors created the Open Government Data Strategy, which was adopted on May 16, 2014. It determined the focus of the federal government's activities and was implemented in relevant departments and federal offices. The value of Swiss cooperation in the field of electronic public administration is also represented by the specific actors representing the highest positions in the country and their vision for how electronic public administration should evolve. The Swiss eGovernment is led by Federal Councilor Ueli Maurer as chair of the committee. According to Maurer (2021), administration has not escaped the trend in improving mobility and digitalization. Information should be accessible at any time, no matter where people are. Another important actor in electronic public administration is the Federal Chancellor. Responsibility for electronification will shift to digital public services from 2022, and will be a more advanced structure that is even better equipped to deal with the challenges of digitizing public services. Overall, as the digital transformation progresses, government communication is increasingly influenced by various forms of media, including social media, and adapts through these factors (Swiss Government Cooperation Values, 2021).

Czech Republic

The origins of the electronification of public administration in the Czech Republic date back to 1998, when the Council for State Information Policy was established. The Council was appointed as an advisory body to the government in the field of information institutions (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017). In 2000, a very important act took place in the form of the establishment of the *Office for Public Information Systems*. Its role was to replace the former *Office of State Information Systems*, which managed strategic planning in the field of information systems in public administration and their cooperation while respecting the state information policy. In 2000, the government approved Act 365/2000 Coll. on Public Information Systems (Act No. 365/2000 Coll.). The government then adopted the first version of the *Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Information Policy*. This plan defined the objectives for the years 2000 to 2002, in the three basic spheres of public administration (*Action Plan for the Implementation of State Information Policy by the End of 2012*, 2000).

Subsequently, in 2003, responsibility for eGovernment was transferred to the newly-established Ministry of Informatics. It held responsibility for the coordination and development of the electrification of public administration, telecommunications, and postal services, and the promotion of an information society. Then, in March 2004, the government adopted the *State Information and Communication Policy*, also called eCzech 2006. eCzech was a strategy aimed at the development of an information society. In 2007, the Ministry of Informatics was dissolved and in May the members of the *Government Council for the Information Society* were appointed. And yet the primary competencies were transferred to the Ministry of the Interior. The competency of this office covered areas of expertise for government decisions concerning eGovernment and information and communication technologies ([Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017](#)). Czech political actors subsequently adopted Act No. 300/2008 Coll. on Electronic Actions and permitted document conversions on 17 July. This legislation is also known as the Czech eGovernment Act. Subsequently, the Minister of the Interior and the Director of the Czech Post signed a contract for the implementation of data mailboxes, which has resulted in significant savings for state funds. The Ministry's goal was to implement these mailboxes by the third quarter of that same year. At that time, Act No. 300/2008 Coll. was coming into force, also known as the Czech eGovernment Act (Act No. 300/2008 Coll.).

Chart 2. Total amount of eGovernment expenditures in the Czech Republic (mil. EUR)



Source: Author's calculations based on the document *Costs for Information Technology (MPSV,2018)*, 2021.

In the Czech Republic, the share of spending on electronic public administration has been increasing steadily since 2014. The largest increase occurred in 2017, when spending tripled. In the subsequent period, spending grew by an average of EUR 73 million per year. In the current spectrum, the share of expenditures relative to the Slovak Republic is roughly 30% lower.

Another important factor in shaping Czech electronic public administration was the signing of the Basic Registers Act by Václav Klaus (then-President of the Czech Republic). This Act interconnects 4 basic registers and entered into force on 1 July 2010. In 2012, the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic launched a unified Public Administration Portal. And yet perhaps the biggest noticeable change for the country's population was the Ministry of Interior's *Co dělat když* ("What to do when") project, designed to assist people in using the newly-provided eGovernment services. The software provides information for processing various documents, navigating to the nearest government offices or police station, as well as how much the entire process will cost. The Government of the Czech Republic, or specifically the Ministry of the Interior, also decided to introduce the mascots eGON and Klaudia, who have already followed the example of other countries by assisting the citizens of the country in the implementation of various electronic services. Currently, the Strategic Framework for the Development of the Public Administration of the Czech Republic for the period 2014–2020 is in force in the Czech Republic. This strategic plan reflects the current action plan of the European Union and is also in line with the strategic documents of the Czech government (MoI, 2017).

