

ICA COUNTRY REPORT

Hungary

Information policy and ICT coordination

After the change in government of 2002, a dual-structural system began to crystallise, in which, within the organisational framework of the Prime Minister's Office, an office responsible for government IT began operations, treating government IT issues in a narrow sense as a separate specialised policy. At the same time, the Ministry of Informatics and Communications (MIC) was established, whose principal task is to undertake uniform and comprehensive professional work relating to the information society.

There was a need to develop the dual structure – mainly to ensure the smoothness of the transition – despite the fact that the issues of the information society cannot be separated radically from each other, since the establishment of an electronic Hungary (eHungary) affects many other specialised policies. Thus the issues of electronic government form a part of electronic public administration. The organisational structure being formed in Hungary is characterised by duality. With the establishment of the body responsible for electronic government, priority has been given – within the information society strategy – to the development of central government IT and the establishment of a coherent government strategy.

In practice, therefore, government IT in Hungary rests on several pillars. One of the pillars is the MIC, which embraces the whole system and is responsible for, among other things, the Hungarian Information Society Strategy (HISS). The Ministry is the principal body responsible for public administration IT in its broadest sense. The other pillar is the forming Electronic Government Centre (EGC), as the body with specific responsibility for IT matters concerning central public administration.

In respect of the IT tasks, the scope of authority of the Ministry of IT and Communications (MIC) includes – inter-alia – the planning, implementation and operation (at central and local government level) of public administration programmes (public administration IT). The tasks and functions of the Ministry are comprehensive in respect of local government IT – including the operation of the records' offices, with the exception of information systems serving the administration of elections.

We may state, therefore, that Hungary does have a ministry designated as the principal body responsible for the management of electronic public administration: the MIC. Nevertheless, the situation is more complex than this. As an examination of the tasks and functions of the MIC demonstrates, in the narrow sense of government IT, the Minister of Informatics tends to have rights of consultation and agreement. A government commissioner, that is, the head of the Electronic Government Centre (EGC), which functions under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, co-ordinates the electronic government policies at central level. We may consider the commissioner Hungary's Chief Information Officer (CIO) in the field of governmental IT.

The EGC elaborates the Government's electronic government service-provider strategy relating to the general tasks of government IT and the development of electronic government. It provides for the organisation of the realisation of the strategy and the co-ordination of its implementation. In addition, it provides for the co-ordination of the development and realisation of a coherent governmental electronic service-provider policy and also for the co-ordination of government decisions relating to the establishment, realisation and propagation of electronic government with a view to making the activities of government bodies more transparent.

The organisational structure established in 2002 is currently undergoing changes; it is not easy to divide up tasks and functions, while adapting to an environment that changes from week to week. Nevertheless, based on the experiences of the past year, we are entitled to state that the system is functional and that, by extending co-operation and communication among the various specialised areas, it should be possible to develop a structure capable of continuous development and adaptation.

The duality, which has been mentioned several times already, appears once more in respect to the responsibilities connected with electronic government and their implementation. Due to their specific nature, the general government tasks and functions concentrated in the hands of the EGC are specifically called upon to manage the IT aspects of the bodies of central public administration. In this area, therefore, the tasks of developing and implementing a specialised policy are not separate from one another. At a sectoral level – given the nature of the system – the definition of responsibilities and the implementation of such responsibilities in line with general government interests are carried out with the supervision and assistance of the EGC and the MIC.

Major projects

The aforementioned division of functions does not mean, however, that in Hungary there is no effective co-operation between the various bodies involved in the development of government IT. For instance, one of the most successful and promising projects is developing as the result of co-operation between the Ministry of Interior, as the body responsible for the sector, and the Electronic Government Centre of the Prime Minister's Office.

The aim of the project is the development of an Internet Public Administration Service Provider System, which is a significant step in the field of electronic administration carried out through the Internet. The legal and technical conditions of electronic administration are still only partially available, since the realisation and spread of the electronic signature, which is a basic requirement, is still in the initial stages in Hungary. Thus, having regard for current legal and technical possibilities, the Internet Public Administration Service Provider System will establish a system in line with limited aims, establishing as a first element “merely” the opportunity to initiate a matter electronically. At the same time, the service functions of the system contribute to the development of a relationship between citizens and the functions of public administration. Users of the system have a broad range of opportunities to obtain knowledge and information.

