Egovernment: Transforming Government Engagement in the European Union

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Abstract

eGovernment is not just a government service on the Internet. The strategic nature of the service relies on the objective of simplifying communication between all parties of the society: government, citizens and business. The use of ICTs can help to connect all three parties and facilitate processes and activities that support their connectivity. Therefore, eGovernment encourages good governance. However, with the nature of ICTs constantly changing, the subsequent economic and societal impact in Europe is diversified. Continued technological progress has led to a societal acceptance of the new technologies, amount to a step-change in what ICT can achieve. Rapid technological developments have altered the level of government engagement within the society. Our point of interest, European societies, has demonstrated diversified levels of government and citizen engagement. For some EU countries' citizens, interaction with the government through online facilities is not a novelty. However, to achieve the same level of efficiency and flexibility for all the EU member-countries is going to be challenging. The experience from the eGovernment services in the European Union shows that the willingness to decentralize procedures and mainly responsibility, and upgrade the role of electronic means, can strengthen governance. Our case study from Europe 2020 will showcase the dynamic shift of political direction towards flexible public services. The diversity of eGovernment implications in the European Union remains exceptionally interesting. This article is going to examine the political issues related to governance in the European Union, from the perspective of democratic governance. Additionally, it will observe how far the European countries have been successful in implementing the EU's action plan. The article tries to identify the current status and the progression achieved so far in EU, with regards to the eGovernment area. Specific reference is being made to the open government approach, attempting to identify the level of political creativity originated in the Europe 2020 Initiative. The article argues that there are diverse speeds and levels of policy adaptation within the EU.

Keywords: eGovernment, European Union, democracy, digital agenda, online services.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the information technology revolution has encouraged economic and social change around the globe. The new technologies are likely to continue to have a deep impact on the political, economic, social and cultural values of the world in the coming decade. Economic prospects will continue to flourish in the market, enabling citizens and businesses to progressively familiarize with technological advancements in the online world. Social and cultural distances around the world are gradually becoming smaller leading to multi-dimensional citizen groups which are more informed, more democratic and more flexible. To ensure unlimited economic and social boundaries, a massive global information infrastructure is being put into place in many countries with the assistance of their governments.

Many governments have put an effort in utilizing technology to find innovative solutions for cost-effective development and social cohesion. The European Union as a whole has made considerable progress in increasing information technology tools and setting up networks. To provide a supporting environment, governments are investing in policies and programs for building a proper economic, social and regulatory infrastructure which will allow them to benefit from the imminent information society, increasing public value. The foundation of public value is a wide term that incorporates the various democratic, social, economic, environmental and governance roles of governments (Germanakos et al, 2007). Nevertheless, the undertaking of eGovernment could also create challenges. While for some countries of the EU, governments are willing to decentralize responsibilities and processes, this is hardly the practice of all EU countries.

The aim of this article is to highlight the progression, advancement and potential of eGovernment in the countries of the European Union and beyond. Our aim is to cover the issues related to eGovernment from a theoretical perspective, which would be affecting not just the European countries, but also most countries of the world. Our analysis will look into the experience and examples from the European countries, in order to draw up analogies. The advantages offered by eGovernment services are numerous: faster access to government services, lower costs for administration, better public access to budgets and documents and the subsequent increase in transparency and accountability. EGovernment

services promote an environment where each citizen could contact the government through a website where all forms, legislation, news and other information are made available. It is assumed that the European governments, as a collector and source of information, would follow this trend, to serve its citizens and business and to save costs by making internal operations more efficient, eliminating complicated and long bureaucratic procedures (Basu, 2004).

The article is divided in five sections, which discuss eGovernment services and democratic issues in the European Union. The first chapter views eGovernment services as a new form of policy making and democratic engagement. The next chapter reviews existing government services in the European Union, while the following one develops the concept of eGovernment as a medium of communication between government and society. We will then discuss the European action plan within the Digital Agenda and the provision of eGovernment services. The empirical chapter formulates a case study that introduces the Open Government approach, which help us draw conclusions on the EU planning regarding online public services. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and potential avenues for future research.

2. A Different Path to Good Governance

Lately, 'governance' and 'good governance' are more and more used in the international development context. The opposite of good governance is considered to be one of the root causes of usual malfunctions within contemporary societies. According to the United Nations, 'good governance' has certain characteristics: "it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law" (UNESCAP, 2007, p. 1). Additionally, it combats corruption, and promotes equal opportunities throughout the society. With the commonly alleged advantages of eGovernment promoting a public services administration that includes all the above and many more, it becomes necessary to explore the vital role of eGovernment to good governance models.

The internet has caused an extraordinary change on society and politics. It has altered the way individuals, groups and institutions are organized, as well as how they relate to each other. Many people nowadays rely on the Internet to connect with family and friends, stay informed and complete daily activities. Frequently, the internet creates new avenues for socio-political outreach and activism. Social networking media and other communicative technologies have shaped the new way in which information is communicated and processed by masses of people (Khazaeli and Stockemer, 2013). If we take social media, for example, Facebook and Twitter rank among the top social media used globally. Given their huge potential for communication, it is hardly surprising that governments, institutions and businesses employ social media.

The internet has also become a vital part of the political life, especially in democracies, where it is seen as the only way to free dialogue between the government and the citizens. Political candidates and public officials use the Internet in order to reach prospective voters or communicate with the citizens. With online presence, political leaders' plea to large demographics, promote a public image and form a renewed relationship with the audience. Citizens rely on the Internet to obtain political information, to keep up with election campaigns, and judge politicians for their pledges (Heeks, 2002). At the same time, transnational actors, citizens and organizations use modern communicative technologies in order to advance their goals.

Most importantly, the internet has redefined the relationship between the media, the state, and citizens. Since private actors and interests can now share in the production of information, the Internet poses a challenge to the state and traditional media's monopoly on knowledge. As control over information determines who holds power in society, authoritarian regimes have tried several times in the past to block sites that damage their authority (Khazaeli and Stockemer, 2013). Unlike conventional forms of media that may be under strict governmental inspection, the internet has proven difficult to regulate on a consistent base. While countries such as China, Iran, Pakistan, and Syria have restricted Facebook and other online sites, these measures have hardly been effective in environments with skilled computer users (as the Arab Spring case has proven) and as more non-governmental organizations (such as ASL-19) offer escape tools to users in despotic countries (Khazaeli and Stockemer, 2013).

