



E-government and the Legal Culture in Eastern European Countries

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Abstract

The article aims to investigate the crucial elements of e-government progress contingent on the extent of legal culture in Eastern European nations, namely the Czech Republic, Poland, and Ukraine. The analysis focuses on the stages and requirements for implementing and developing e-government based on the evaluation of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) in specific Eastern European nations. The benefits and opportunities that offer e-government for governments and citizens are given. The main barriers that the countries have to overcome to reach the higher level of digital technology integration are defined. Outlines the role of regulatory framework, transparency, accountability, citizen engagement in eGovernment development. The scientific study pays much attention to the peculiarities of national legislation of Eastern European countries in the context of global digitalization and integration of state data into the global space. Positive practices and the existence of existing problems in the implementation of the concept of e-government are shown. The conclusions propose measures to improve the development of e-government.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Eastern European countries, e-government development index, e-services, legal culture.

Introduction

The shift towards digital transformation is necessary as digital technologies support national and local development, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and guidance, and enable the delivery of online services and solutions in both routine and exceptional circumstances. They play a significant role in promoting innovation in governance, particularly in supporting the advancement of electronic government or e-government. The integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into government has profoundly transformed the nature of interactions between public administrations and their citizens worldwide. E-government makes it possible to provide citizens with an array of services that have undergone substantial development and can significantly enhance the population's welfare (Leogrande et al., 2022). E-government has become vital in establishing institutions that are effective, accountable, resilient, and inclusive.

E-government is an instrument that ensures the provision of more effective services for citizens, and transparent and efficient work of public institutions, resulting in increased satisfaction of citizens regarding cooperation with public institutions and accessibility to services. E-government implementation involves changes and improvement of services

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for citizens. Such an instrument is connected with the reformation, the transition to another level of development of society and the state, and the approach of public power to the citizen. Changes (or reforms) in any government sector are currently aimed at using digital technologies. Ultimately, e-government as a digitalisation element can notably enhance the quality of service offered to citizens, as well as the government's transparency and public administration efficiency. Various factors affect the interaction between the government and its citizens, which consequently affects e-government's development and support. Furthermore, legal culture plays a significant role in shaping citizens' relationship with the law and government initiatives; therefore, e-government and legal culture are interdependent. At the national level, legal culture plays a crucial role in guiding the development and implementation of e-government. The success of e-government is contingent upon the citizens' utilization of the services provided by the government. The effective implementation of e-government necessitates the adoption of specific legal terminology and regulatory and legal acts at the national level. Therefore, one can assume that the implementation of e-government is interlinked with legal culture as it establishes favourable conditions for its successful introduction. Simultaneously, in countries with different levels of development and different legal culture, e-government instruments are being formed in different ways, since a legal culture is part of the state's value system and generally depends on the political system.

Today, technology permeates almost every aspect of life. Governments around the world are striving to make the most of it, making it vital for countries to have advanced technology. The ICT industry is rapidly progressing, and e-government is one of the transformative measures being implemented by governments (Al-Sowayegh, 2012). Europe possesses the highest average EGDI value and dominates the global charts since the UN E-Government Survey's inception. Its e-government development is the most comparable. Despite highly developed regions, variations in e-government development occur. The Eastern European region possesses the continent's lowest score. Nevertheless, the chosen countries have reached the highest level of e-government development in Eastern Europe. Our research aims to explore the key aspects of the legal culture in Czech Republic, Poland, and Ukraine, which have an impact on the development of e-government.

This study analyses the prominent patterns in e-government advancement from 2020-2022, based on the appraisal of the E-Government Development Index (EGDI). The current pandemic crisis has boosted technological growth in government services globally, compelling all governments to reassess their strategies for catering to diverse societal segments (Doran et al., 2023). Digital technologies contribute to the development of both national and local communities, facilitating the sharing of guidance and knowledge. They also allow for the provision of online solutions and services, in both normal and exceptional circumstances, that make the transition towards digital transformation an inevitability.