The Internet Public Administration Service Provider System offers the following services:

- Clients can find out at home, by way of the Internet, which documents are necessary, what they have to do in order to settle a matter, and where they can do it;
- Assisted by the Internet, clients can collect and record, as stipulated, the data necessary for the administration of a matter, and then, in the case of types of matters that have already been integrated into the system, send such data to a records' office selected by the client – or initiate the administration of the matter;
- Clients can read detailed information concerning their specific matters, and can alter matters initiated electronically (until official processing of the matter begins);
- Clients can make appointments at records' offices in matters that they have initiated electronically;
- Clients can receive information concerning a broad range of topics and in many areas of public administration, either generally or with regard to specific areas of public administration, or relating to the initiation of specific matters.

A peculiarity of electronic initiation is that clients must appear in person for all procedures – applications can only be submitted in this manner – but as the requirement of preliminary information, it is generally sufficient to appear on just one occasion. Where a matter has already been prepared using the communication assistance of the Internet, an administrator can administer the matter in the shortest possible time in the presence of the client. Data given over the Internet are integrated by the administrator into the system, thereby minimising the work of data recording; the clerk then draws up and issues the document, certificate or official attestation etc.

During the first phase of development, the following types of matters will be supported:

- Residence Identity Card System
- Individual Entrepreneur Identity Card System
- Birth/Marriage/Death Certificate Service System
- Vehicle Driving Licence System

Since most citizens in the course of their lives rarely encounter public administration in a active manner, it will continue to be sufficient for the administration of the occasional matters arising, if they receive the proper information via the Internet, and also receive an opportunity to fix an appointment with the appropriate records' office, or even submit their data preliminary and initiate the matter.

Those who often come into contact with public administration and in many different matters – e.g. people involved in broker activities – will seek, equipped with the electronic signature, to demand the full range of electronic administrative possibilities as part of the fulfilment of their “business” activities. For this reason, when the architecture of the Internet Public Administration Service Provider System was being planned, additional developments – such as the possible integration of electronic means of administration into the system – were also given due consideration.

Following a series of public consultations, the Prime Minister's Office launched Hungary's e-government portal – <http://www.ekormanyzat.hu/> – in December 2001, providing citizens and businesses with a user-friendly entry point to government information and services.

A new portal is being developed – <http://www.magyarorszag.hu> – which was launched in Spring 2003. This will provide access to more than 40 interactive services including address registration, extension of driving licence validity and birth certificate amendments. The creation of an electronic tax returns system is also envisaged.

To enable user identification, the Hungarian Government launched in October 2002 a range of initiatives aimed at setting up a smart card infrastructure for e-services provided by central and local administrations. The Interior Ministry, jointly with the Ministry of Informatics and Communications, is responsible for creating a certification centre to manage the smart card technology.

The Hungarian government is engaged in consolidating the regulatory framework surrounding e-government. A number of laws and decrees were adopted during the last few years in this regard: Act on Electronic Signature (2001), Act on Electronic Commerce (2001), Government decree and decision on the Governmental Electronic Signature System, Government decision on the e-government backbone infrastructure, and Government decision on e-procurement. Some of these legal texts will be amended and new laws are being elaborated to improve the government's capacity to supply electronic services, and to enable e-voting and electronic filing.

The national e-government infrastructure will be complemented with the creation of an ‘e-government backbone’, consisting of a secured network linking the whole of the public sector. The project was launched in Spring 2001 to create the base for data transfer between government organisations. The infrastructure will include an extensive countrywide network due to be built in 2003 (the section in Budapest is already in use), regional operational centres and a government intranet. With this network, the Government's aim is to remedy the current fragmentation of government information systems,

which undermines the efficiency of a highly computerised public administration. The network is similar in concept to the IDA (Interchange of data between Administration – a EU driven strategic programme) TESTA (Trans-European Services for Telematics between Administrations) network. This fact is of high importance because Hungary together with some other candidate countries for EU accession has recently joined the IDA programme almost a year before his EU membership is due to be realised. This involves – inter-alia – the necessity of joining the governmental backbone to the European one (TESTA), participating in the IDA's horizontal programs dealing mainly with elaboration and utilisation of standards for pan-European interoperability, and in programs of common interest for various policy sectors.

Bringing Hungary with other candidate countries on board, the IDA programme is important as it ensures that the country will gain access to systems and services enabling it to apply EU law, enforce Internal Market rules and supply e-government services across borders to citizens and businesses. Such a process will assist in accelerating the country's capability to implement EU legislation before joining the Union, thereby safeguarding, for instance, freedom of movement in the enlarged Europe.