Results

Electronic public administration has been identified as one of the key contributors to the development of the information society and governments worldwide. Most countries have seen rapid developments in this area, which have been pursued through integrated approaches to the planning and implementation of public sector reforms. However, the application of ICT in electronic public administration should not be considered an end in itself. Where there is the political will to implement eGovernment, individual countries can achieve better results. eGovernment is not merely the simple use of information technology to provide services to citizens, but a significant role is played to a large extent by the political environment in which eGovernment needs to operate. The overall success of electronic public administration depends on a deeper understanding of the increasingly complex political and institutional environment.

The introduction of electronic public administration is closely linked to the changing nature of the relationship between public administration and the general public, which is linked to developments in today’s rapidly evolving and interconnected society, where the role of technology has grown exponentially in recent decades. A shift in public administration relations has led to a new, less authoritarian era, more focused on service and information. This new, less authoritarian nature of the relationships between public administration and its clients is linked to previous efforts to reform public administration.

Table 1. Comparison of political factors in individual countries

Variables	<i>Slovakia</i>	Czech Republic	Switzerland
First mention of eGovernment	1998	1998	1997
First legislative changes	2002	2000	2005
Adoption of law on eGovernment	2013	2008	2008
Establishment of a ministry	2020	2003	1999
Number of competencies transferred	7	4	1
Number of important reforms	4	4	4

Source: Author’s calculations based on data analysis, 2021.

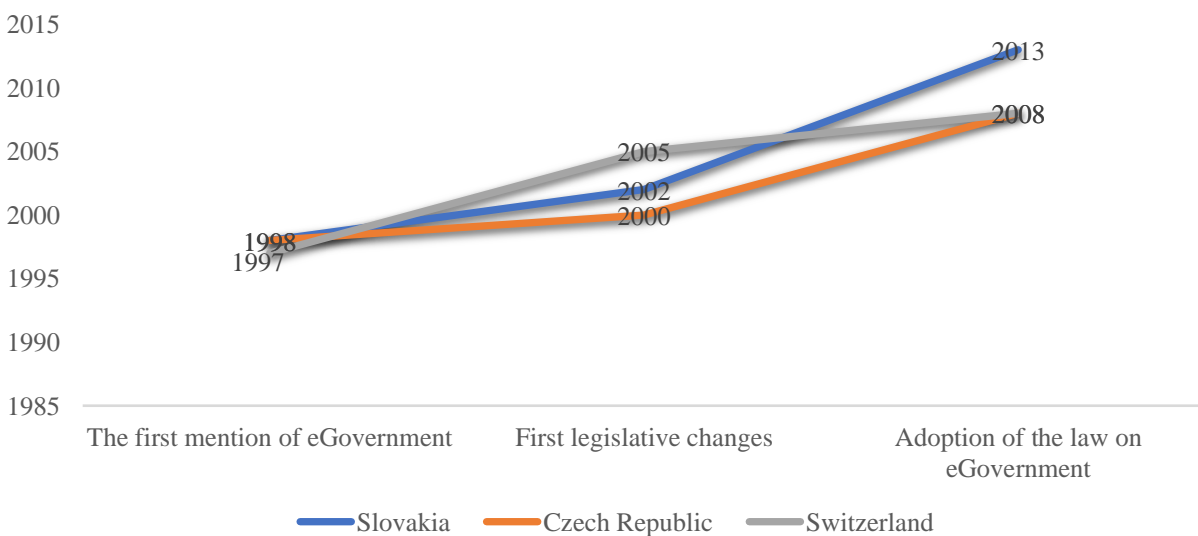
The first references to electronic public administration in Slovakia and the Czech Republic date back to 1998. As both countries formed a unified administrative territory for a long period of time, it is understandable that the contribution of modern technologies from neighboring European countries reached them at the same time. In Switzerland, on the other hand, the first confrontation with eGovernment came somewhat earlier. Even though Switzerland is not one of the member states of the European Union, the initial influences and implementation of the strategy relied heavily on the form that was implemented in the EU.