E-government is a new phase of public administration in terms of quality. However, as any transition to new qualitative characteristics poses challenges, so does its formation. Sometimes these problems seem not so obvious, but the

difficulties associated with them interfere with achieving the aim: Improper technical equipment, information inequality, personnel shortages, lack of motivation for training civil servants in technical skills, and organisational challenges are hindering the creation and development of e-governance. These obstacles include insufficient support from civil servants, the existence of an opposing resistance stratum, and weak cooperation between government agencies and the public. Social and financial barriers hinder the use of e-government services by the population, due to low income, insufficient IT knowledge and limited Internet accessibility (Muradov, 2022).

Literature Review

This literature review was based on a comprehensive analysis of the main approaches to e-government implementation and its relationship with legal culture. Our analysis has identified the status of eGovernment and the influence of legal culture on its implementation in various Eastern European countries. Furthermore, we have recognised the principal tendencies in the progression of e-government.

E-government emerged during the late 1990s, and since then, researchers have shown a keen interest in studying this phenomenon due to numerous countries' adoption and implementation of e-government (Molnar et al., 2015). Notably, most recent approaches recognize that digital technology has enabled governments to effectively address challenges and ensure efficient provision of essential public services.

Nilsson notes that definitions often refer to using digital technologies and the Internet to improve how government and other parties share information (Nilsson, 2013).

The definition of e-government provided by the United Nations is pertinent to our research, specifically when analysing the state of e-government development in Eastern European countries using the "United Nations E-Government Surveys:2022". According to the United Nations, e-government refers to «the utilisation of the Internet and world-wide-web for disseminating government information to citizens» (United Nations, 2022). This definition includes governments' use of ICT to communicate with citizens, which is positive as eGovernment aims to improve information dissemination and transparency.

E-government is the provision of information and services to citizens, businesses and public administrations by electronic means (Ingrams et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2008). E-government development depends on several factors, such as technology, human resources, infrastructure, political will, trust in government and culture. Researchers recognise that culture plays a crucial role in e-government development among all elements, but more empirical work needs to be done to understand its impact. The development of culturally appropriate policies facilitates effective e-government implementation (Kumar et al., 2020).

E-government is a way for the state (public administration) and the public sector (civil society) to interact. It is a method of legal communication with the public and functions as public self-government. E-government

enables interactivity and continuity of interaction between citizens and the state while allowing for public scrutiny of public authorities. Using e-government elements in public institutions can promote stability within society, encourage growth and enhance citizen satisfaction. Therefore, it is imperative to address issues within public authorities through e-government approaches (Makeieva et al., 2021).

Governments across the world have invested in the development of e-government to provide their citizens with public information and services online whilst promoting critical public values (Chen et al., 2019). However, e-government development is neither inevitable nor unilinear, as the determinants of e-government maturity vary widely across countries, levels of government and types of e-government (Bonsón et al., 2012; Gallego-Álvarez et al., 2010).

Soumaya and Renard made a classification of electronic government capabilities. This classification is necessary in our research, while talking about to starting and implementing e-government in Eastern European countries. Classification consists of two groups – progress capabilities and contextual capabilities. That is, the availability of resources should be an essential element. Progress capabilities refer to the resources that support e-government project implementation: change management through a psycho-organisational approach, primarily human-centred; project management. Contextual capabilities refer to opportunities in specific organisations (providing services already available to citizens; informational capabilities) (Ben Dhaou and Renard, (2017). Thus, the e-government concept implementation involves a psychological approach (the demand to study people's needs and the population's capabilities to use services) and an organisational approach (the availability of resources and the need for additional ones to launch e-government initiatives).

Nilsson's explanations of e-government are particularly valuable for our research (Nilsson, 2013). It highlights the possible link between the development of eGovernment and the level of trust/satisfaction towards government. Successfully introducing e-government could help improve how the government is perceived, as well as its transparency and information dissemination. This approach confirms the influence of legal culture on the development of e-government in various countries. For socio-legal scholars, legal culture has become a key area of research. This is particularly evident in Eastern Europe, a region replete with historical, geological, sociological, and political ties that render it an exceptional legal culture case study. The originator of the concept of legal culture, L. M. Friedman, has defined legal culture as the foundation of the connection between law and society. In his description, legal culture is explained as a constituent of the wider culture, comprising of attitudes and values related to regulation. These perspectives have an impact on the relationship with the law and, consequently, the position of the legal framework in society (Friedman, 1975).

