

E-GOVERNANCE, A CHALLENGE FOR GENERAL SECURITY

Afrim TAHIRI¹

Corresponding author / e-mail: afri_tahiri@outlook.com

Abstract

Transparent administration means open to the citizen, without compromising his data and security, which can have consequences for individual and collective well-being. Interventions from outside which make even experts in the field conjecture about the ways of putting e-administrative services into use and the consequences that total openness has for general security. Based on the recent cyber attacks in the region, the challenge for the public administration is its transparency and modernization. In addition to modernization, the administration must maintain its own security from outside interference. This paper shows some factors that can affect the security of administrative data and consequently the security of the state and its vital mechanisms.

Qualitative, empirical and interpretive methods have been applied in the treatment of the topic. The work brings a series of recommendations, including the application of a standard, respecting the principle of transparency and modernization of the administration, to be more vigilant for general and individual security. The application of this standard, also recommended by experts in the field, paves the way for alignment with the prevailing standards within the European Administrative Space, and that safety in the general interest is primary.

Keywords: E-Administration, transparency, public security, public official.

1. Introduction

The topic that will be discussed in this paper is about the importance of the e-government system, which topic we will divide into two aspects, the first aspect is about the security of state institutions that interact with the system of electronic government and; the second aspect has to do with the interaction of state institutions with citizens in the provision of electronic services, or the growing trend of the development and modernization of electronic government through state institutions.

Based on the problems faced by the Public Administration in the Republic of Kosovo, which are known from the data of the progress reports supervised by international mechanisms, which indicate extreme politicization of the Public Administration, including the recruitment of staff not according to the principle of meritocracy, such problems also arise where security in the technological system is not infrequently attacked.

The preservation of personal data, the lack of sufficient information for citizens regarding the importance of using e-government services, and the risks of cyber attacks are indicators that e-government is a challenge for state institutions and general security.

The purpose of this research is to identify existing problems that may arise as a result of the e-government system and the easiest way to avoid existing risks for general security in state bodies.

¹ MSc Afrim Tahiri, Executive Director of the NGO "Together for Democratic Development" - Vushtrri. E-mail: afri_tahiri@outlook.com

2. Modernization of the administration is a challenge for the security of the country - E-Governance

E-Government represents Information Technology systems, through which opportunities are created to provide better, faster and timely public services. It also improves services, strengthens accountability, increases transparency and improves governance efficiency.²

The "E" in e-government stands for the word "electronic". So, e-Governance is mainly related to the performance of functions and the achievement of governance results through the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). The project will increase the efficiency of the services provided, reducing the cost of the service and the time when the services are provided.³

Electronic government brings great benefits to society. Benefits can be economic and social, including modernization of administration, education, health, justice, security, business development, trade development, agricultural development, budget growth, democracy growth, cultural development, scientific research, statistics different, etc.⁴

Based on the data of other authors, we share the opinion that e-government is characterized by speed in the performance of services, by connecting to an Internet network, we can request services from home or other places or vice versa, this shows that the cost of service provision compared to the provision of services in the past, where numerous physical materials were required such as: computer, printer and large amounts of paper, etc. e-government has seemingly cheaper costs for the government and the citizen.⁵

One of the main principles that must prevail in public administration is transparency in administration. The use of information and communication technology makes it easier to declare transparency in governance. By informing the public more easily and on the other hand by having the opportunity for the citizen whenever he wants to see and analyze the data published by the government. This is only possible if the government leaves the information available to the citizens without hiding the information in what would be considered transparent governance. Increasing access to information makes e-government improve access to government information to citizens, making it an important resource in making decisions that affect daily life and thus helps empower citizens.⁶

The information technology telecommunication system is spread over the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo and connects all central and local institutions. More than 500 different institutional buildings are connected to this network. It enables the provision of electronic services to citizens, businesses and the administration itself.⁷

Various countries seem to continuously make efforts to modernize the administration and increase transparency by performing services in an efficient and effective manner. Modernization of the administration aims at good governance in the entire administration. This raises the question: what can be considered good governance? Good governance includes: full respect for human rights, the rule of law, effective participation, multi-stakeholder partnerships, political pluralism, transparent and accountable processes and institutions, an efficient and effective public sector, legitimacy, access to knowledge, information and education, political empowerment of people, equality, sustainability and attitudes and values that promote

² <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/page.aspx?id=1,34>

³ https://countmein.eu/sq/smart_change/e-qeverisja-ne-indi-iniciativat-dhe-ceshtjet/

⁴ <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/page.aspx?id=1,34>

⁵ https://countmein.eu/sq/smart_change/e-qeverisja-ne-indi-iniciativat-dhe-ceshtjet/

⁶ https://countmein.eu/sq/smart_change/e-qeverisja-ne-indi-iniciativat-dhe-ceshtjet/

⁷ <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/page.aspx?id=1,34>

responsibility, solidarity and tolerance.⁸ Based on the research in this paper, we understand that in addition to the modernization of the administration, various problems also arise where in terms of the security of institutions, modernization and digitization can be a challenge for the general security in the administration. In this aspect, we encountered problems that appeared more easily compared to the classic form of storing documentation on paper, and as a result, there may be easier interference from outside in the data stored by administration institutions, such as attacks by cyber security in state institutions and public information media.