The idea behind the eGovernment appeared in the early 1990s, but it was put into practice at the end of the same decade (Netchaeva, 2002). eGovernment services first appeared in industrialized and economically advanced countries. By 2005, Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom and Germany were among the leading eGovernment users (Germanakos et al 2007). Currently, several countries in the world have eGovernment projects; the most economically advanced states appear to have the most advanced eGovernment (Netchaeva, 2002). EGovernment refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies, which have the ability to modernize relations with the society; citizens, businesses and other parts of government. These technologies could assist a number of different purposes: better delivery of government services to citizens, upgraded interactions with business and industry, citizen enablement through direct access to information, and more efficient government management (Basu, 2004). The advantages offered by online

government services can be less corruption, due to increased transparency; greater convenience for both citizens and businesses; revenue growth for the government and/or cost reductions. Usually, the interaction between a citizen or business and a government agency would need to take place in a government office. Developing information and communication technologies make it possible to locate service centres closer to the client. These centres may comprise an unofficial kiosk of the government service, a service kiosk located close to the client, or most commonly through a personal computer in the home or office.

The eGovernment is supported by the regulations and policies of e-government, combining the legal frameworks of both IT governance and global governance. This is supported by the digital society developed by the connected environment. What are the basic features of eGovernment? As a matter of fact 'the quest is multi-dimensional across leadership, policy, economic competitiveness, education, digital citizen services, internal government operations, digital democracy, and enabling technologies for each dimension' (Caldow, 2001). Therefore, according to IBM, multidimensionality is among the basic features of the eGovernment process. In order to maintain a competitive advantage, this multidimensional factor needs to be implemented through the 'seven eGovernment leadership milestones': 'integration, economic development, e-democracy, e-communities, intergovernmental, policy environment, next generation Internet' (Caldow, 2001). In IBM's perception, eGovernment is the base framework for all the different evolutionary changes in the different sectors. It is, for example, impossible to implement e-democracy without eGovernment. This perspective makes clear how eGovernment indeed represents 'an alternate route', a change in perspective as employed in the past, a revolution, in a way for the public administration.

eGovernment initiatives within the administrative domain usually include improving the internal workings of the public sector by: a) cutting process costs: improving the input/output ratio by eliminating financial and time costs, b) managing process performance: planning, monitoring and controlling the performance of process resources, c) making strategic connections in government: connecting departments, agencies, levels and data stores of government to increase the ability to investigate, develop and implement the strategy and policy that guides governmental procedures, d) creating empowerment: transferring power, authority and resources for processes from the existing to new locations (Heeks, 2002).

The evolution of eGovernment has some similarities with the evolution of e-commerce. Similar to e-commerce, which allows businesses to conduct transactions with each other more efficiently and connects customers with businesses, eGovernment's goal is to make interactions between government and citizens or government and business enterprises, and inter-agency relationships more convenient, transparent and inexpensive (Basu, 2004). The value for the public is that government information is publicly accessible; procedures are defined and become more transparent, which improves democracy and public service. Within the government, the administration can also circulate state information through electronic means.

The adoption of eGovernment requires a transfer of government activities into online forms. This transformation aims at the same results with a company that decides transfer a private company's activity to the Internet, i.e. to increase effectiveness. The purpose of eGovernment is to simplify citizens' access to an excessive amount of information. For the public, eGovernment means a simplification of their interaction with government facilitated by internet connections. Thus, the main characteristic of advanced eGovernment is based on this exchange, which defines interactivity. To achieve a satisfying level of interactive eGovernment service, a number of stages have to be followed, according to I. Netchaeva, (2002):

A) The construction of diverse online sections, which will include only specific department information
B) The construction of federal and municipal sites, which will be interactive. Some sites include the function of email, which is very useful and popular among citizens.
C) The development of forums and opinion polls for the users to be able to participate actively in discussions.
D) The creation of central government and departments online services for the simplification of daily procedures, such as paying fines, renewing licenses, registering addresses etc.
E) A unified government portal, which brings together all departments and government organizations nationwide, and offers a variety of different services for the citizens. The portal should give users the opportunity to participate in online discussions, comment on policy and legislation proposals and vote online.

As every society has different needs and priorities, there are no universal standard for eGovernment tendencies. Each society's and government's willingness to establish an effective eGovernment network would depend upon the objectives and specific sectors it chooses as priorities, as well as the resources available at a given time. The necessary pre-conditions for eGovernment depend upon a society's most important needs. For instance, the level of administrative structures, legal framework and human resources needed for eGovernment vary with the objectives (Caldow, 2001). Once a vision and priority sectors are established, it is important to measure how prepared a society is for eGovernment.

Measuring eGovernment readiness involves examination of the government abilities; institutional frameworks, human resources, budgetary resources, communication flows, etc. National infrastructure, economic health, education, information policies, private sector development and other issues are also factors of society's readiness (Basu, 2004). Even in developing countries where problems of low internet connectivity and human resource issues cause problems, creativity and innovative planning can create precise applications, services and information that can be delivered in a useful way to identifiable audiences (Pacific Council on International Policy, 2002).

3. eGovernment Services in the European Union

The global development of eGovernment is the echo of rapid technical developments, competitiveness and efficiency pressures and of course the need to modernize public administrations. eGovernment services are expected to raise the quality of public services and reduce the costs of their delivery, and therefore lead to more transparent government. Except the most expected outcomes eGovernment can promise, there are special European advantages that drive eGovernment: "The diversity and ingenuity of Europe can be a great asset. It offers multiple sources of innovation and collective resilience. As a global region, Europe has a wealth of erudite and respected institutions, and innovative entrepreneurs. Properly supported by quality public services we can use these capabilities for local value and international economic advantage" (European Commission, 2014a).

The need for a consistent European wide eGovernment policy is great for two main reasons. To begin with, there are issues that should be addressed at a European level. These include privacy, security, interoperability and equal accessibility to services from all citizens. What is more, the transmission of technologies and the expanding of the single market have led to new transnational services, which could be centrally developed to support European citizens and businesses, as a whole. Moreover, national governments can learn from common experiences, motivate best practices and foster the development of the best eGovernment systems (Germanakos et al, 2007).

Any aspiring plan of accelerating the whole process of eGovernment 'for all' in the Member-States of the EU, in such a diverse political, social and economic environment, is not an easily implemented plan, quite often, fail to meet their targets, despite of the available resources both of national and community public expenditure. Most importantly, the prolonged economic crisis in Europe has led to significant changes of plans due to severe restrictions in expenditure (Georgiadis et al, 2011). One of the most well-known success stories of eGovernment is 'eEurope'. The eEurope initiatives have been both highly debated and decidedly results oriented. The EU showed its determination to display ability to track, monitor and evaluate the implementation of each action plan, using a comprehensive system of key indicators and benchmarking reports produced and submitted to leaders for review and further action. The intentionally detailed implementation of eEurope and the political commitment of the EU leaders to build and enforce a knowledge-based economy and society 'for all', has placed the EU in the top global, regional and sub-regional actors (Basu, 2004). The positive effects of political will and enforcement are perhaps the first lessons that other countries may learn from eEurope.