Each of the countries observed approached the implementation of electronic public administration from a different angle. The Czech Republic appointed the *Council for State Information Policy*, at the outset, to act as a decision-making body in the field of electronification. However, this office was replaced in 2000 by a more comprehensive body, the *Office for Public Information Systems*. Among the main priorities of this change were to take a firm grip on computerization and assume responsibility for strategic planning in the field of

information systems in public administration and their subsequent integration with the national information policy. In 2003, the Czech Republic (CZ) decided to take a drastic decision and shifted leadership of electronic public administration to yet another authority. However, in this case it was the newly-established Ministry of Informatics. This authority performed its function until 2007, when the Ministry was abolished and the management of eGovernment in the Czech Republic was transferred for the last time, specifically to the Ministry of the Interior. In Slovakia, the process of transferring competencies for eGovernment was a bit more complicated. Initially, as in the Czech Republic, the government reacted flexibly and entrusted the Slovak Statistical Office with the responsibility for electronic public administration. However, after a short period of time, the leadership of the electronic reform was again transferred, this time to the Ministry of Transport, Posts, and Telecommunications of the Slovak Republic. Subsequently the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, which had only a very limited capacity to deal with the issue, became the next representative body. For this reason, in 2003 the issue of eGovernment was again delegated to the Ministry of Transport, Posts, and Telecommunications of the Slovak Republic. However, even this step did not prove to be the right solution. In 2004, another change came; following the adoption of the document *Strategy for the Informatization of Society*, the post of Government Plenipotentiary for the Information Society was created and the competencies for electronic public administration were transferred to the organizational portfolio of this post. After a period of two years, specifically in 2006, the responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of Finance. A number of advisory bodies was also created to deal with informatization during its tenure. Until 2016, the responsibility for the competency of this office was stable. This year saw the creation of a new central state administration body. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatization was created to strengthen competencies in the area of management, coordination, and supervision of EU funds, as well as covering the overall informatization of society. The last transfer was recorded in Slovakia in July 2020, from which time eGovernment has been under the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. Of the countries surveyed, Switzerland is the best performer in this respect. Responsibility for managing electrification leadership was transferred only once in the initial years of implementing the changes, but as the country operates as a federal republic, responsibility for the overall leadership of eGovernment is delegated to a number of public authorities.

In terms of important reforms, strategic or otherwise, the countries are on par. In Slovakia, the most important reforms took place in 2006 (OPIS), two reforms in 2008 (SIVS and NKIVS), and the last important strategy was adopted the period 2019–2022. The Czech Republic adopted its first major strategy in 2006, namely *eCzech*. Subsequently, in 2010, the strategy *Digital Czech Republic* was launched, and later its update *Digital Czech Republic v. 2.0*. Another important strategy focused on the programming period 2014–2020 under the title *Strategic Framework for the Development of Public Administration of the Czech Republic*. The current strategic plan of the Czech Republic is influenced by the Digital Agenda of the European Union. It reflects its priorities and, in terms of content, focuses on implementing its goals and adapting it to the situation in that country (MoI, 2017). In Switzerland, it is difficult to define a clear framework for important reforms, as developments have taken place in different places at different times. Nevertheless, the national electronic public administration strategy was first launched in 2007, with further important updates applied in 2012, 2015, and 2019. Current goals for eGovernment in Switzerland include improving cooperation and coordination between the federal departments and adapting the architecture to implement the Tallinn Manual.

Chart 3. Comparison of political factors in individual countries



Source: Author’s calculations based on data analysis, 2021.