2.1 Cyber attacks and the permanent risk of vital state institutions: Facilitating the provision of e-administrative services to citizens and the performance of work with higher efficiency by institutions, the introduction of the e-government system seems to be of particular importance. But starting from the fact that providing such services to citizens requires minimal technical and technological knowledge and knowledge from all those who want online access to perform services, it seems that this is a challenge for the state and its institutions. Knowing that a significant part of the citizens do not have enough knowledge to access the Internet, this may leave room for interference from outside and as a result we will have the misuse of sensitive data of citizens.

On September 6, the Government of Kosovo announced that the websites of state institutions were the target of a cyber attack. The government said the attack was carried out from abroad.⁹ Based on this fact about the targeting of the country by external criminals, it makes us understand that state institutions must be more vigilant against various attacks on the operating system of state bodies and that the cooperation of different sectors, such as that of cyber security in the Agency of Information Society in cooperation with external experts for protection and security of information flow. This is due to the fact of the last identified cyber attack which came from outside Kosovo and had as a target the IPs in which several web pages of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo were published,¹⁰ hints that the security of the public administration in addition to in addition, the general security within the state can be jeopardized. In this regard, in addition to internet attacks on state institutions, last month Kosovo was also attacked with cyber attacks on public and private media. Cyber attacks, making the daily work of information impossible, raise the dilemma of whether there should be a comprehensive strategy of security institutions and the media, in the joint care of protecting and informing the public correctly? Based on experts in the field, the answer is: yes, there should be a comprehensive strategy for better security. These cyber experts describe cyber attacks as a strategic problem for Kosovo, while the statistics provided by the State Police show deterioration in security in the online world.¹¹

Today, cybercrimes constitute one of the major security concerns around the world, therefore, Kosovo, which was a constant target of cyber attacks, which mainly came from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, but also from Russia,¹² must to be vigilant in the protection and security of information, where as a result, in addition to the security institutions, the individual security of its citizens can also be attacked.

With such attacks, not only our country is at risk, but no country can remain immune and invulnerable to cyber attacks. An example of this is the suspicions of interference and

⁸ Avni H. Alidemaj.: Public Administration and its development trends in Kosovo, Prishtina 2021. P.202

⁹ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/telekomi-i-kosoves-sulme-kibernetike-/32032233.html> 19.11.2022

¹⁰ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/institucionet-sulm-kibernetik-/32021518.html> 19.11.2022

¹¹ <https://nacionale.com/drejtisi/sulmet-kibernetike-rriten-ne-kosove-cak-kryesisht-mediet-ekspertet-alarmojne-per-gjendjen> 20.11.2022 ora 21:00

¹² <https://www.epokaere.com/sulmet-kibernetike-kosoves-i-kane-ardhur-nga-serbia-deri-te-rusia/>

manipulation of votes in the last elections in the selection of the new state administration in the USA, where suspicions of interference by Russian cybernetics in the manipulation of votes for president were raised, with CRAFT, the elections were won by the Republicans.¹³

However, in the region, namely in Albania, cyber attacks against the Government of Albania are politically motivated and behind them are actors who are connected to the Government of Iran. This is the result of the analysis of the American company Microsoft, on September 8, which analyzed in detail the attack on state servers in Albania. From this the question arises, what can be endangered in the state and what more specifically can benefit from such cyber attacks? Based on the cyber attacks in Albania, during the cyber attack recorded on July 15, it was impossible to use the e-Albania portal, which is a state portal that offers a number of digital services, such as school registration, applications for personal documents, registration of property rights and registration of business data. Moreover, the attack also included the leakage of sensitive data, emails sent and received as well as those deleted from the system.¹⁴

2.2 Interaction of citizens with state institutions through the E-Kosova platform: As we mentioned in the introduction of the paper, the second aspect of the administration's challenge in institutional digitalization is the provision of services to citizens and interaction with them. The provision of services to citizens came as a need of the hour as with the development of information technology and the growing citizen demands to be served in an efficient and effective manner, the installation of this service was necessary for the benefit of the general interest. Regarding this, the question arises, what is this platform?