The central aim of the European Commission's decision towards eEurope was to reduce bureaucracy among the EU Member-States. However, instead of simplifying the existing national bureaucratic procedures, the bureaucracy forced by the European policies, directives and regulations made the task of automation and public administration procedures even more difficult (Georgiadis et al, 2011). Arguably, national diversity in Europe is a characteristic of plurality and should be encouraged to exist. However, a number of multiple-level activities and services are present in the EU. Examples of difficulties in systems' unification and integration are evident in taxation, insurance and public health.

By the end of the 20th century, the numbers regarding the internet usage in Europe were unsatisfactory (14.1% European internet users by 2000), displaying a large inconsistency among the EU Member-States (Internet World Stats, 2005). To combat these data, a multilingual major project was launched aiming at the PROMotion of Information Society in Europe (PROMISE). The PROMISE work programme 1999 is based on Council Decision 98/253/EC of 30 March 1998 with regards to the Multi-annual Community Programme to Stimulate the Establishment of the Information Society in Europe (PROMISE) (OECD, 2004). Main objectives of the plan were to: to increase consistency and synergy of Member-States' policies, to promote the information society and encourage economic and social actors to move from simple awareness to active participation and real exposure of benefits for the information society. Work areas were grouped into three categories: i) increasing awareness and understanding of the prospective impact of the information society; ii) improving the socio-economic benefits of the information society across Europe; and iii) augmenting Europe's international impact through technological advantage (OECD, 2004).

For the promotion of internet usage and in combination with the 'people and skills' investment, the action plan encouraged projects for improvement of networks of scientific research communities, as a priority. Information Society

Technologies (IST) Programme was launched by the European Commission within the 5th Framework Programme for Research, Technology Development and Demonstration. The EU's plans were documented in an Action Plan published early in the year 2000 (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The action plan aimed to form a knowledge-based society that would guarantee dynamic growth of the economy and a full range of services for all European citizens provided by the information society. The main targets should have been achieved by the year 2010.

The 2002 action plan focused mainly on the consistency of internet and web services throughout Europe. Considering the existing diversity on the available ICT infrastructures in Europe and the enduring computer illiteracy in remote areas of Europe, the procedures had to start from scratch. The 'e-Europe' 2005 Action Plan succeeded the 2002 plan, aiming at encouraging the development of e-services for both the public administrations and private enterprises. It was a rather refocusing programme for research, putting a framework for online services in Europe financed by the 6th Framework and eTEN programmes (OECD, 2001). This time the targets were new projects in eGovernment, e-health, e-inclusion, e-learning and e- security available by 2010, taking into account the enlargement of the EU.

The 2005 eEurope mid-term review highlighted that there had been an impressive increase since 2000 in the number of households connected. Internet usage in the EU was up to only 37% in 2005 (Georgiadis et al, 2011). However, there was no evidence of increased productivity. It was, hence, decided that the focus should be on how to increase usage and on encouraging the development of new businesses and services that will attract new demand (European Commission, 2004a). Some more specific actions for online services in relation to their contributing factors had been also suggested by the European Commission, with emphasis on the adoption of copyright EU legislation, provision of distance marketing services and financial services, as well as control on electronic services. Correspondingly, the European Commission had specified actions and provisions for secure application of online e-health systems and services (Georgiadis et al, 2011). To respond to these data, the i2010 initiative was launched in an effort to implement the new Lisbon strategy towards a sustainable growth of a more inclusive information society.

The i2010 initiative was no more than a strategic framework for the information society and media. ICT was defined as the driving power of digital economy and competiveness, the one to drive through "inclusion and quality of life" (European Commission, 2005). As a result, by the year 2010 the figures of Internet usage and broadband Internet access in Europe improved up to 70% and 60% by the European households and individuals respectively (Seybert and Lööf, 2010). At the same time, the EC issued an Action Plan on eGovernment (included in the i2010 initiative), which aimed to increase the efficiency of public administration services and comply with the needs of citizens and businesses. In total, the plan instructed effective public services, provision of secure services, reduction of bureaucracy and cross boarder integration of public services for sustainable citizens' mobility.

In order to meet these objectives, the plan of the European Commission enclosed five priorities: i) No barriers should restrict the citizens to access online services. By the year 2010, all citizens should enjoy eGovernment services. ii) The digital gap should be further eliminated and the Member-States should reduce administrative problems using innovative eGovernment services by the year 2010. iii) eGovernment priority is given to high impact horizontal cross-border services. eProcurement and public contracts should be carried out electronically by 2010. iv) eGovernment services should be improved. Interoperability in identification management, document authentication and eArchiving procedures, as well as secure systems of mutual recognition of national websites identifiers are the results of this digital enforcement. v) eDemocracy (via eGovernment services) and increased ICT use, which has led to noteworthy citizen participation in decision-making, is of significant importance (Cimander et al, 2009).

By the year 2010 the economic crisis required new measures and created the necessity for the "Digital Agenda for Europe". The EC proposed the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020; however a very low degree of adapting ICT innovations in the productivity and in public administrations was still evident until 2010 (e.g. only 1.9% of the EU GDP was spent to research for innovation) (Euractiv, 2010). As a matter of fact, the agenda was an effort to "wider deployment and more effective use of digital technologies", therefore the improvement of competiveness, better health services, environmental conditions and more opportunities, stimulating innovation were among the measures that would help to drive economic growth. As a step in stone to achieve year's 2020 goals, the EC adopted seven priority areas one of which is the Digital Agenda for Europe. This Agenda pursued the availability and connectivity of all Europeans to high speed Internet, which will encourage the creation of a Digital Single Market (European Commission, 2011). The ambitious goal of the 2011-2015 is to increase the take-up of eGovernment services considerably by 2015: 50% of citizens and 80% of businesses should use eGovernment services (European Commission, 2009). Additionally, high priority was given on the ongoing need for in-depth studies, in particular to the different stages of implementation in individual Member-States. EC uses the results of studies to target EU financial support and to adapt policy initiatives in the field of eGovernment (European Commission, 2009).