Ralf Michaels emphasises that legal culture has undergone extensive discussion and is of great significance. However, he adds that establishing a precise definition has not been as critical among those who study the subject. Michaels contends that separating legal culture from general culture is

challenging because law plays such a significant role in everyday life. Legal culture and the law are intricately linked, with legal culture being the cultural milieu that impacts the legal system and imparts significance to the law (Michaels, 2011).

Susan S. Silbey defines legal culture in a broad sense, as the range of actions, experiences, and interpretations that apply to the law. In a more specific sense, legal culture helps to understand the concrete legal system of different national cultures. In the science of legal culture, this category is related to the following issues: the research of legal ideology, the study of aspects of power acting in a legitimised manner; legal awareness, participation in the construction of legal meanings; work on laws that relate to the legislation as a political instrument (Silbey, 2018).

E-government is a necessary basis for developing open government that includes transparent, joint and collaborative actions of government and administration with the help of information technology Wirtz and Birkmeyer, 2015; Park and Kim, (2020).

The article aims to explore the key aspects of e-government development depending on level of the legal culture in several Eastern European countries - Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine.

Materials and Methods

The research is based on the main provisions of public administration and law. The paper also uses the principles and conclusions involved in the works of scientists on the problems of legal system, public service, digital society, comparative legal cultures of different states, relationship between citizens and the state, level of social trust to the government. The initial phase of the research relies on an integrative review of academic literature to recognise the attributes of e-government and legal culture.

The second stage of the research examined the e-governance implementation practices and characteristics in Eastern European countries. We selected The UN classification carries out the selection of Eastern European countries for analysis. This group of countries includes Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic and Ukraine (World Population Review n.d., 2023). The aforementioned countries possess the greatest EGDI value in Eastern Europe. The study focuses on the period from 2020 to 2022, which was a time when the pandemic served as a litmus test for Governments worldwide. This health crisis has led to a reconsideration of the State's role, prompting Governments to create digital solutions that guarantee the provision of public services and uphold societal stability, often exceeding existing policies and regulations. The delivery of public services via e-government is evaluated by the UN to determine its effectiveness. The evaluation consists of analytical chapters and data on the development of e-government, which is included in the annexes of the publication. This provides a snapshot of the relative measurement of e-government development in all Member States. The average EGDI value worldwide has experienced a slight increase, from 0.5988 in 2020 to 0.6102 in 2022, largely attributed to progress made in reinforcing telecommunications infrastructure. Europe continues to lead in e-government development,

possessing an average EGDI value of 0.8305. The 2022 Survey has evaluated a total of 22 online services, with Europe having the highest average number of services extended online in a regional context (United Nations, 2022).

The study utilises the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) analysis, which is a tool for assessing the state of electronic government development in United Nations member states. The ranking is determined based on how countries perform in e-government relative to each other, rather than an absolute measurement. EGDI is composed of three components, including (1) online service provision, (2) telecommunication connectivity, and (3) human capacity. The scale used for rating ranges between 0 and 1, whereby 0.75 to 1.00 is graded very high for EGDI values; 0.50 to 0.7499 is considered high; 0.25 to 0.4999 is rated as average, whereas low values are ranged from 0.0 to 0.2499 inclusive (United Nations n.d., 2022).

1. Results and Discussion

Basis of legal culture in modern societies is intertwined with universal human values, which oriented towards social and individual achievements and measures their progress.

The interrelation between legal culture and e-government is also evidenced by the fact that legal culture promotes the rule of law and the formation of legal awareness of the population, creating a democratic and legal state and civil society. The benefits of implementing e-government are incentives to develop an appropriate legal culture, as e-government is about trust between citizens and the government.

Putra et al. emphasize that e-government is closely interconnected with the legal culture of the population and has several advantages that also affect the legal culture of society (Putra et al., 2018):

1. Increases the efficiency of public administration.
2. Improves service for citizens.
3. Provides an opportunity for rapid information exchange to achieve the results of the designed policies.
4. Improves trust in the government.
5. Implements updates of public administration reform.

Since e-government, as an aspect of public administration, is related to the transparency of public authority and generally contributes to the improvement of interaction between the state and citizens, its implementation contributes to solving various social problems.

