Chapter 4

e-Government Interoperability Framework in Lithuania: Preconditions and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

An e-Government Interoperability Framework (eGIF) is one way to achieve e-Government interoperability. An eGIF is a set of standards and guidelines that a government uses to specify the preferred way that its agencies, citizens and partners interact with each other. In order to come up to the expectations of their stakeholders and to achieve real resolution of the evolving interoperability problems, the scope of the eGIFs needs to be extended, including service composition and discovery, development and management of semantic schemas for governmental documents, certification mechanisms and authentication standards. Moreover, a shift from a paper-based specification towards a repository of services, data schemas and process models is needed, in order to serve the ever-changing nature of governments under transformation. Upon conducting a state of the art analysis of relevant frameworks at a pan-European and national level, lessons learnt from the pioneers UK eGIF, German SAGA and Greek eGIF are presented. The proposed Lithuanian eGIF model describes new approach, outlines the technical, semantic and organization dimensions and stresses the importance of political interoperability. It also provides three layers model moving from only standards and specifications based approach to systems and coordination support elements. Finally the chapter tackles the issues that rose within stakeholders’ community in the e-Government interoperability context.

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INTRODUCTION

Information communication technology (ICT) adaptation in public administration processes is closely related to improvement of public sector efficiency and effectiveness. Such adaptation of ICT commonly refers to as electronic government (e-Government), which is described as seamless integration of computer-supported government services (Wimmer & Traunmuller, 2000). In the beginning of 21st century citizens’ expectations and new laws and regulations requires that information need only be given once and need to be reused by others creating a huge need for interoperability among public and private organizations. All these organizations use hundreds, thousands, or even more applications that need to communicate with each other.

Electronic government interoperability is becoming an increasingly crucial issue, especially for developing countries that have committed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 (United Nations, 2008). Enhanced government efficiency and effectiveness coupled with the delivery of basic public services to all citizens are essential components required to achieve such goals. To date, most governments have finalized the design of national e-Government strategies and are busy implementing priority programmes (Janssen & Scholl, 2007).

However, these technology investments have not led to more effective public electronic services (e-Services), but increased citizens expectations that public sector organisations will provide services similar to those in the commercial sector with the same effectiveness and efficiency (Kašubienė & Vanagas, 2007). On the contrary, they have ended up reinforcing old barriers that made access to public services cumbersome – not to mention expedient decision-making processes. The e-Government promise of more efficient and effective government institutions is not being fulfilled due, to a large extent, to the seemingly ad hoc deployment of information communication technology systems (Gatautis, 2008). In the short run, these ad hoc deployments address the specific needs of government agencies, but they do not pay the required attention to the overall need of interaction among the diverse ICT systems in order to share and exchange data (Damaskopoulos, Gatautis & Vitkauskaitė, 2008). This collaboration is a function that is the key, for example, in e-Government “one-stop shops” that aggregate many public services into one service window (Charalabidis, Tschichholz & Hopkirk, 2007).

Furthermore, the seamless flow of information across government and between government and citizens also increases transparency and accountability. Governments are thus better able to justify their programmes while citizens are better informed – all prerequisites for a vibrant democracy.

Today, far too often, the data needed by policy makers to make better decisions is available but inaccessible. Policy makers are faced not only with overlapping and uncoordinated data sources, but also with the absence of common terms of reference and means of representing these data. This results in the time consuming and complex cost of comparing data that is represented differently. Interoperability will allow data compiled by different agencies to be used together to make decisions faster and better. An important goal of governance is to enable the citizenry to have easier and faster access to government information and services. The seamless flow of data from one government office to another provides the policy maker with the information needed to draft sound policy and deliver better services (Müller, 2006).

From the early days of e-Government, interoperability was perceived as a critical challenge and enabler. Interoperability has a central role in e-Government and as a result significant work has been already conducted. Since 1991, interoperability has remained an important European Union (EU) goal especially in the e-Government context. To take one particularly pertinent example, in June 2002 the eEurope 2005 Action Plan made