In 2013, eGovernment services have been used by 41% of the EU28 population (50% is the target to be reached

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for 2015), 3% less than in 2012 and nearly at the same level usage as in 2011. In 2014, it is estimated that only 9 out of 28 countries are above the 2015 targets, namely DK, NL, SE, FI, FR, LU, AT, SI, BE, and about 7 countries increased usage in 2013. In five countries (RO, IT, BG, PL and HR) online public services are used by less than a 25% of the population and the eGovernment actions display a delay in implementation. Additionally, almost 73.3% of European internet users used at least one public authority online service in 2013 (European Commission, 2014b). The following graph demonstrates the eGovernment use discrepancies in the EU28.
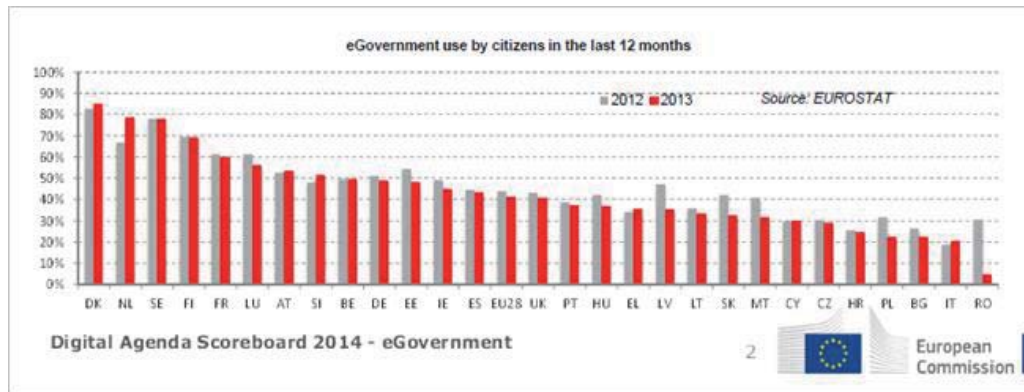
Source: European Commission, 2014b

On the one hand, eGovernment service developments are closely related to the general ICT impact and developments on information societies. On the other hand, it is also evident that eGovernment service development entails economic and social progress made. Hence, the various initiatives taken by the EC to diminish heterogeneity of the ICT services provided to the European citizens throughout Europe, only aim to improve knowledge-based economy and quality of life for each Member-State. In progressing eGovernment, many services have been implemented nationally, aiming at saving time and effort in their interaction with public sector procedures to the citizens. In a multi-national environment such as the EU, with a variety of social, financial and environmental conditions, life of Europeans and particularly those of young age is becoming more demanding and complex. Increasing complexity of services offered to Europeans due to the economic crisis, and the necessity of improved multilingual eGovernment services becomes apparent (Georgiadis et al, 2011). Obviously, the economic crisis hit many European countries over the last years and has delayed the efforts and investments on the implementation of eGovernment services, needed by the citizens. As a result, the existing eGovernment services fail to meet the current needs not only of citizens or business, but also the needs of interaction between government organizations, departments and local authorities.

In evaluating eGovernment services, a key element in question is the completeness (or the maturity) of the existing service. Other important and neglected causes of deficiencies in benchmarking are related to negligence of the interrelationship of an eGovernment service to the organizational structure and the back-office processes (Ojo et al, 2007). The factor of 'e-readiness' from the citizen side to use the offered services varies based on social and cultural local developments or mentalities. E-readiness motivation programmes and projects have been funded and many researchers and international organisations have developed models and directories to assess global e-readiness in various ICT services, like e-business for market economy integration and global digital inclusion (Ojo et al, 2007). Fundamentally, eGovernment readiness is evaluated taking into account a specific number of indicators, the most important of which are: i) existence of the appropriate ICT infrastructure, ii) maturity of online services and iii) support in providing advisory and decision-making services. The variation of these indicators is used for assessing eGovernment readiness for different countries. Amongst the well-developed systems for estimating e-readiness is UNDESA, which employs 16 'core' indicators that cover telecommunication network infrastructure, human capacity development and online presence, as well as e-Participation, e-Information, e-Consultation and e-Decision Making (United Nations, 2008).

The EC framework programmes were launched aiming to adapt Europe to the information age and kick-off the transition to a knowledge based economy, enjoying higher growth, job availability and e-services for all citizens. The EC's initiatives towards Europe's transition to a knowledge based economy have been developed in phases and have been continually ordering new action plans in an effort to generate the prospective benefits of the information age, i.e. ICT innovations, Internet and web services for all citizens, public administrations and businesses (Council and the European Commission, 2000). In reality, eEurope was nothing but a policy framework with no funds but directives of how to use and

re-allocate public funds in order to fulfil the directives provided. Therefore, the e-Europe 2002 Action Plan focusing to a faster, cheaper and 'open to all' Internet was quickly followed by the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan, focusing on broadband technologies and their use for online services targeted to all citizens and in both the public and private sector (Georgiadis et al, 2011).

Although eEurope programmes were focused on EU strategy and did not offer extra funds but needed to use public funds from existing expenditure, the EU Member-States followed these policies almost unescapably. Also, the EC was successful in improving internet connection throughout Europe and support the Member-States in the adoption of the required legal frameworks for opening the communication networks; applying new business practices (e.g. eCommerce, eHealth etc.). Nonetheless, despite the amount dedicated on this action plan and the complexity of certain eGovernment services, the results are not satisfactory in terms of broadness and general applicability (Georgiadis et al, 2011). There is still inconsistency from state to state in the levels of ICT systems adaptation by public administrations. This inconsistency explains why the EC tried to encourage quality network infrastructures, development of attractive applications and services and organisational transformations. Another goal of the EC should be on new initiatives to join efforts so that the Member-States could exchange knowledge and know-how, providing support to each other through more joint public administration activities.

The EC has continued with tireless planning, framework programmes and horizontal ICT and eGovernment project support, but there are still rural areas in EU with poor network infrastructure, citizens not taking advantage of eGovernment services, businesses lacking integration to wider markets and the EU lacks into the image of a competitive - based economy. Furthermore, the global economic crisis has weakened more the weak economies of the EU and unemployment figures are continuously growing. While in general, the EU Member-States have introduced important projects in their effort to develop their eGovernment services and have achieved to advance technologically on world scale, there are still Member-States with low performance on the availability of eGovernment services. Nevertheless, there are Member-States with low performance on the availability of eGovernment services, which need to focus their efforts in redesigning their national priorities within the eGovernment sector.

In general, continuous efforts in the field of digital adaptation of Europe have paid dividends, considering that the internet use has been impressively high compared to the end of the 20th century. With an average penetration of 76.5% in EU 28 one should recognise the progress being made (Internet World Stats, 2014). More specifically, particular efforts should also be made to attract citizens and promote the use of eGovernment services. Apparently, countries of low performance on eGovernment services are likely facing problems with ICT infrastructure and should thus give emphasis to firstly improve their general ICT indices. Further efforts should be focused on the improvement of broadband networks, as well as the elimination of the digital divide between states. Inequality has reached high levels in the rural areas of EU creating problems for the less privileged EU citizens.