E-government provides a chance for governments and citizens to participate in more considered democratic procedures. Through e-government services and various communication channels, the development of information and communication technologies allows citizens to access information and become better informed at low cost. On one hand, this development does indeed enable citizens and civil society organizations to express their opinions and exercise their right to oversee and scrutinise the actions and policies of both central and local governments. On the other hand, it also serves to exert pressure on governments and their representatives in parliament to fulfill their obligations (Esselimani et al., 2021). There exists a connection between e-government and democracy. The development of the e-

government system to meet the needs of the country's populace largely depends on the government.

Moreover, Eastern European countries exhibit diverse levels of legal culture and political situations, which may result in varying conditions for implementing and developing e-government. The countries included in our research have, however, enhanced their institutional and legal frameworks for the advancement of e-government over the last three years. And they are strong in their democratic beliefs. These countries possess a national strategy for electronic or digital government, as well as regulations regarding cybersecurity, personal data protection, national data policy, open government data, and e-participation. There is a growing ability for individuals and businesses to engage with public institutions through online platforms and gain knowledge on legislation associated with freedom of information, as well as obtain access to public content and data. Out of the 43 European countries that were surveyed, 35 belong to the EGD group with a very high ranking, as shown in Figure 1. Ukraine moved from the high to the very high EGD group for the first time by 2022.

Table 2.5 Countries in Europe with the highest EGD values

Country	Rating class	EGD rank	Subregion	EU	OSI value	HCI value	TII value	EGD (2022)	EGD (2020)
Denmark	VH	1	Northern Europe	Yes	0.9797	0.9559	0.9795	0.9717	0.9758
Finland	VH	2	Northern Europe	Yes	0.9833	0.9640	0.9127	0.9533	0.9452
Sweden	VH	5	Northern Europe	Yes	0.9002	0.9649	0.9580	0.9410	0.9365
Iceland	VH	5	Northern Europe	No	0.8867	0.9657	0.9705	0.9410	0.9101
Estonia	VH	8	Northern Europe	Yes	1.0000	0.9231	0.8949	0.9393	0.9473
Netherlands	VH	9	Western Europe	Yes	0.9026	0.9506	0.9620	0.9384	0.9228
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	VH	11	Northern Europe	No	0.8859	0.9369	0.9186	0.9138	0.9358
Malta	VH	15	Southern Europe	Yes	0.8849	0.8734	0.9245	0.8943	0.8547
Norway	V3	17	Northern Europe	No	0.8007	0.9528	0.9102	0.8879	0.9064
Spain	V3	18	Southern Europe	Yes	0.8559	0.9072	0.8895	0.8842	0.8801
France	V3	19	Western Europe	Yes	0.8768	0.8784	0.8944	0.8832	0.8718
Austria	V3	20	Western Europe	Yes	0.8827	0.9070	0.8505	0.8801	0.8914
Slovenia	V3	21	Southern Europe	Yes	0.8666	0.9439	0.8239	0.8781	0.8546
Germany	V3	22	Western Europe	Yes	0.7905	0.9446	0.8957	0.8770	0.8524
Switzerland	V3	23	Western Europe	No	0.7677	0.9128	0.9450	0.8752	0.8907
Lithuania	V3	24	Northern Europe	Yes	0.8347	0.9251	0.8636	0.8745	0.8665
Liechtenstein	V3	25	Western Europe	No	0.7329	0.8726	1.0000	0.8685	0.8359
Luxembourg	V3	26	Western Europe	Yes	0.8319	0.8245	0.9462	0.8675	0.8272
Latvia	V3	29	Northern Europe	Yes	0.8135	0.9284	0.8378	0.8599	0.7798
Ireland	V3	30	Northern Europe	Yes	0.7796	0.9618	0.8287	0.8567	0.8433
Greece	V2	33	Southern Europe	Yes	0.7753	0.9405	0.8206	0.8455	0.8021
Poland	V2	34	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.7929	0.9033	0.8348	0.8437	0.8531
Italy	V2	37	Southern Europe	Yes	0.8659	0.8606	0.7860	0.8375	0.8231
Portugal	V2	38	Southern Europe	Yes	0.7954	0.8665	0.8201	0.8273	0.8255
Belgium	V2	39	Western Europe	Yes	0.6899	0.9614	0.8294	0.8269	0.8047
Serbia*	V2	40	Southern Europe	No	0.8514	0.8332	0.7865	0.8237	0.7474
Russian Federation	V2	42	Eastern Europe	No	0.7368	0.9065	0.8053	0.8162	0.8244
Croatia	V2	44	Southern Europe	Yes	0.8108	0.8500	0.7711	0.8106	0.7745
Czech Republic	V2	45	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.6693	0.9114	0.8456	0.8088	0.8135
Ukraine*	V1	46	Eastern Europe	No	0.8148	0.8669	0.7270	0.8029	0.7119
Slovakia	V1	47	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.7260	0.8436	0.8328	0.8008	0.7817
Hungary	V1	51	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.7465	0.8345	0.7671	0.7827	0.7745
Bulgaria	V1	52	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.7092	0.8221	0.7984	0.7766	0.7980
Romania	V1	57	Eastern Europe	Yes	0.6814	0.8090	0.7954	0.7619	0.7605
Belarus	V1	58	Eastern Europe	No	0.5302	0.9011	0.8426	0.7580	0.8084