E-Kosova is a unique state platform where public services found in offices and physical counters of institutions are provided electronically.¹⁵

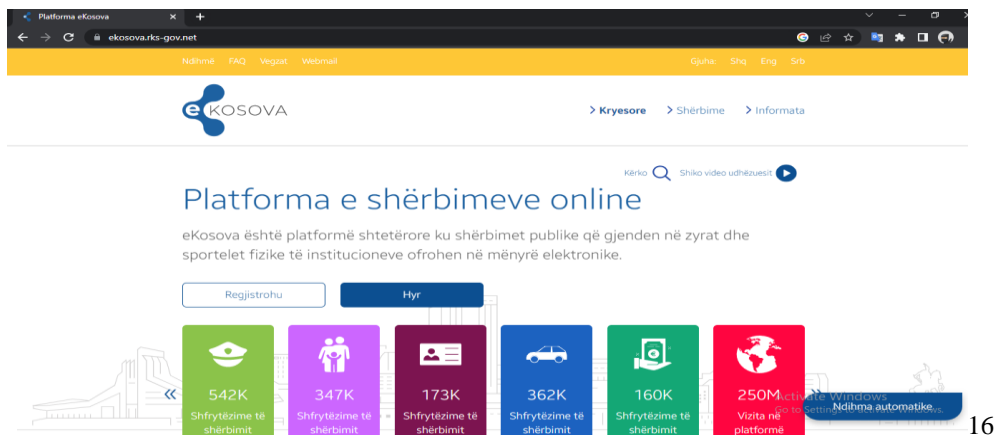


Figure 1. The entrance page of the e-kosova platform

From the picture above, we see that apparently the security of entering this platform is at the right level, since access requires identification, registration and a personal secret password to connect. But what can happen to the person who does not know how to use the E-Kosova platform? In seeking help from other individuals, can the individual's personal data be misused? Regarding this, from the procurement office in the Municipality of Obiliq, Valmira Ibrahim

¹³ <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/3562134.html> 22.tetor,2016.

¹⁴ <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/sulmi-kibernetik-shqiperi-/32031879.html> 19.11.2022

¹⁵ <https://ekosova.rks-gov.net>

¹⁶ <https://ekosova.rks-gov.net>

says: "people who do not have knowledge in the use of state platforms hesitate to ask for help from someone to access and submit the request for the missing service"¹⁷. while in the second question, are they afraid of personal data? she says: "yes, they may be afraid of personal data, although the biggest risk is if they ask for help from a stranger and he can then open the account of the person asking for help by misusing the data his".¹⁸

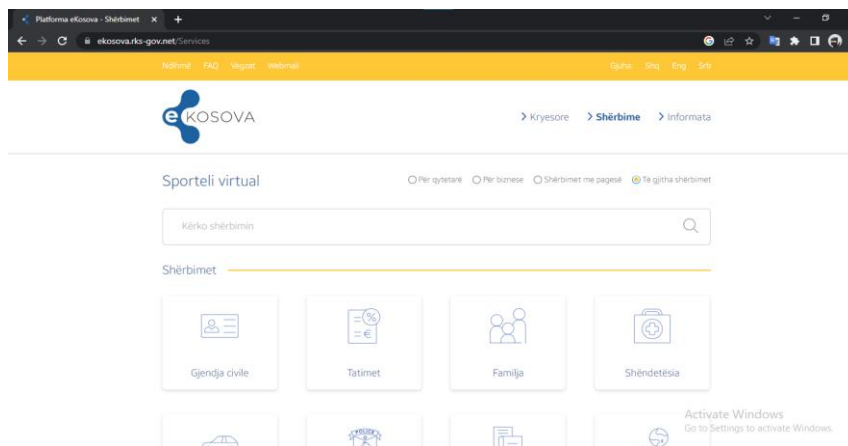


Figure 2. Front view of services on the e-kosova-virtual counter platform

2.3 E-Kosovo and the risk of human rights violations: No matter how easy and seemingly economical the provision of electronic services by institutions to citizens seems, this cannot be said to be completely good for them. Based on the individual ability and knowledge of a part of the citizens regarding information technology and the Internet, and the few publications for providing knowledge regarding electronic use in receiving services, this turns out to be a selective opportunity, where the majority of age postponed and a good part of even younger people have no knowledge about the provision of digital services by state institutions, this can easily be considered a violation of human rights. This is said because the platform appears to be too complicated for individuals with minimal internet knowledge to access. When we say that it is complicated, we are basing it on the many data that were required to access this platform.