4. Developing the Relationship of Citizens with the Government

The development of eGovernment must be examined in the context of the individual citizen and their relationship to their government. From a historical perspective, government rule was connected to the monarch. As technology and communication increased though history, the middle classes were no longer satisfied to submit to the monarch's total control, and forced for the sharing of the power. This trend continues through history, as communication and technology increases and it becomes available to the individual citizen, whose power increases considerably. eGovernment is the most recent step in this evolution that empowers the individuals to protect their rights and have their voice heard by their government. Different cultures demonstrate a diverse rate of evolution in history, but it appears that as communication and technology improves, the relative power position of the individual improves relative to that of the government (Evans and Yen, 2006).

Many nations have incorporated information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a way to increase government transparency and reduce corruption. As a matter of fact, the fight against corruption has received a great emphasis in newer applications of ICTs by certain governments. The use of social media is a central part of some of these more recent initiatives, focusing on transparency and anti-corruption (Bertot et al, 2012). By reviewing transparency initiatives and issues related to the use of ICTs, social media and eGovernment, we want to explore the ways in which these technologies facilitate collaboration between governments and members of the society in promoting democracy. Older studies have examined the correlation between the evolution of eGovernment services and the reduction of corruption. The results of those surveys showcased a connection between the levels of ICT development with observed level of public sector corruption. ICT is the essential pre-condition for eGovernment and a source of technological innovations in the public sector. At the same time, the ICT infrastructure and usage can indicate the level of eGovernment

evolution (Proskuryakova et al, 2013; Grönlung and Flygare, 2011). Data demonstrate matching demand for public e-services and perceived corruption. The EU Members-States that rank high by demand of public e-services indicator are Denmark, Finland, Netherlands and Sweden, countries that are also listed among the top ten in Corruption Perception Index, known as CPI (Proskuryakova et al, 2013).

In democracy, the provision of information to citizens and the ability of citizens to monitor the activities of the government play an important role. ICT systems and eGovernment can be utilised in many key government areas against corruption, though the influence of culture often makes social change the largest challenge in openness and anti-corruption initiatives. Nonetheless, many anti-corruption policies have focused on economic incentives rather than economic incentives, controlling discretionary power of government officials through a system of rules (Brautigam, 1992). To the contrary, ICTs offer countries a new approach to creating transparency. Many nations with transparency laws have linked the implementation of these laws to the implementation of ICT-based initiatives, and they have often use eGovernment (Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Additionally, ICTs have the ability to promote good governance, strengthen reform initiatives, reduce potential for corrupt behaviors, and strengthen relationships between government employees and citizens, allowing for citizen to monitor their activities, and monitor behaviors of government employees (Bertot et al, 2012). To achieve the above goals, ICT initiatives must move from increasing information access and ensuring that the rules are transparent and applied to the decisions and actions of government employees (Bhatnagar, 2003). Many governments envisage the use of ICTs as the means to the promotion of efficiency and transparency, at the same time. ICTs are, in general, considered to be an effective means for achieving these goals, but social attitudes can minimise their effectiveness as an anti-corruption tool. Taxes and government contracts are the usual areas, where eGovernment has proved to be a clear and successful solution to corruption problems. Nations across the Americas, Asia, and Europe have all claimed successes in reducing corruption through eGovernment (Bhatnagar, 2003).

Looking at the direct advantages of using eGovernment, the automation provided will help to increase customer service levels and decrease costs. The development of an eGovernment system mainly helps to distribute information, but the attitude of the citizens, who are the customers, is important, not irrelevant. Furthermore, it will help the collection of information that facilitates decision-makers' work (Evans and Yen, 2006). eGovernment aid government agencies in centralizing decision-making and purchasing in order to reduce costs. The centralization of certain activities will eliminate costly dysfunctions. The use of information technologies in eGovernment has been evolving for many decades. What is being seen as an added value to the eGovernment systems are applications that provide information on websites, as well as the undertaking of some online transactions. However, the gap between eGovernment and eCommerce uses of online competences, especially in business may be widening. This could possibly be explained by the general failure of the public sector to address opportunities opened by Web 2.0 innovations, as quickly as the private sector to opportunities (Dutton & Peltu, 2007). If there is a potential for the public services to transform successfully, rather than maintain the traditional approaches, we should focus on the reasons public services resist to internal flexibility. Approaching, for example, the negativity of the public sector staff to embrace and support a network governance model. Motivating individuals and working groups in the public sector would be the key to welcoming online innovations that have added value for citizens.

Despite the fact that eGovernment and eCommerce have different objectives and cultures, eGovernment can learn lessons from business. Especially business that develops more advanced online applications can be of much value in the development of eGovernment systems. The digital networks' ability to understand customers and treat them according to their particular requirements is an example that demonstrates the value of online expertise private services embrace. This specific example in an eGovernment context could be of benefit in learning how to help tailor public services to citizens' requirements and to demonstrate concrete 'value-added' benefits of going online (Dutton & Peltu, 2007).

However, the concept of eGovernment has not only created opportunities but challenges, as well. Some serious concerns about permitting this amount of information to be held by the government alone are valid. A) While the government may theoretically seem like a generous organization, it is always possible that in the future specific governments or parties might use this information to harm the citizens of this country. Citizens need to be reassured that this information will be stored in a secure environment by a government and treated with strict confidentiality (Evans and Yen, 2006). B) A good advice would be to use e-business concepts in the process of automation. There is not point to systematise out-of-date procedures, because that would mean automating a mistake. A full analysis is in need before any procedures are automated. And since main procedures will not require human intervention after becoming automated, it is vital that they are developed in a flexible way to change with future requirements (Evans and Yen, 2006). C) Another basic concern is censorship. It would be possible for certain people in the government to monitor web activity and censor information when that information does not agree with what the government wants. China provides an apt example of how eGovernment design and implementation has been used to strengthen the governmental control over other entities,

such as enterprises and citizens (Kluver, 2005).

Beyond the finance, content, and responsiveness of eGovernment, it is also vital to examine how the public feels about the digital government. The way in which citizens evaluate eGovernment is the factor that will shape how online democracy will shape the future (West, 2004). To adopt eGovernment processes, citizens must have the intention to 'engage in eGovernment', which incorporates the intentions to: receive information, to provide information and to request eGovernment services (Warkentin et al, 2003). Whether citizens exchange information electronically, given the choice between an online process and a traditional method depends on a number of variables. The significance of these variables should be understood as a group, which is critical to the overall eGovernment adoption model.

A) Trust is a central defining aspect of many economic and social interactions; it is the belief that the other party will behave as expected in a socially responsible manner, and in doing so, it will fulfil the trusting party's expectations (Mayer et al. 1995). Therefore, trust reduces the social complexity that leads to social relations of independence and thus reduces the risk and uncertainty involved in social interactions. Trust is crucial in economic transactions, as well because it reduces the victims of opportunism. Presumably, the same should apply to tax payments, where the interaction is technically one-sided in favour of the government.