Fig. 1. E-Government Development Index in Eastern European countries

Note: The ranking of Ukraine reflects the results of the assessment undertaken at the time of the Survey.

*Countries that moved from the high to the very high EGD group in 2022.

Sources: 2020 and 2022 United Nations E-Government Surveys (United Nations, 2022).

Since 2020, governments worldwide have implemented measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysed countries have offered online resources and distance learning platforms to provide information and support. It is important to note that our discussion of e-government is in the context of the EU and its impact.

When compared with other Eastern European countries, Poland's e-government is ranked first in the region. Poland serves as an illustration of how a legal system should prioritize justice and the common good, rather than being at the disposal of a powerful state apparatus. The history of the legal systems in Poland illustrates the importance of upholding the essential and innate link between morality and law, as well as safeguarding the dignity of individuals and their rights through all available legal means. This has had a significant impact on the current landscape, as well as the challenges and possibilities for the advancement of e-government in Poland. On the other hand, in Poland, the government's transformation into e-government was delayed due to past economic backwardness and communism in comparison to Western Europe (Kapsa and Musiał-Karg, 2020).

Since 2015, the Ministry of Digital Affairs has overseen digital policies, public administration reform, public sector digitalization and electronic government development in Poland. Despite being merged into the Prime Minister's Chancellery in 2020, the relevant departments maintain their digital leadership (Nilsson, 2013).

The Polish public administration is actively engaged in open data initiatives, exemplified by the Open Data Portal. The portal provides access to information covering various domains, along with a dedicated Data API for developers to create bespoke applications using public sector data. The EPUAP Portal, also known as the Electronic Platform of Public Administration Services, facilitates the provision of government services to the general public through electronic communication channels. Adherence to this system also ensures the government's timely delivery of these services to its constituents. This platform empowers citizens and enterprises to handle official affairs and administrative procedures free of charge.

Poland's government is committed to making public services more transparent and accountable. This has placed Poland in a select group of trailblazers leading the way in digital government.

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy where political rights and civil liberties are generally upheld. The country's open attitude towards digital solutions and the robust position of Czech companies in the IT sector suggest that it possesses significant potential for furthering the digitisation of its public services. Czech software developers rank highly among the best professionals in Europe and worldwide. The Digital Czech Republic strategy, formulated in 2019, prioritizes e-government as one of its key objectives. One crucial area that the government needs to focus on is the Integration of digital technology. Compared to 2021, Czechia's ranking has improved in terms of Digital public services and connectivity, with the strongest performance in the human capital dimension. The Czech Republic ranked 45th out of 193 countries according to the E-Government Development 2022 Index (EDGI). However, the lack of digital technology integration has been hampering its growth, according to the European Commission experts (Sear, 2022). Digitalisation is occurring in various areas of public administration through adopting laws and amendments to existing ones. In 2019, the Czech Parliament passed a Law on the Right to Digital Services, also known as the digital constitution, which mandates the full operation of online solutions from 2025.