The Czech Republic was the first country that had to make certain legislative changes to move forward with the implementation of eGovernment. In 2000, it passed Act 365/2000 Coll.

on Public Information Systems. This law defined rights in the area of creation, management, transfer, use, and development of information systems. In Slovakia, the first amendment to this Act was implemented in 2002. This was the Act on Electronic Signatures and on Amendments and Addenda to Certain Acts. This Act primarily corrected the relationships arising in connection with the creation and use of electronic signature itself in the field of public administration information systems. In Switzerland, this consisted of a law that entered into force on 1 January 2005, defining the conditions under which certification service providers can be recognized on a voluntary basis and regulating their activities in the field of electronic certificates. It also sets out the requirements that an electronic signature must meet in order to achieve the same status as its handwritten alternative. In addition, it regulates the issue of liability on the part of certification service providers, supervisory authorities, and owners of signature keys. Within the countries observed, the Czech Republic and Switzerland are on par in terms of the adoption of the eGovernment Act. Both countries adopted an amendment to the Act in 2008 and have thus created better conditions to move forward more efficiently in implementing the individual pillars of electronic public administration. In this respect, Slovakia lags significantly behind. The Act on eGovernment was adopted in our country a full eight years later, in 2013.

In closing, we observed that a separate ministry was created in each country to manage the development of electronic public administration. In Switzerland, based on working group discussions, the Federal Council mandated participation in the reorganization of the military ICT effort, which led to the creation of a new Federal IT Steering Unit in 1999. The latter was responsible for the overall management of the ICT program and the first ICT funding resources. In the Czech Republic, a separate Ministry of Informatics was established in 2003. It was responsible for the coordination and development of the electronification of public administration, telecommunications, and postal services, and the promotion of the information society. The Slovak Republic again lags behind in this factor. Although the management of eGovernment has been transferred several times, the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic was only established in 2020. However, even in this case, it is not a separate ministry that would exclusively manage matters related to electronic public administration, but only a grouping of several units under the umbrella of this authority.

Conclusion

The factors that limit the possibilities of implementing ICT in public administration should not be seen as insurmountable obstacles, rather quite the opposite. Public policy actors, office managers, and public administration employees themselves should continuously search for and learn about the nature and origin of the barriers, which will not only make them easier to overcome, but will also help to pave the way for the success of eGovernment projects. However, this is not easy in many cases; it is enough to compare the implementation of Slovak electronic public administration with other European countries. The research paper aimed to analyze how political actors in the three countries under examination – the Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, and Switzerland – affect the development and implementation of the electronic public administration system. In the following section, we offer appropriate solutions to eliminate the obstacles identified with the help of research questions for the implementation of eGovernment in the Slovak Republic. Combined with the intensity of political and legal barriers, the Slovak Republic is facing a significant time lag in the implementation of eGovernment. Therefore, new challenges need to take concrete form as soon as possible, from making the Internet accessible to the widest possible layers of citizens, through portable capacity building and project management, to ensuring education and promotion among citizens and politicians. Building eGovernment cannot be an isolated, standalone process, but must follow trends and directions both in our country and throughout the world. The Slovak Republic can benefit from the experience of other neighboring countries such as Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland, which are similar to us in many factors. In particular, we can draw inspiration from Estonian electronic public administration, particularly with their establishment of a single authority to run the given area, as well as the establishment of a showroom. The latter serves as an information and support center for eGovernment. This institution provides citizens with consultation either in person or electronically and also acts as a coordinator between G2B, B2G, and G2C/C2G communication. In Czech electronic administration, the promotion of electronicization is coming to the fore particularly in the form of the mascots eGON and Klaudia, who follow the example of other countries and have already assisted citizens in the implementation of individual electronic services. The same applies in the area of digital technology integration, where the Czech Republic performs above the EU average, mainly due to its good results in the area of e-commerce. Factors enabling the successful implementation of the tools of electronic public