B) Technology acceptance is defining for the adoption of online government services (Chuttur, 2009). This also applies to website use, where 'perceived usefulness' and 'perceived ease of use' influence Internet adoption. "Perceived usefulness is the degree that users believe that a particular system facilitates their activity. Perceived ease of use is the degree that users believe that using the system is easy, and that it directly increases perceived usefulness" (Warkentin et al, 2003). Applied to the eGovernment context, a web interface that is perceived as helpful to the interaction process and easy to operate, is likely to increase citizen's intentions to use it.

C) Finally, culture is very likely to contribute to the adoption or social resistance to eGovernment. According to Hofstede, there five cultural factors that affect how people interact. Of these five, power distance is the most likely to influence eGovernment adoption and use by citizens. Power distance is a measure of how people at the lower social classes of society differ from those at the top. In high power distance societies, 'whoever holds the power is right and good' and members of the non-ruling class are more likely to obey instruction from those who rule (Hofstede, 1997, p. 43). The higher power distance is the more it influences intentions to engage in eGovernment. The second culture factor that should influence eGovernment adoption is uncertainty avoidance. The greater the cultural tendency to avoid uncertainty (i.e. risk), the greater the impact of trust on eGovernment adoption. As a matter of cast, cultures that tend to avoid uncertainty, trust is more important as a prerequisite of joint business ventures. Therefore, higher uncertainty avoidance will reinforce the positive effect of citizen trust on intentions to engage in eGovernment.

It is becoming evident that as trust is an important element of eGovernment, respective governments should examine some actions to stimulate this trust. The building of democratic trust via eGovernment can be completed by efforts that force existing trust in government, to increase citizen security with the usage of the service transaction mechanisms of the eGovernment (Warkentin et al, 2003). The use of eGovernment is not what causes this increase in trust, but it is a factor worth exploring in future research. Finally, increasing people's confidence and trust in government through eGovernment is an outcome worth pursuing.

eGovernment gives the opportunity for governments to demonstrate their legitimacy and provide basic civic education online that will increase citizen understanding on the responsibility of government. The effectiveness of eGovernment and democracy will increase as soon as online users understand how they benefit from eGovernment. To effectively participate in the government's workings, you need access to the ground base, which includes information on the proper way to make freedom of information requests that go beyond what government shares online (Cliff, 2004). Without these ordinary information mechanisms in place, encouraging deeper public participation will lack the necessary foundation.

The service and convenience benefits of eGovernment are broadly publicized. If services properly employ administrative knowledge on user satisfaction, eGovernment services can help government avoid common organisational problems and set priorities. The goal of increasing citizen satisfaction and service towards them is the bridging effect between traditional eGovernment and online efforts to promote participatory democracy (Cliff, 2004). At least, governments need to take into account structures input and useful feedback, when they design online transaction services and information portals. eGovernment services do not operate in a competitive environment; they do not compete with other government websites. However, they are evaluated by citizens, who assess eGovernment services based on the time required for procedures to be completed and preference among thousands of other online applications they use every day. One useful idea would be to start considering online portals, which are the main source of online

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political and government news, as online aggregators for more website visitors.

Despite the fact that some may suggest eDemocracy implementation as a separate policy work, it would also make sense making eDemocracy available in an integrated way across the eGovernment service (Cliff, 2004). Government built eDemocracy tools are best implemented as part of a whole eGovernment technological design, rather than as an individual application connected to eGovernment. Governments need to avoid separating eDemocracy services from the substance of their technical expertise and resources, especially in societies where familiarity with eGovernment tools is considerably low. Interestingly, a Web Watch research reveals that what citizens declare they want from online services and that they actually do online are two very different things. People declare they want strong privacy policies, but very few access them (WebWatch Report, 2002). Similarly, people frequently ask for accountable eGovernment, but is unknown how many evaluate eGovernment services by using them. Learning what users do online will help governments to prioritize investments and enhance information access, as well as service transactions and building new tools.

eParticipation is another form of the democratic nature of eGovernment, but their efforts need to reach people in order to be effective. Unlike other organisations, governments have the obligation to provide reasonable access to their services and democratic processes. Universal access to the internet is still a political challenge and the digital divide is often cited as the reason for low participation in online projects. Again, based on the understanding on what proportion of the society is connected and why, the government can develop online efforts, which complement existing forms of participation and work to ensure that many and diverse voices are heard. In the transitional economies of Europe, the connectivity devices should be developed; email and the web can provide a participatory structure for collecting input and traditional mass media and facilitate the public interface that generates citizens input.

From representative institutions to decision-making procedures within governments, ICT can prove very useful in making political procedures more efficient and hopefully more effective. Compared to online campaigning and eGovernment, the ICTs use by parliaments, local council and other public services is at least understudied (Cliff, 2004). In order to strengthen citizen participation, which could be described as an imperative goal in the information age, the role of the internet in these institutions should be given more attention in the future. Citizens will engage their representatives in governance when they feel attached to the political outcomes. As indifference about politics is among common reasons for political abstention, citizens frequently feel their voices are not being heard or their input does not matter. "While it is generally accepted that many citizens do not have a stake, ICT can be used to bring citizen's input and deliberation into representative political processes. These procedures have direct political power and authority. They are simply an external exercise or academic experiment" (West, 2004, p. 24). Thus, enhancing citizen participation in democratic procedures through eGovernment is an effective way to enhance representativeness and therefore democracy in the society. Given the nature of eGovernment change, it is little surprise that eGovernment has not increased trust or confidence in government. It will take major improvements in government performance in order for the public to transform itself into trusting and non-cynical citizens (West, 2004). However, there is some evidence that more exposure to eGovernment leads to greater confidence in the online public sector.

5. The European eGovernment Action Plan

Though earlier reference was made to the Action Plans issued by the European Commission over the past two decades, we come back to the eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015 to examine the ambitions of the programme from a strategic point of view. Both the European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-15 and the Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment support the use of ICT in civic life. But also the Europe for Citizens Program (2007-2013) promoted initiatives that simplify the active participation in the civic and democratic life of the European Union (Mahmood, 2014). The new action plan is looking to exploit the general capacities of ICT to promote smart administration, innovation and sustainability (Europa, 2000). The Digital Agenda for Europe sets eGovernment within a comprehensive set of measures intended to exploit the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICT) across Europe (European Commission, 2010). At a time of highly constrained public resources, ICT can help the public sector develop innovative ways of delivering services to citizens while releasing efficiencies and minimising costs (European Commission, 2010).

