

e-Government in the New Member States: Mission Impossible?



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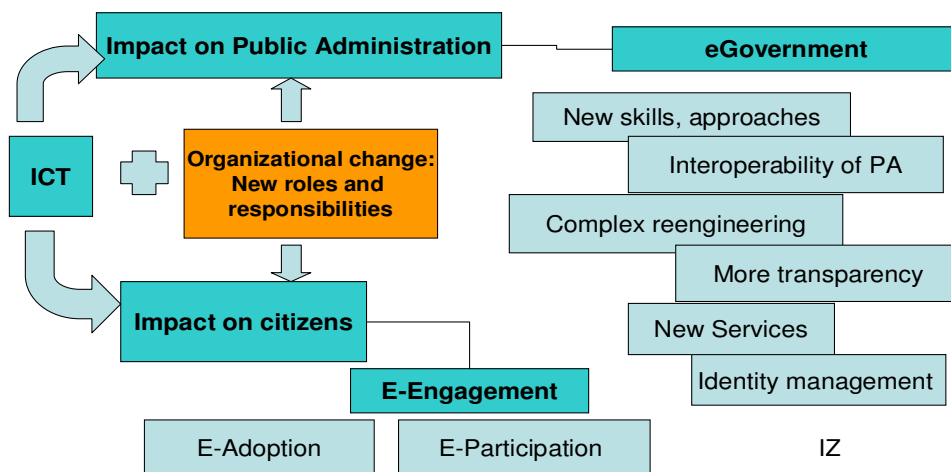
ABSTRACT

The Czech Republic has entered the European Union, which is seeking more effective functioning of public administrations and provision of better services for all citizens, both facilitated by ICT use. The development of e-Government goes hand-in-hand with the complex re-engineering of all processes and services in public administration, front and back-offices, implementation of the management of organizational change and is expected to influence the entire process of public governance.

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Reinforcing eDemocracy: organisational change

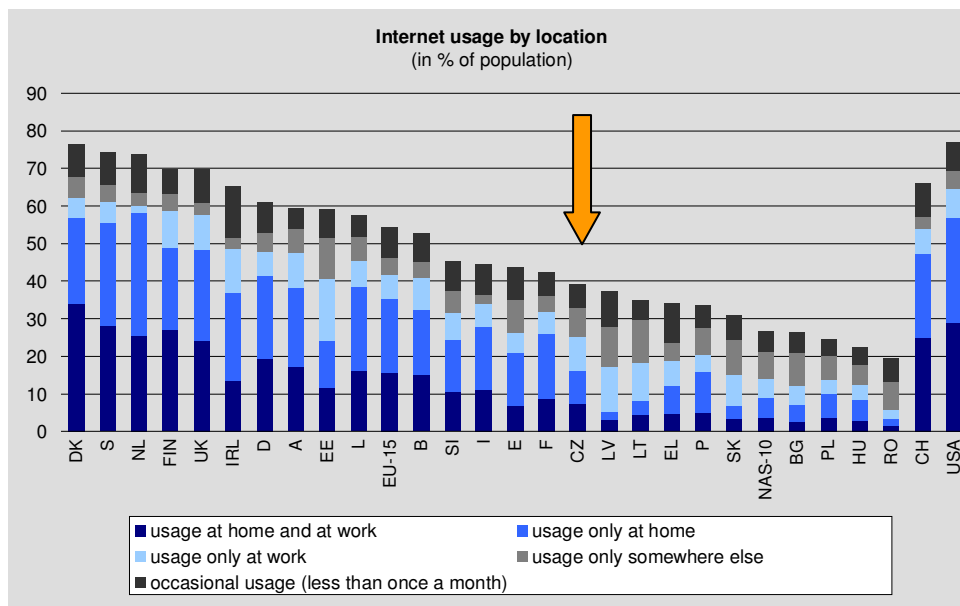


We have joined the Union in order to share experiences of building European information society, facing together threats in socio-economic aspects of globalization as conflicts, lost of personal contacts, but also challenges like bridging the Digital Divide, Accessibility for All etc.