Additionally, on 27 March 2021, the Czech Republic initiated the first-ever population census using an electronic data form. Consequently, the utilization of human capital and digital technologies integration by businesses has bolstered the activation of e-government (Wasiuta, 2021).

The duties and functions of the digital government entity were mainly partitioned between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation and the Home Office in the Czech Republic until recently. January 2022, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation introduced a strategy for the reform of digital government management and initiated the alignment of all ongoing digital transformation initiatives. The establishment of the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation provides ample political backing and extensive coverage for the entire public sector. However, a formal agreement must be implemented and agreed by all stakeholders to firmly establish the mandate of the Deputy Prime Minister's Cabinet for Digitalisation to ensure its effective leadership and decision-making authority. The Home Office provides public sector organisations with shared infrastructure and services, including data centres and cybersecurity (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2020). During the ICT project approval process, the ministry promotes the utilization of shared infrastructure and services by other institutions. The Ministry of the Interior further assists public sector organizations in the development and provision of digital services through its PMA service (OECD, 2021a). Governments can increase efficiency and reduce duplication of effort and expenditure by implementing standardised tools and services across the public sector. Such policies facilitate the long-term sustainability of digital initiatives and ensure alignment with the digital government strategy (OECD, 2014).

To strengthen digital governance, the Czech Republic has established the DIA, a new organisation aimed at promoting the digital transformation of the public sector and local and central governments in close coordination with the Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation. The legal basis for the Digital Innovation Agency (DIA) was provided by Amendment No. 471/2022 to the Right to Digital Services Act of the Czech Republic, which came into effect in January 2023. The Agency collaborates closely with the Department chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation, which is responsible for developing strategic and policy determinations. The DIA has assumed primary responsibility for digital transformation in the public sector, replacing other central government agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Agency for Communications and Information Technology.

Each regional and local authority bears the responsibility of implementing its digital government and developing and delivering its services. This reflects the Czech Republic's decentralised government structure. The Office of Chief Architect of eGovernment, under the Ministry of the Interior, has the authority to approve all digital projects related to ICT of regional and local governments. Under the continuing digital government's governance restructuring, the Czech government transferred this function to the DIA in April 2023. However, to deliver comprehensive and high-quality services nationwide, while promoting interoperability and responsible public

spending, the central government must increase its coordination with regional authorities in disseminating guidelines, standards, and shared resources. This will ensure that users, irrespective of their location, have equitable access to and can benefit from services of a consistent quality.

Digital governance in the Czech Republic is divided into two areas - institutional models and policy levers. The first area examines the formal and informal institutional structures, necessary for the Czech government to provide leadership and guarantee coordination and collaboration, ultimately promoting innovation, efficiency, effectiveness and dependability across the public sector. The Leverages constitute a supporting toolkit for the implementation of governments' digital transformation strategies. The toolkit centres on strategy and planning, project management tools, financial mechanisms, and norms and standards. Policy levers empower governments to craft and execute digital governance and user-service delivery strategies that offer a resilient impact, fulfilling citizens' and enterprises' needs (OECD, 2014).

The Czech Republic has undertaken considerable measures to reshape its economy, society, and public sector via the nationwide Digital Czech Republic strategic programme. Implemented in 2018 and updated yearly, this initiative comprises three central elements, including the Czech Republic in the Digital Europe Programme, which is governed by the Government Office. The objective is to promote a digital agenda approach across the European Union (EU), while guaranteeing EU regulatory compliance. The Information Strategy of the Czech Republic is led by the Office of the Chief E-Government Architect of the Ministry of the Interior and is centred on the e-government of the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2020). This strategy details the national plan for creating and managing information systems for public administration. The Digital Economy and Society pillar aims to maximize the economic and societal benefits of digital transformation whilst minimizing potential negative consequences. All three sections are cooperatively led by the Information Society Government Council (European Commission (n.d.a), 2022; OECD, 2023). Aligned with the objectives and targets set for the European Commission's Digital Decade policy programme until 2030, the Czech Republic aims to broaden the programme's reach by prioritising education and digital abilities.

Notwithstanding this ambitious plan, progress has been sluggish in recent years, leaving the country trailing behind its European counterparts. Though in the realm of digital public services, the Czech Republic is gradually advancing, approaching the EU average (European Commission (n.d.b), 2022).