The European eGovernment Action Plan is the Commission's response to the Member-States' call for a shared eGovernment policy in the EU, as defined in the 2009 Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment (European Commission, 2009a). The European Commission has drawn an aspiring programme to work with Member-States' public systems to improve the services on offer via the internet (Euractiv, 2010). The new eGovernment Action Plan predicted no more or less than forty specific measures between 2011 and 2015, in order to enable citizens and businesses to use online facilities. The promotion of eGovernment is seen as a boost for Europe's competitiveness and public authorities to offer improved services cost-effectively (European Commission, 2010). At the heart of the Digital Agenda, the

eGovernment services aimed to use information and communication technologies, in order to improve the access to public services for European citizens. The specific Digital Agenda goals include: a) to make eGovernment services more accessible for use, up to 50% of EU citizens and 80% of EU businesses by 2015 and b) to ensure that key public services are available online, as to facilitate online entrepreneurship from anywhere within the EU, and that citizens can study, work, reside and retire anywhere within the EU (European Commission, 2010).

Additionally, the European eGovernment Action Plan aim to simplify the eGovernment service with a new generation of open and flexible eGovernment services at local, regional, and national level. The Plan aimed to counterbalance discrepancies of online use between the Member-States and to open the way for citizen users to actively contribute to the form of online service, according to their needs. National governments have the most important role in the implementation of the Action Plan, whilst the Commission's main responsibility has been focused on improving the development of cross-border eGovernment services. This process includes establishing pre-conditions, such as interoperability, eSignatures and eIdentification (European Commission, 2010). The Action Plan, specifically, draws attention to the following categories of action:

A. User empowerment includes services planned to satisfy users' needs, combined development of services, recycling of public information, enhanced transparency, and contribution of both citizens and business in policy-making (European Commission, 2010).

    Empowering users includes European businesses, which means creating an environment, which promotes competitiveness and good business practice. In this context, the action of starting up a company should be simplified, to the extent of enjoying an efficient bureaucracy, and fewer obstacles that usually repress entrepreneurship in Europe. In the current economic climate this should be a priority, particularly for the smaller businesses, where administrative burdens are excessively high and capacity is low. Empowering users also include citizens, meaning encouraging and motivating citizens to become engaged users of government services. For instance, the action of finding a job should focus on the administrative procedures and online services that support people, who have lost a job and help to return them into the productive economy.

B. The strengthening of the Internal Market includes seamless services for businesses, improvement of the personal mobility scheme, and EU-wide application of cross-border services (European Commission, 2010).

    The majority of public services, which are available online do not work across borders or involve burdensome procedures to be accessible. This creates problems to people from one EU country that want to access public services in another country than the one they live in. Also, this reduces severely the mobility of businesses and citizens. To support the Internal Market, governments should develop 'seamless' services for entrepreneurs and individuals to be able to set up business, to study, work, receive health care and retire anywhere in the European Union (European Commission, 2010a).

C. Improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of public administrations includes enriching organisational processes, minimising of administrative problems, Green Government (European Commission, 2010).

    For the purposes of efficiency and effectiveness, the importance of diligent coordination and collaboration should be highlighted. No matter the governance structure of a country, careful and constant coordination of eGovernment activities and collaboration are key factors to achieve steady progress (CapGemini et al, 2010). The success in achieving a shift from traditional public service to user centric online public services depends greatly on the countries' success to manage that shift internationally and intra-nationally. It makes clear why policy matters (European Commission, 2014a). There are important political and economic reasons to support European collaboration on eGovernment. Joint action on eGovernment policies can contribute to overcoming the current economic crisis by using public resources more efficiently and reducing public expenditures (European Commission, 2010). eGovernment services can be developed more economically by coordinating and pooling public and private resources (European Commission, 2010). It is vital for every country to address the cultural and institutional factors that make administrations operate as they do, such as funding arrangements, accountability issues, insufficient incentives to pioneering and risk averseness etc.

D. Creating pre-conditions for evolving eGovernment includes open specifications and interoperability, as well as establishment of key enablers (European Commission, 2010).

    Obviously, these policy priorities cannot be implemented without the support of technical solutions, which ensure security and privacy, without compromising interoperability. The Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 quotes both "Interoperability and Standards" and "Trust and Security" as core pillars for progress in Europe (among 7 pillars adopted in 2012, including digital single market, fast internet, research and innovation, digital literacy and ICT-enabled benefits). The considerations made the point that there is a need to propose legislation on ICT interoperability, promote standard-setting rules and adopt a European Interoperability Strategy and

Framework (European Commission, 2009). ISA (Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations) is the European Commission's program to improve interoperability among public administrations in EU Member-States. ISA runs from 2010 to 2015 and has a financial budget of 164m euros, to coordinate eGovernment activities, and particularly transaction, through establishing common frameworks in support of interoperability and promoting reusable generic tools and common services (European Commission, 2014). The evaluation of the program by ISA metrics demonstrates an overall satisfactory degree of implementation of actions, with more than 84% of actions being in a 'good' track, 11.36% needing further attention and a small 4.54% causing concern of delay (European Commission, 2014c).

Additionally, the current state of IT enablers in the European Union countries remains problematic. The availability of back office enablers is great; however more is required to ensure an administrative transition from paper-based to digital service provision. Key enablers define the extent to which a number of necessary technical preconditions are met (European Commission, 2014a). According to European Commission (2009), these include:

a. Electronic Identification (eID), to secure access to online services
b. Electronic Documents (eDocuments), to ensure information is transmitted through authenticated documents
c. Authentic sources, to retrieve customer data through base registries
d. Electronic Safe (eSafe), to use secure electronic means for the storage and retrieval of information
e. Single Sign On (SSO), to enable the access to multiple systems with one log on

The enablers in place need to evolve further: the Electronic Identification (eIDs) needs to become eSignature enabled, the coverage of Single Sign On needs to be extended to additional administrations and services, and secure eDelivery or Electronic Safe mechanisms to provide requested services online (CapGemini et al, 2010). When compared to the building blocks that are available, actual usage of the enablers in eGovernment service appears low. Additionally, there is lack of monitoring of the adoption, usability and impact of key enablers. Only about half of the countries (EE, PT, AT, LT, ES, FR, FI, LV, SE, DK, NO, SI, NL, TR, BE, MT) are monitoring the usage of these enablers (European Commission, 2014a).

Strengthening international collaboration, on a European level, in order to create the necessary frameworks for the encouragement of ICT professionalism, is an important step forward and needs to continue (European Commission, 2014a). As we saw earlier, on an EU level there is major recognition of the importance of collaborative eGovernment, but no policy actions have been proposed yet. The overall review of individual Member-States' policies on collaborative service delivery show that there is no EU country having a policy action in this field, excluding legislation to open and public sector information data (Osimo et al, 2012). Collaboration in eGovernment is not to date mentioned as a priority in any policy document under study (Osimo et al, 2012). To match the potential of the digital revolution and keep up with global competition, Europe needs to transform the skills, knowledge and capability of the workforce. Working together, industry, education and government have the power to ensure long-term action and success that will deliver jobs, competitiveness and productivity growth (McCormack, 2014).