We have joined e-Europe objectives in the crucial period, when Europe is working on serious and deep processes of reshaping traditional forms of democracy, influenced by ICT and principles of knowledge society. We could say that e-Government stands in the center of all e-PHENOMENAS of our days, because it influences the heart of European Democracies. The basic question here is, if New Member States (NMS) really have national visions well developed into Action Plans with legal, organizational and other operational frameworks for implementation at all levels.

Do we have the same priorities in our e-Government visions and strategies? As you remember, these basic ones are planned to be implemented in the foreseeable future:

- Interactive multi-platform services (2004)
- Interoperability pan-European services (2003)
- Public procurement (2005)
- Public internet access points (statistics)
- Culture and tourism services
- Broadband connections for all admins (2005)



Let's have a look at the level of internet usage by European citizens based on SIBIS project results. We still see a big difference between the levels of regular users among traditional and NMS (SIBIS 2002, GPS, SIBIS 2003, and GPS – NAS).

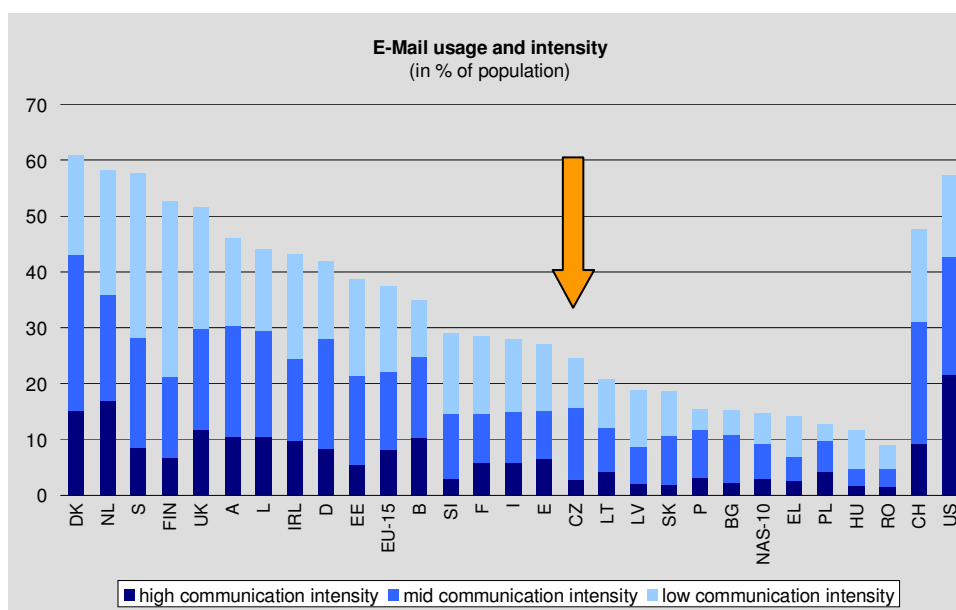
Where is the Czech Republic in September 2004?

- Internet penetration (more than 1/4 of population regularly using),
- Mobile phones (10 mil among 10 mil citizens)
- Digital Signature Law – exists de-jure from 2001
- Green and White Books on e-Commerce (ready at the end of 2002)
- Number of SMEs Internet users (more than 80% are on-line, dial-up)
- Action Plan e-Europe + under implementation (benchmarking exercise)
- End of the Czech Telecom monopoly de-jure from 2003, ADSL, (“last mile“ problem is still present)

- Internet into Schools – 100% of schools will be on-line before 2006 (60% are on-line for now)
- Ministry of Informatics exists from January 2003
- National programme for PC literacy (2 big initiatives exist: private and governmental)
- Government portal of life situations (www.portal.gov.cz) exists, pilot stage is running from the end of 2003 (Ministry of Informatics)
- e-PUSA, back office portal for regional administration, www.epusa.cz, second stage is under implementation (Vysocina and Pilzen regions with Ministry of Interior)
- Separate projects for providing e-Services (land and ownerships register, custom service register, car register etc.), mostly atomized and spontaneously implemented
- Information Society related legislation is well developed, but not enough (e.g., still not finished legislation for re-use of Public Sector Information and sharing of data in registers)
- Local/regional projects for broadband for Structural funds; a national plan for Broadband doesn't exist yet