In January 2022, the new government endorsed a national programme prioritising digitalisation within the public sector. This pursuit makes staff, processes, and technology more digitally advanced and reformed in the Czech Republic. The implementation of the programme could significantly enhance digital transformation in all central government offices (European Commission (n.d.c), 2022). For example, the Czech Republic intends to finalize the enforcement of the Act on the Right to Digital Services, also known as the "Digital Constitution," by 2025, granting all citizens the right to access public sector services digitally. Presently, efforts are underway to ensure the

sustainability of these services. With agility and unconventionality, the government devised a range of digital services during the pandemic.

In November 2022, the Czech Republic government opted to establish a separate module inside the Digital Czech Republic Programme for effectively tackling these concerns and aligning continuous endeavours to augment the digital abilities and proficiency throughout the government division.

With the digital transformation rapidly progressing across society, there is increasing pressure on governments worldwide to guarantee their capacity to execute and supply services to their citizens in an increasingly digitalised world. At the central government level, the Czech Republic has adopted standardised project management tools, principles and guidelines. The OECD Framework for Digital Talent and Skills in the Public Sector outlines the necessary components governments require for creating a digital government workforce, which can bring their vision of a digital government to fruition (OECD, 2021b). The OECD Digital Government Policy Framework emphasises the significance of a government functioning as a platform that offers unambiguous and transparent guidelines, tools, data, and software to cater to the necessities of teams responsible for designing and delivering user-focused, harmonised, unbroken, forward-thinking, and cross-sectoral services (OECD, 2020). The 2017 OECD Council on Open Government Recommendation (OECD Legal Instruments, 2022). recognises that citizen engagement can strengthen civic capacity, inform policymaking with evidence, reduce costs of implementation, and tap into wider networks and ecosystems for innovation in policymaking and service delivery. Furthermore, it has the potential to empower citizens and increase their influence on policy decisions. User engagement includes processes for the education, consultation and involvement of stakeholders in the development and delivery of policies and services (Welby and Tan, 2022).

The Digital Czech Republic Programme serves as the umbrella strategy for the cross-sector digitalization of the public administration in the Czech Republic. The programme's objective is to enable the Czech Republic to become a digitally mature country by providing a blueprint for cross-sector initiatives. However, it is necessary to enhance the monitoring and assessment mechanisms for the implementation of digital government initiatives to accurately measure progress and identify gaps. For instance, by publicly releasing its advancements, the government can enhance transparency and foster trust in government.

On the doorstep of the European Union, Ukraine has aligned e-government and democracy for several years, with assistance from EU member states. The country's administrative structure is flourishing with pilots, reorganisations, and promising levels of digital maturity (Plantera, 2019). In recent years, Ukraine has made noteworthy advancements in enhancing e-governance. In 2022, the country was elevated to the "very high" EGDI group from the "high" category. Among European nations, Ukraine is ranked 46th in terms of EGDI, just behind the Czech Republic (United Nations, 2022). The successes of digitalization, connected with the reforms implemented in recent years, were based on European practices. In particular,

its decentralization reform (local government reform) allowed it to bring social services closer to citizens. The reform gave people, and businesses access to high-quality and convenient public services without corruption risks. First, the interaction between ministries and central and local authorities was established.

Since mid-2017, Ukraine has introduced two new concepts that provide an in-depth definition of national e-government priorities: the 2017 Concept of E-government Development in Ukraine and the 2018-2020 Concept of Digital Economy and Society Development in Ukraine.

In 2019, the Ministry of Digital Transformation was established in Ukraine. The European Union's U-LEAD programme began its operations within this framework. U-LEAD with Europe is an initiative of the EU's external action, which has been in progress for more than four years. The program enjoys the support of civil society stakeholders from Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Poland. The primary aim of the programme is to facilitate the realization of Ukraine's goal of achieving more decentralized multi-tier governance. To achieve this, the government is dedicated to implementing two vital good governance components. The first of these components is the Trembita data exchange platform, which guarantees seamless interoperability between government agencies and registries (EU4DigitalUA, 2022). Secondly, the establishment of the Vulyk information system enables local administrative service centres to enhance the efficiency of delivering public services to citizens by ten times (Sear, 2021; soft Xpansion (n.d.), 2022).

