

# Leadership and e-government: a comparative analysis of the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on the issues of building and maintaining an effective and leading system of e-government using an example of two neighbouring countries. We demonstrate that the current model of e-government organization that exists in operation both in the Russian Federation and in the Republic of Belarus is not effective enough and requires certain institutional restructuring and fine tuning. We also argue that this restructuring can be achieved using the mechanisms of interdepartmental interaction for achieving leadership in the development of e-government.

Moreover, it appears that in both countries in question there is a clear need for creating a unified regulatory framework in the form of a systematic set of legislative provisions presented in the form of a kind of electronic statehood code which should become a set of rules and regulations specifying relations in the area of e-government functioning on the territory of both states in question.

## 1 Introduction

Nowadays, in the most developed countries of the world, the priority direction for the development of state and municipal administration is the creation of systems of the so-called “e-government” which aims to increase the efficiency and democratization of public administration. The problems of the implementation of “e-government” are currently devoted to a fairly large number of works by both domestic and foreign researchers.

In general, the best practices of creating e-government are explored using various case studies from various countries around the world (see e.g. Kristalniy and Travkin 2003; Sadovskaya 2011; Khramtsovskaya 2011; Al-Wazir 2012; Shkabatur 2012; Reddick and Michael 2012; Wang 2013; Smith 2013; Porrua 2013; Al-Hashmi 2013; Jalote 2013; Balyukov and Logua 2014; Dyurbek 2014; Strielkowski et al. 2017; or Bakunzibake et al. 2018 just to name a few).

In Russia, the experience of introducing of e-government and problems in this area are investigated to a lesser extent but there are some interesting insights too (see e.g. Rozhkov 2010; Pavlyutenkova 2013; Drozhzhinov 2013; or Bershadsckaya et al. 2015 among the others).

The term “e-government” was introduced to the political discourse in the 1990s. The e-government projects were based on the model of interaction between the state, business and the client (citizen) in the electronic space and the concept of “internetworking public sector”, as well as the concept of good (quality) public administration (good governance) (Davidson et al. 2005). The latter includes principles such as the rule of law, equality, orientation towards consensus, citizen participation in government decision-making, operativity (administrative processes at a reasonable time ensure the involvement and participation of all stakeholders), and efficiency (the authorities “produce” results that satisfy public expectations and, at the same time, make the best use of the resources at their disposal, taking care of the reproduction of these resources); transparency and accountability.

Despite ongoing discussions about the nature and interrelationships of the concepts of “e-government” and “e-administration”, they are often used interchangeably in political practice because they include common core

components: more effective government activities, the provision of services to citizens and the improvement of the democratic process through the use of information and communication technology. At the same time, e-government projects are usually considered as an integral part of the systemic transformations of public administration, including administrative reform, civil service reform and the reorientation of the state towards serving citizens and businesses. The main qualitative characteristics of e-government are:

- accountability and transparency of government activities;
- informing and effective participation of citizens in the political process;
- empowering of representative institutions;
- free exchange of information.

Taking into account the various combinations of the above characteristics, a number of models for the implementation of e-government projects were designed, the main purpose of which is to monitor the processes of public administration transformation based on the use of information and communication technologies at the global level. The result of this monitoring was the publication of reports on the status of e-government projects prepared by international organizations and analytical centres. The analysis of the results achieved in different countries, the preparation of new programs for the development of the information society and e-government, the development of academic research in this field led to a shift in the emphasis of the traditional areas of e-government projects, and the introduction of a number of fundamental conceptual innovations.

## **2 Development of e-government in the Republic of Belarus**

The creation and development of e-government in the Republic of Belarus is determined by a large number of regulatory documents. However, analysis of the “E-government” Strategy for the development of informatization in the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2022, subprogram shows that, despite the introduction of such a component as “the provision of electronic services through various access environments through the use of modern network infrastructure”, the main guideline of the program will be the implementation of state powers in electronic form, since:

- there is no definition of a state service in the sub-programme;
- the terms state electronic service, information service, administrative procedures are used extremely unsystematically;
- there is no mention that the convenience and needs of citizens are decisive in the formation of a set of services based on the principle of “life situations”, and not the automation of existing administrative procedures;
- the effect of the implementation of the program for citizens is determined only in quantitative parameters (reducing the administrative burden on the population and business, reducing the number of calls to the authorities for the provision of services, reducing the waiting time);
- the expected results are mainly related to public organizations and organizations “using the global Internet computer network to obtain information from public authorities and to provide information to public authorities”.