Let me give some examples of e-Services, which are already present in the Czech Republic. In the area of e-Government, the **national government portal** (<http://portal.gov.cz>), administrated by the *Ministry of Informatics*, was launched in 2003, but is still in the pilot phase. It includes guides to ease solutions of some life situations, legislative documents and directory of central and local authorities. Interactive services are still in preparation. All Portal services are provided free of charge. There are also plans to incorporate an extended English section to provide information for foreigners living in the Czech Republic. The Portal should be fully functional in 2006.

But are citizens ready to use e-Government services? How far is the e-Adoption process?



Base: all respondents, weighted column percentages
Sources: SIBIS 2002, GPS, SIBIS 2003, GPS – NAS

In the Czech Republic some e-Services are available, for example online **declaration of taxes** (<http://adis.mfcr.cz/adis/jepo/index.html>): income taxes for both natural and private persons, VAT, road taxes, realty taxes and announcement of tax-free financial amounts to natural persons. Another project, **small business register**, is currently underway and is to be launched from 2005. With the support of Ministry of Informatics, all public agencies now have the possibility to receive a **qualified certificate** for a digital signature for free.

Application for **Electronic Market Place for PA** (<http://verejnasprava.centrade.cz>) is available already since 2002. From January 2004 it is possible to have **remote access to the land registry** and some other registries.

After a long preparation phase, the application of the **Electronic Custom Management** was launched at the beginning of 2003 (<http://www.cs.mfcr.cz/ecr>).

But even a higher number of e-Services could not show us the level of satisfaction of citizens. They would probably prefer to have only few, but complex solving e-Services! What is crucial is a mental change of both, citizens as users and PA staff as service providers, because ICT will never replace personal engagement. There is still a lot of work to be done in the e-Government field in the Czech Republic.

It seems that three separate processes are going on: one estimated from **Citizen Perspective**, represented by need for new and better government portals, internet access, quality of services, and elimination of paperwork. The other from **Business Perspective** is related to integration of business IT with government systems – integrated, single-source public services, ROI results. The third one from **Government Perspective**, connected with personal skills development, higher productivity for civil servants as knowledge workers, etc. Now these perspectives should be integrated with each other, which is a big challenge.

In this sense all RTD supporting programmes could become of high significance for a national effort to find the most effective solutions, processes and know how, as well as in exchange of best practices.

In order to facilitate e-Government deployment, European Commission, DG INFSO, has recently launched the **Framework for Good Practice in e-Government**, with an open invitation to public and private sector to use this framework to accelerate best practice exchange. It will be interesting to know, how all member States, including NMS, will use this opportunity. Sharing of information between European public administrations is the common task of nowadays, essential not only in crisis situations of rising terrorism or e.g. floods, but also for everyday life.

Interoperability of IT systems is not a problem any more and technological development is going faster, than organizational changes, so the “interoperability” of people remains a challenge. The vision of Networked Governments, which will enable the virtual integration of the different layers of public administrations (local, regional, national, EU and worldwide) could become reality, if we will manage to create a streamlined, direct, efficient democracy that quickly adapts to change. In the near future European governments at all levels will need to re-organize management of their IT operations based on services, that they offer to users of e-Government (taxation, passports, etc.), rather than based on the IT components (servers, routers, etc.). They will use not only the term **Return of Investment** (ROI), but more and more the term **Public Value** of e-Government investments, thinking about improvement of constituent service level, operational efficiency and political return.

All New Member States have e-Government plans or at least basic elements of e-Government development already formulated in the strategic national documents. Some of the NMS have set up a Strategic e-Government Initiative Group or Centres for e-Government competence. Some of them have managed to align the group and plans with the objectives of the politicians in charge, so that fulfilling the plan has strong support of the political leadership. But e-Government deployment in NMS may become a “Mission Impossible“, if long-term visions, strategic plans and administrative decisions are not shared and created in co-operation of all levels of public administration with citizens, business and non-profit organizations of civil society.