administration include a legal framework that is sufficiently open. The developed countries that achieve the highest scores are clear evidence that open legislative structures, and not overly defined technological details, are useful for the development of electronic public administration. Another important factor is political consensus. It is generally the case that, in the absence of strong opposition, tools of electronic public administration are implemented much more smoothly and are more widely used. The absence of partisan or political conflict is, therefore, an accelerating factor in the development of electronic public administration initiatives. User-friendliness is also an important aspect. If electronic eGovernment applications are easier to use than traditional forms of communication, their diffusion is significantly faster and wider. The lack of user-friendliness seems to be a hindering factor in the development of tools for electronic public administration. In terms of the underlying infrastructure, it is essential for the development of electronic public administration in Slovakia that the responsibility for leading electronicization is not constantly shifted to different government authorities. Following the example of Switzerland, we can implement a test environment when introducing new e-services, for example piloting to smaller municipalities and cities. We also need to compare experimental solutions with other countries that have had more success with implementation and develop national strategies aimed at achieving the best possible implementation and harmonization—all the more if this can provide a user-friendly environment, which is proving to be one of the important factors for the successful introduction of these services. Only in this way can the eGovernment become an innovative revolution in Slovak public administration.

References:

Act No. 300/2008 Coll. On electronic acts and authorized conversion of documents.

Act No. 365/2000 Coll. On public administration information systems and on amendments to certain other acts.

Council of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2000). *Akční plán realizace státní informační politiky do konce roku 2012*. [Action plan for the implementation of the state information policy until the end of 2012] Government of the Czech Republic. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpan040761~1.pdf>

Digital administration. (2021). *The value of Swiss eGovernment cooperation*.

<https://www.egovernment.ch/en/organisation/e-government-schweiz-kurz-erklart/the-utility-of-egovernment-switzerland/>

eGov.sk (2008). *Electronic public administration*. <http://info.egov.sk/node/4>

eGovernment (2021) *Implementing eID*. <https://www.egovernment.ch/en/umsetzung/schwerpunktplan/elektronische-identitaet>

- European Commission (2015). *eGovernment in Switzerland* (January 2015, Edition 9.0).
https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/2015-03/egov_in_switzerland_-_january_2015_-_v_9_0_final.pdf
- European Commission (2016). *eGovernment in Switzerland*. (February 2016, Edition 10.0).
https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/eGovernment%20in%20Switzerland%20-%20February%202016%20-%20Edition%2010_0%20-%20v3_00.pdf
- Heeks, R. (2006). *Implementing and Managing eGovernment: An International Text*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Jouzbarkand, M., Khodadadi, M., & Sameni Keyvani, F. (2011). Conceptual approach to e-government, targets and barriers facing it. In: *5th International Conference on Application of Information and Communication Technologies (AICT)* (pp. 1–5). IEEE. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/ICAICT.2011.6110903>
- Kupka, V. (2008) Alternative Ways of Election in the 21st Century. The Way Towards Direct Democracy? *Slovak Journal of Political Science*, 8(4), 111–138.
- Lidinský, V. (2008). *eGovernment bezpečně* [eGovernment the Safe Way]. Grada.
- Mettler, T. (2019). *The Road to Digital and Smart Government in Switzerland*. In A. Ladner, N. Soguel, Y. Emery, S. Weerts, & S. Nahrath (Eds.), *Swiss Public Administration: Making the State Work Successfully* (175–186). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ministry of the Interior. (2017). *Strategický rámec rozvoje* [Strategic framework for development]. *Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky*. <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/archiv-implementacni-planu.aspx>
- Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. (2017). *Historie minulých vlád*. [History of past governments.] Government of the Czech Republic. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/historie-minulych-vlad/statni-informacni-politika---cesta-k-informacni-spolecnosti---dokument-2089/>.
- Office of the Slovak Government. (2010). *Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky na obdobie rokov 2010 – 2014*. [Program Announcement of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Period 2010 - 2014.] Občianska zodpovednosť a spolupráca [Civic responsibility and cooperation]. <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/programove-vyhlasenie-vlady-sr-na-obdobie-rokov-2010-2014/>
- Špaček, D. (2012). *eGovernment: ciele, trendy a prístupy k jeho hodnocení* [eGovernment: objectives, trends, and approaches to evaluation]. C. H. Beck.
- Wavestone. (2020). *Digital public administration fact sheets 2020 Switzerland*.
https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Digital_Public_Admin_Factsheets_Switzerland_vFINAL.pdf