¹⁷ Valmira Ibrahim. Civil servant: interview about the e-kosova platform and possible abuses by criminals, Obiliq Municipality, 2022.

¹⁸ Valmira Ibrahim. Civil servant: interview about the e-kosova platform and possible abuses by criminals, Obiliq Municipality, 2022.

¹⁹ <https://ekosova.rks-gov.net>

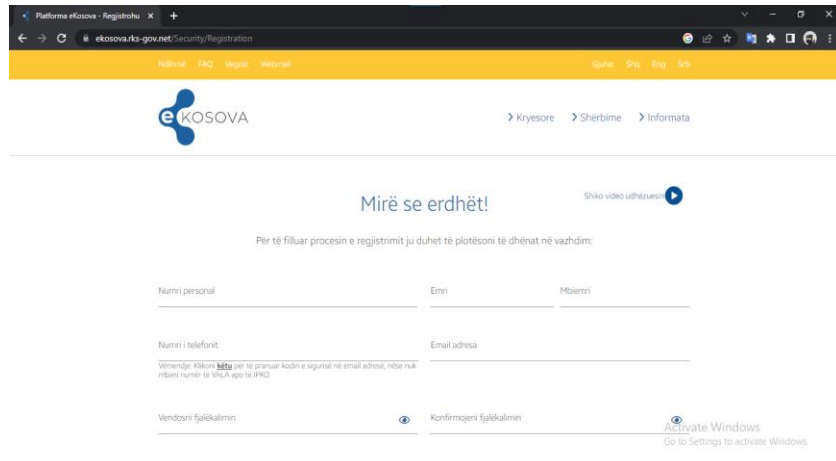


Figure 3. View from the account registration page on the e-kosova platform

The platform in question seems to facilitate interaction between state institutions and citizens in the performance and provision of state services. The fact that through the publication of a public announcement for citizens, it can be made easier and faster to send mandatory calls or even for help in the interest of the general interest, such as the last call from the Ministry of Economy in the Republic of Kosovo, where citizens were it was possible to subsidize the purchase of efficient rental equipment, interested citizens were required to apply through the corresponding page for subsidy, it shows that the digital platform of citizen interaction with state institutions, in addition to what seems very beneficial for the general interest, can also be infringing of human rights. This is due to the fact that a large part of the elderly does not have knowledge about the beneficial opportunities from the institutions through this service. Regarding this, in communication with citizens, they say: Mujë Druari says, "I have not applied, I am old, my eyesight has weakened and I cannot apply".²¹ Asked, why don't your children apply, or someone close in the family? Muja says, "the boys work hard, they are at work all day, and when they come home, they only change their clothes, they eat a little bread and then they go to bed, they don't have time to watch TV, or even I logged in to the Internet".²² In the same question, the other elderly person, Fazliu, a co-resident of Muja, intervened, stating "what is it about?", about the subsidy for the purchase of efficient heating equipment. He says, "This is the first time he is hearing about this, who is helping us to buy it cheaper?", Ministry of Economy. Fazliu says, "the river has taken us, they inform you in the village and believe me, believe me, they also fill out the form, except when you call them, I am informed: come on, you have won the right to buy this equipment cheaper, and that we desert people don't even know that the state helps them".²³ "We old people don't know these platforms and I don't even know how to access the internet, they wanted more frequent announcements on TV and I also opened counters in the municipalities so that those who don't know how to use the internet, then physically able to submit the request for this assistance given by the state".²⁴

²⁰ <https://ekosova.rks-gov.net>

²¹ Mujë Druari. informer: gives answers regarding the government subsidy for efficient heating devices, Vushtrri, 2022.

²² Mujë Druari. informer: gives answers regarding the government subsidy for efficient heating devices, Vushtrri, 2022.

²³ Fazli Gashi. informant: gives answers regarding the government subsidy for efficient heating devices, Vushtrri, 2022.

²⁴ Fazli Gashi. informant: gives answers regarding the government subsidy for efficient heating devices, Vushtrri, 2022.