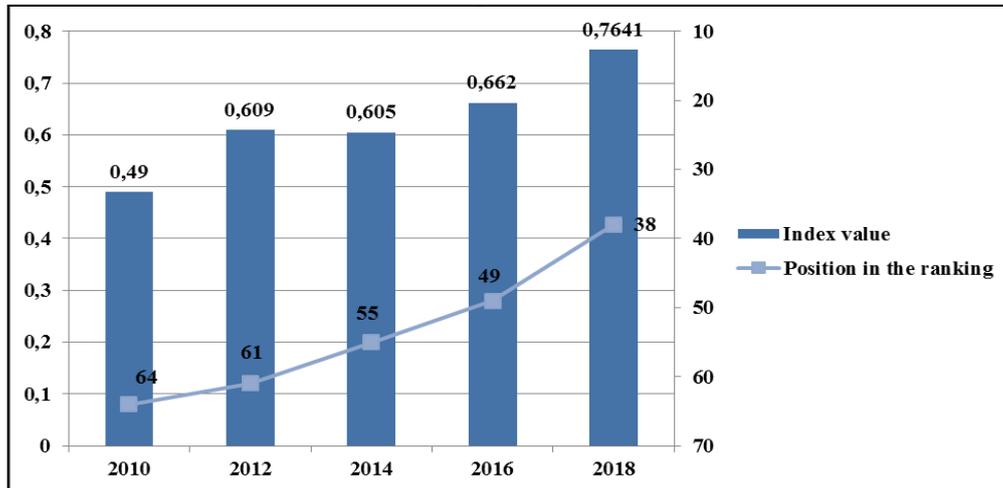
As a result of the implementation of the State Informatization Program of the Republic of Belarus “Electronic Belarus” and the National Program for Accelerated Development of Information and Communication Technology Services for 2011–2015, a nationwide automated information system (OAIS) was created. OAIS is designed to integrate government information resources and automate government activities to provide information services to other government agencies, organizations and citizens. Structurally OAIS is represented by two portals:

- a single electronic services portal (<http://portal.gov.by>); 46 e-services in the field of taxation, accounting and circulation of real estate, education and culture are currently implemented on the basis of information from 12 GIR - state information resources;
- portal for government agencies and organizations (<http://nces.by>), access to which is limited and possible only through secure communication channels. The portal with online access to administrative procedures for business will be launched in mid-2017.

In connection with the relevance of the introduction of public electronic services, civil projects in the field of e-government in Belarus a portal dealing with e-government and public services online was created (it can be accessed at <http://e-gov.by>). The portal is designed to collect and discuss ideas (e-government).

The degree of e-government readiness is considered as an important indicator of the level of development of each country and is measured once every two years by United Nations (UN) experts who issue a special rating based on the e-government development index (EGDI). The United Nations has published the report “E-Government Survey 2016: E-Government in Support of Sustainable Development”. The report illustrates the dynamics of e-government development, as an indicator of effective development, based on an analysis of the situation in 193 countries of the world.

According to the latest data, the e-government readiness index of the Republic of Belarus is 0.7641, which corresponds to the 38<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking. In the same ranking for 2016, Belarus ranked 49<sup>th</sup>. Thus, over the past 2 years it has moved up by 11 positions (see Figure 1 that follows).



**Fig.1.** Dynamics of change of the e-government readiness index of the Republic of Belarus  
*Source: United Nations (2018)*

At the same time Belarus ranked only 76<sup>th</sup> in the E-Participation Index in 2016. Such a significant difference in the values of the two UN indexes for Belarus confirms the thesis about the prevalence of the technocratic approach in the construction of the Belarusian e-government profile.

The state in recent years has focused on the creation of nationwide interdepartmental electronic systems. As a result, the main characteristic of large-scale implemented projects is the orientation of state institutions, primarily on their own needs, rather than on the interests of those who use electronic services, that is, ordinary users-citizens. Worst of all, Belarusian authorities do not even understand that the technocratic approach and the emphasis on “informatization of state administration” do not correspond to the modern understanding of the tasks of the national e-government system.

According to experts, today Belarus is at the second, the so-called “informational” stage of e-government development, which is characterized by unilateral provision of information to users by government authorities.

Only recently, services of the third, “interactive” stage in receiving electronic services, begin to appear, when you can fill in or submit electronic forms online, and later only make, for example, one visit to a government agency in order to receive the necessary documents or to put a signature on a form.

Regulatory requirements for placing information online and the actual availability of information on the official websites of government agencies currently do not allow to talk about free and open “access to information” of the public sector, since they do not consider the subject (citizen, legal entity) as the initiator of the legal relationship defining the content of the object of legal relations (information of state authorities).