6. The Open Government Approach

The Open Government approach, which was initiated by the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, is a global effort to improve the government services. Improvement includes more transparent, effective and accountable governments, consisting from institutions that authorize people and are proactive to their concerns. OGP originally aims to secure actual commitments from governments on their role to promote transparency and accountability, empower citizens, fight against corruption and bring in new technologies to a new way of governance (Open Government Partnership, 2014).

More than half of the EU Member-States (UK, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain and Sweden) had joined the Open Government Partnership by September 20, 2011. The countries signed the Open Government Declaration and committed in the delivery of a country action plan developed with public consultation in March 2012, as well as to individual reporting and follow up on their progress (Osimo et al, 2012). The OGP declaration signed calls for the increase of accessibility of public information data and increasing of civic participation in government activities (Open Government Partnership, 2014). The Open Government Partnership has unquestionably offered a good practice example of government management drove the participating countries to extend their engagement. However, not all EU Member-States have joined the partnership, which created the fear of augmenting already existing differences in open data and citizen engagement in the EU. The introduction of Open Data policy on the European level aimed to prevent such inconsistencies.

The open government approach can enable the online transformation that Europe is in need of. This pattern is accomplished by opening up public data and services and simplifying collaboration for the design, production and delivery of public service. It also involves making government processes and decisions open, in order to raise citizen participation and engagement (European Commission, 2009). Open data can enable the development of new services, encourage new markets, businesses and jobs, by promoting information provided in original data by government. The use of big data in Europe's largest governments will have an estimated reduction of administrative costs by 15% to 20%. Open and integrated public services can be used by different administrations, as well as by businesses and citizens, in order to deliver personalised, user-friendly and innovative services (European Commission, 2009).

The Commission is focusing on creating value through reuse of a specific type of data - public sector information or government data. That includes the information that public bodies produce, collect or pay for. For example, geographical information, statistics, data from publicly funded research and online books from libraries. Former Vice President of the European Commission, Neelie Kroes, has outlined the importance of open data for the future of Europe: "A better use of data will contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the creation of jobs and the promotion of web-entrepreneurship and start-ups throughout the EU. We estimate that overall economic gains from significantly reducing the barriers to reusing such government-held data can amount to € 40bn a year for the entire EU. While data held by any kind of entity is potentially interesting, our open data policy starts with opening up data collected and held by government institutions, ranging from the meteorological institutes to economic analyses produced by statistical offices. Such data has already been paid for by the taxpayer and should be therefore available for reuse" (Kroes, 2013).

The progress made on this field already can be called rather satisfactory. The open data enthusiasts have organised open data camps, hackathons and other community building events. Furthermore, some EU countries (e.g. UK, Denmark etc.) put in place guidelines for public data reuse on the national or regional level (National Archives, 2013; Horst, 2014). As a result of an ongoing coordination, all EU countries have adopted an open data strategy even though there are still important differences in the level of commitment. The European Public Sector Information Platform directive (PSI) has been transferred by all EU Member-States, and came up with national legislation to enable its use (Osimo et al, 2012). The PSI Directive is one of the key pillars of the open data policy, for two reasons; on a practical level, it creates certain rights for re-users: that all will be treated equally, that administrative charges will not surpass certain limits, that charges and licensing conditions will be made transparent. On a broader lever, the PSI Directive is active in altering the culture inside public administrations towards greater openness (Kroes, 2013). Additionally, some of the Member-States have expanded their legislations reinforcing the re-use rules for their countries, e.g. France (Joshi, 2011) promoting the open data re-use.

Finally, according to the 11th eGovernment Benchmark report, there is room for improvement in the field of transparency. The overall EU score on the transparency indicator was only 48%, which is mainly due to insufficient information provided to users during delivery of eGovernment services (European Commission, 2014a). The indicator examines the extent to which governments are transparent about their own responsibilities and performance, the service delivery and the personal data involved (European Commission, 2014a). Transparency levels are somewhat higher when it comes to provision of institutional information or administrations, or information concerning the personal data involved in service delivery (European Commission, 2014a). Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to reach a level of fully open and transparent public services and organizations. In general, transparency is an important element for increasing the take up of online public services as well. Since transparency helps to build the trust of citizens in public administrations, the data show that this feature is still not sufficiently at the center of eGovernment strategies for many governments (European Commission, 2014). As an innovative, participatory and ambitious obviously initiative, the open government approach gives EU citizens a tool to improved accountability at EU level and increases the EU's new leaders commitment to a more open, transparent and accountable European Union.

7. Conclusions

Although there is an obvious shift of governmental services from traditional networks to web-based ones, a delay in evolution of online services is apparent in Europe. The work done on the development of eGovernment services and the different points of view on the concept of eGovernment provide us with a list of aspects, standards and scopes on the issue. In this article, we covered a number of perspectives (political, technical, and regulatory) that view the development of online services from a governmental portal. Our effort was to explore the aspects and scopes that influence the quality of the offered services and the consequential satisfaction of the citizens.

Europe has demonstrated the ability to address the challenges ahead. This is already happening, through the number of ambitious actions plans since the beginning of the 22nd century, which led the European states in the

information age. However, there is still need for a more synchronised approach. Europe's future lies in the hands of its citizens. National initiatives bear, always, huge importance for the direction and development of policies, but a coordinated pan-European direction will increase Europe's global leadership. At the same time, information age societies should be able to facilitate the will of their citizens. Democratic outcomes should be taken into consideration in forthcoming eGovernment efforts and funding. We have, in earlier chapter, illustrated a number of factors that validate the values of democratic commitment, supported by ICT tools and strategies. We can develop the democratic concept and involve citizens more with ICTs, as soon as we realize not only the potential, but also the reality of online applications.

Governments have the first word in designing and implementing social policies to solve societal problems. Unlike business, they are not stalled by the need to deliver short term results, but they can plan and implement for the long term. It has become evident from our analysis that EU actions secure only a slow progress in eGovernment issues, which will not deliver on the advantage that Europe has to offer. Brand new and innovative ways are in need to achieve better outcomes and meet the expectations of governments, stakeholders and citizens. The experience gained from existing eGovernment projects in Europe should be used to improve and upgrade the capacities of future systems, as well as to draw recommendations on their social value. The continuous development of eGovernment training programmes for public services and business, the promotion of online learning and orchestrated communication efforts to raise awareness on the social benefits of eGovernment will help to gradually build social trust, which will allow eGovernment to grow further in Europe.

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