2.3 Electronic services through the e-kiosk and the possibility of infringement of the right to the service: The functionalization of the digital box or e-kiosk in the provision of electronic services to citizens is of particular importance, as it allows the individual to avoid physical contact with the administration's employees, and another very important thing is to avoid waiting in lines to be served with necessary documents for the individual. Regarding the good opportunities that were mentioned, the question arises as to whether the provision of services through the e-kiosk could also have negative consequences? Of course, yes. Starting from the strike in September of this year, where municipal services were offered to citizens only through the e-kiosk and where a large part of the citizens, in the absence of information on how to use this static device, had a problem receiving the service, despite advantages that this administrative apparatus offers, it also has its own shortcomings, where in the absence of receiving services from the administration employees in e-kiosks, queues and waiting for service were formed. Regarding the operation and provision of services in the e-kiosk, an employee of the administration respectively civil status official declares: "such a service is more than necessary at a time when there is still a risk of the Covid-19 virus, people did not limit the time, can receive services 24 hours a day. This means less risk of mass accumulation and easier protection from the spread of the Covid-19 virus.²⁵ He further adds, "we can't say that everything is fine, because the elderly do not know how to use the e-kiosk." What caught my eye is that it is very difficult for handicapped persons to provide documents as the height of the monitor is too high and unsuitable for them.²⁶



Figure 4. Photo from the e-kiosk in one of the municipalities of Kosovo

²⁵ Xhavit Musa.: Administration employee-interview regarding the provision of services to citizens through the e-kiosk, Vushtrri, 2022.

²⁶ Xhavit Musa.: Administration employee-interview regarding the provision of services to citizens through the e-kiosk, Vushtrri, 2022.

4. Conclusions

The findings in our research show: the fact of setting up a system for the provision of administrative services which is unknown until now for the citizens of Kosovo indicates many possibilities of problems in the provision of digital services and from the lack of recognition of such a system general individual and collective security within the state may be endangered.

The system of digitization of the provision of services to citizens and vice versa must be preceded by the raising of the professional capacities of public administration employees immediately, their professionalism will contribute to the easier establishment of the system of provision of digital services through e- the government.

The provision of services through the E-Government system, in the absence of sufficient knowledge about the provision of services through the E-Government system, will serve to worsen the security of personal-individual data as well as the possibility of the intervention of foreign digital bodies in the internal data of state institutions where as a consequence there may be misuse of the services offered through this system and defunctionalization in the provision of services to citizens and not only..

Remark

The government, making efforts to modernize the administration, in many cases, without properly calculating the provision of the service, violates human rights. This can be seen from the impossibility of access for all ages and handicapped persons in the provision of services through electronic government.

Our recommendation, based on the data from the research with citizens and public administration officials, is:

- the modernization process should be developed based on a strategy that prioritizes the professionalism of the employees. The professionalism of the employees means the ability to inform the public to serve them, and not like now that the vast majority do not even have the knowledge to benefit from government subsidies, but they are not even informed about such opportunities.
- The new services that are offered must be safer, having the possibility that all those who do not have knowledge about the use of information technology, can be served by civil servants in a safe way.

References

- [1]. Alidemaj, A.: Public Administration and its development trends in Kosovo, Prishtina, 2021.
- [2]. Erasmus project 2017. Smart Change.: E-governance in India, initiatives and challenges. Accessed 15.11.2022. https://countmein.eu/en/smart_change/e-qeverisja-ne-indi-initiativat-dhe-ceshtjet/
- [3]. Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Kosovo. Accessed on 25.10.2022.: e-government.: <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/ap/page.aspx?id=1,34>
- [4]. Musa, Xh. Druari, M. Gashi, F. Ibrahim, V.: interview about the digitization of the administration and the provision of services through the E-Kosova platform, Vushtrri, Obiliq, 2022.
- [5]. National-News.: Cyber attacks are increasing in Kosovo, mainly the media-experts are alarming about the situation. Accessed on 21.10.2022: <https://nacionale.com/drejtisi/sulmet-kibernetike-rriten-ne-kosove-cak-kryesisht-mediet-ekspertet-alarmojne-per-gjendjen>
- [6]. New era-News of July 12, 2022.: Cyber attacks have come to Kosovo from Serbia to Russia. Accessed on 23.10.2022: <https://www.epokaere.com/sulmet-kibernetike-kosoves-i-kane-ardhur-nga-serbia-deri-te-rusia/>

- [7]. Radio Evropa e Lire-News of September 13, 2022.: What is known about the group behind the cyber attacks in Albania? Accessed on 22.10.2022: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/sulmi-kibernetik-shqiperi-/32031879.html>
- [8]. Radio Free Europe-News of September 13, 2022.: Telecom of Kosovo target of cyber attacks. Accessed on 19.10.2022: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/telekomi-i-kosoves-sulme-kibernetike-/32032233.html>
- [9]. Radio Free Europe-News of September 6, 2022.: Websites of Kosovo institutions, target of cyber attacks. Accessed on 19.10.2022: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/institucionet-sulm-kibernetik-/32021518.html>
- [10]. Voice of America-News of October 22, 2016.: Will there be a problem in the American elections? Accessed on 24.10.2022: <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/3562134.html>.