Belarusian legislation still does not even have a unified approach to the definition of a state electronic service. Because of this, both informing about administrative procedures, and providing information about the activities of government authorities and organizations, and directly interactive services (for example, hosted on a single electronic services portal) are often called electronic services, while mixing in essence different generations of services, which are characteristic for different stages of e-government development.

Describing the overall single portal of electronic services, it is noted that out of more than 60 procedures currently provided, only 19 are designed for individuals. But even these 19 procedures have not a great social importance and relevance among potential users. As the analysis of existing electronic services shows, e-government developers do not think about the convenience of users, so they formally approach to the structuring of information.

For example, the section of a single portal of electronic services, containing links to external services, is extremely inconvenient: information is presented in an unstructured form, which makes this section unattractive to use, services are categorized conditionally, and links to official websites, information databases and electronic

services are mixed. It should be noted that government strategies and programs adopted in recent years in the field of e-government development envisage a number of serious measures to deepen the electronic interaction between citizens and government authorities

Thus, in the Strategy for the development of informatization in the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2022, one of the tasks is to be among the top of 50 countries in the UN e-participation index. At the same time, the share of administrative procedures and public services rendered electronically in 2022 should be at least 75%.

To sum it up, one might see that it will be difficult to achieve these indicators while maintaining the current pace of development of the e-government if the Belarusian authorities do not involve various experts from civil society and business.

### 3 Development of e-government in Russia

In the Russian Federation, the transition to a full-fledged “electronic government” is still ongoing and might take a long time before it will be finally accomplished. As the research we conducted showed, part of the regions, having achieved certain results, stopped in applying the principles of “e-government”, or are still not working with them.

Despite the fact that the system of legal regulation of the introduction of “electronic government” includes several dozen of laws, many programs and concepts, the direct regulation of the activities of the executive authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, which are the most important participants in the process of public administration and the provision of public services to the population, has not yet been implemented properly.

According to data presented by the United Nations in the report “E-Government. Review 2018: E-Government as Sustainable Development Support”, the e-government readiness index in Russia is 0.7969, which corresponds to the 32<sup>nd</sup> place in the rating. In the same ranking for 2016, Russia ranked 35<sup>th</sup>. Thus, over the past 2 years, it has increased its rating by 3 positions (see Figure 2 that follows).

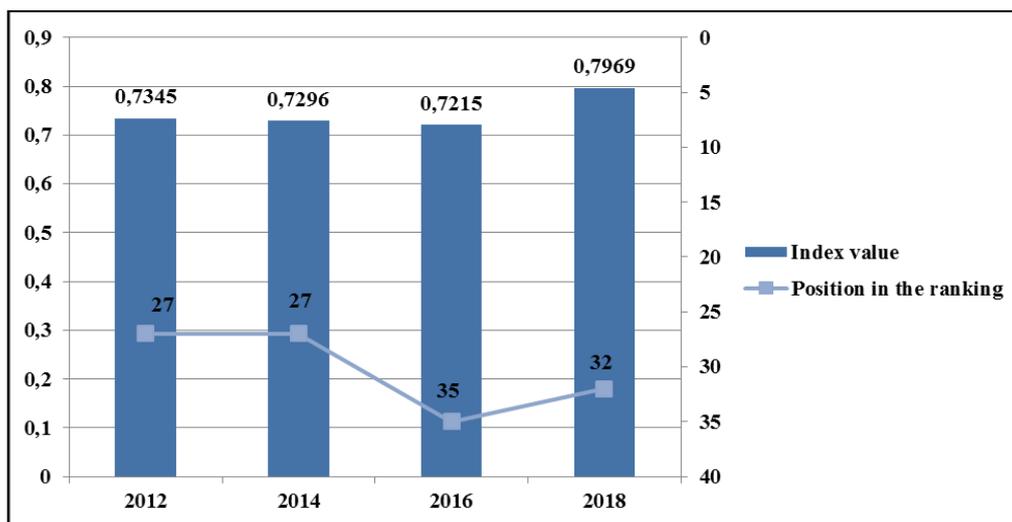


Fig.2. Dynamics of the UN index of readiness for e-government of the Russian Federation

Source: United Nations (2018)

At the same time, Russia has not yet restored its 2012 rating, which is primarily due to the low level of development of information and communication technologies and the maturity of e-government tools in the country.