The primary achievement towards achieving e-government objectives is the introduction of the Diia application. This application was created from the ground up to revolutionize how Ukrainian citizens and businesses engage with the government. There are presently over 11 million Diia users, and the application offers eleven distinct digital documents and twelve services.

The launch of the Diia application has taken a giant stride towards the paperless vision at the core of the Ministry of Digital Transformation philosophy. Legal recognition for digital documents is a notable milestone in this direction. Earlier this year, Ukraine became the first country in the world to grant digital passports the same legal status as their paper analogues for local use (Fedorov, 2021).

Public administrations are currently providing citizens with a high level of performance in various services. Efficiently serving citizens is one of the essential functions of a democratic state. Although much has been accomplished, Ukrainians' determination to make digital transformation a reality is evident. The Ukrainian government recognizes the value of e-governance as a resource. Improving administrative capabilities in service delivery is necessary not only for practical purposes, but also for reinforcing democracy and the relationship between the state and the citizen.

Ukraine's digitalization reform is amongst the most prominent changes in the country, with long-lasting effects on its society. The Ministry of Digital Transformation in Ukraine perfectly showcases how the government conducts digitalization processes. Consequently, numerous countries are keen to learn

from Ukraine's experience. Despite the already impressive progress, Ukraine's ambitious digitalization reform still holds great potential.

Our results correlate with the opinion of Ravšelj, Tomažević and Aristovnik (Ravšelj et al., 2020) demonstrating that e-government services can substantially alleviate the administrative load on citizens and businesses, enhance decision transparency, and hence mitigate the risk of corruption.

Akhmetov et al. (2018a) argue that corruption is a pervasive social phenomenon with profound repercussions for society and the state, ranging from distorted market competition to the erosion of state authority. Understanding the drivers of corruption, whether driven by personal gain or systemic deficiencies in legal culture, is crucial in formulating effective anti-corruption measures (Akhmetov et al., 2018b).

Moreover, the study highlights the role of legal frameworks and regulations in shaping anti-corruption efforts. As mentioned by Akhmetov et al. (2018b), countries with robust legal systems and enforcement mechanisms tend to perform better in combating corruption, underscoring the importance of strong institutional frameworks. However, our study also recognizes the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of these legal mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness and relevance in evolving socio-political contexts.

Charron and other (Charron et al., 2022) noted a decline in the European Quality of Government Index (EQI) compared to the EU average. It concerns Poland and Czech Republic, as their EGD value also declined during 2020-2022. But as our analysis shows these countries have much more perspectives despite some barriers.

Conclusion

The suitable legal framework enables the extension of e-government practices to encompass regions and municipalities across nations. E-government presents a chance for governments and citizens to participate in more thoughtful democratic practices.

Eastern European countries possess a legal framework mechanism and effective legal culture for the development of e-government. They maintain strong democratic beliefs. Success in implementing e-government primarily hinges upon state coordination in implementing digital administration with a sufficient legal basis. The varying levels of legal culture and political situations in the Eastern European countries we analysed, particularly Ukraine during war conditions, demonstrates the challenges countries may encounter. So, the conditions for implementing and developing e-government in these countries differ. However, the e-government systems of Ukraine, Poland, and the Czech Republic are influenced by the EU context, and as a result, they develop accordingly. Over the past three years, these nations have bolstered their institutional and legal frameworks for the advancement of e-government. The objective of e-government development is to establish efficient governance standards by enhancing human resource expertise and augmenting public confidence in e-services. A unanimous agreement exists that governments must sustain pace with digital transformation. It is a positive external pressure that arises from living in the age of the information society. Citizens' demand

for efficient service delivery is on the rise, and it is the responsibility of public authorities to meet this demand. In various countries, the implementation of e-government is dependent on critical shared resources. Specifically, this pertains to having adequate regulatory and legal frameworks, as well as cultural readiness. These factors are essential for the widespread adoption of e-government elements at the community level and correspondingly, for adequate levels of information and technical support. These resources are fundamental to promoting electronic government initiatives, which have a direct impact on government transparency. Therefore, each nation must determine the scope and degree of its e-government programmes following its distinct national development priorities and legal framework.

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