The content analysis conducted by us showed that the development of “e-government” in the regions of Russia is uneven. The absolute leaders are Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Republic of Tatarstan, as well as Tyumen, Arkhangelsk and Moscow regions. In these regions, information technologies are being actively introduced into the state administration, and the authorities are interacting with citizens through regional public service portals and “The Open Government” portals.

In 2012, the rules for subsidizing regions within of “The Information Society” program were approved. By 2020, the total budget expenditures to support the regions will be about 7 billion rubles. At the same time, the maximum amount of funds to support one region cannot be more than 50 million rubles.

In 2014, the Minister of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation held a meeting to select the best projects for the right to receive funds from the federal budget in 2015 for the direction of work with

multifunctional centres, the provision of state and municipal services on the “one window” principle and in electronic form.

In 2014, the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 29, 2014 approved the Concept of regional informatization until 2018, aimed at equalizing the information development levels of the regions and improving the quality of life of the population through the use of new technologies. At the same time, the concept regulates the principles of using information and telecommunication technologies in the state authorities of the regions, in particular, the executive power, therefore one of the goals of the Concept is to achieve the effectiveness of public administration in the regions.

In order to actualize the state of development of “e-government” in regional executive authorities, it is necessary to analyse the system on the basis of which this “e-government” is built – the system of inter-agency electronic interaction (SMEV). It is the state information system using databases and information intended for the organization of interaction between government authorities for providing the state and municipal services and performance of functions in electronic form. For the implementation of SMEV, a service-oriented structure for constructing electronic control tools using generally accepted standards, common technological solutions, common classifiers and metadata bases is used. According to the algorithm for the provision of services under the “one window” system and in electronic form, applicants can get the service by following one of the ways, while the internal interaction of the authorities becomes an insignificant factor for them. The authorities, when receiving an application through a single portal of public services, operate in a fully electronic mode. If the application arrives through the multifunctional centre, then it is transferred to the responsible authority, which, in the process of providing the service, starts the process of interdepartmental interaction, however, the result of the service goes to the MFC not in electronic form, but in the traditional real form.

Thus, the evaluation of the experience of regional authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in the field of “e-government” can be carried out on the basis of a study of the development of SMEV in the implementation of services and functions in electronic form.

In January 2015, an approbation of the system of interdepartmental cooperation – “SMEV 3.0.” was carried out. Interdepartmental requests for TIN (taxpayer identification number) were regularly processed using passport data in four pilot regions: Moscow, Mordovia, Yaroslavl and Tyumen regions.

Our study showed that the main problem of Russia in the transition to the “electronic government” today is the differentiation of the levels of implementation of information and telecommunication technologies in the regions. Despite the fact that, in general, indicators of work with high technologies in public administration tend to increase, the gap in some areas sometimes reaches huge percentages in certain parameters.

Thus, the Russian Federation which has a vast space and territories in which there is located a huge number of administrative-territorial units, faces a number of problems and tasks that require speedy resolution. In terms of new technologies, specifically – “e-government” - and the entire set of structural elements it assumes, coordinated and effective measures and actions should be taken without any delay.

The problems of the regions in this area include, first of all, the incompleteness of regulations at the country level. There is no legislative base relating to the lowest level of public administration, measures for informatization are too poorly regulated and coordinated, and above all, the financial factor is not taken into account which sometimes does not allow to comply with the instructions of the federal authorities. Full-time units for specialists in the field of information technologies in management are not allocated, specialists replacing posts often do not have professional skills and high qualifications. Also, the quality of management of socially important sectors occurs with the use of outdated rules and procedures, and the management is very corrupt.

## **4 Conclusions**

Overall, our analysis of the state of e-government in the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation shows that there are still gaps and issues remaining. In addition, it also appears that issues with introducing a full-fledged e-government in both countries are somewhat similar.

One of the important steps of the state authorities of the Russian Federation and Belarus in building e-government is the mandatory posting of information about administrative procedures on the official websites of government agencies. However, the submission of this information is at a very low level, since there is no unified information system summarizing information on administrative procedures, and there is also no comprehensive vision of their conversion into electronic format. Digitalization is needed in order to achieve better control and speeding up the administrative processes.

At the same time, there is a clear trace of the need to create a unified regulatory framework, where the executive power will be given a place to regulate the use of “electronic government”. Proceeding from this, it is advisable, for example, to develop a systematized set of legislative provisions in the form of a kind of electronic statehood code, which will be called the E-Government Code (Code). The Code can become a set of rules and regulations specifying the relations in the field of “e-government” functioning and the activities of their executive authorities using the principles of e-government.

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