

AN OVERVIEW OF THE E-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN TURKEY IN RESPECT TO THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS

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Abstract

This paper intends to evaluate the position of Turkey as regards to the twenty public services specified by the EU with the intention of figuring out the efficiency and effectiveness levels the public administration has. In doing so, it hopes to appraise the strengths of Turkish public administration vis-à-vis the EU rules and regulations as respect to e-government. Examination reveals that the Turkish attempts to provide public goods and services via electronic apparatus have fallen below acceptable levels by international standards. The existing initiatives, on the other hand, have the potential to bring better performance for public administration. This examination utilises primary and secondary material in the forms of official documents, reports, appraisals, articles etc. Consequently, this paper reviews e-government literature in general and Turkish initiatives as well as the European dimension in public administration in particular.

Key Words: *eEurope, e-government, Turkey, EU, public services*

JEL Classification: H4

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to examine the attempts espousing e-government capacity of Turkey to meet the standards introduced by the EU, a part of good governance practices. As a prospective candidate to the EU, and of course having a supposedly well-functioning public administration, Turkish government has to make use of electronic apparatus to increase its administrative and technical capacities. Therefore, there is an obvious need to study this dimension with the idea in mind to support modernisation of the structure, functions and relations in the administrative setting of government.

In spite of the considerable developments achieved for the last decade or so the indicators of the country in every aspect of the state mechanism seem to be well below the level required to set satisfactory performance. This may have been caused by structural and functional discrepancies such as low levels of consciousness in high-tech use, lack of consistent policies in effective deployment of technical and human resources and so on.

However, there have been certain attempts to promote utilisation of internet in public administration at local and central levels in Turkey. Notwithstanding the existence of websites of nearly every public institution, it would be quite naive to argue that they are used in an interactive way in the production of public goods and services. One of the motivating factors to promote e-government in Turkey is 'E-Europe Action Plan' by the EU. This effort has led to the introduction of 'The eEurope Initiative'. Turkey ratified the membership of the initiative in 2001. A cursory

glance at the 20 basic public services launched by the EU reveals that even though there have been certain achievements in the part of Turkish government, the outcome have not been up to the level requisites from public administration.

Though it is one of the widely criticised areas by the public in many countries, tax payments have scored a considerable amount of success in Turkey. In this vein, it could be perfectly fair to claim that in the reposition of customs and excise duties Turkey has satisfactory performance levels. However, less successful areas include public tender procedures, public records, construction, and vehicle registration records. These areas require co-operation in sharing information filed by different institutions for various reasons. The caveats of 'The Short Term Action Plan for E-Transformation Turkey Project' would have the potential to wipe the problems out in the country.

2. E-GOVERNMENT: CONCEPT, POSITION AND NEED

E-government initiatives experience quite a speedy transformation in line with economical, political, cultural and social changes throughout the world. The change itself is sporadic as different dimensions of 'electronic revolution' are directly related to advancements in democratic notions and implementations (Aktan and Şen, 1999: 9). Despite recent successful attempts to materialize electronic apparatus in public services, there is a gap between Turkey's level and the levels achieved in European Union countries (See: <http://www.e-devlet.com>). This depends on certain variables such as level of GDP, indigenous electronics sector, lack of support from politicians for long periods of time and lack of consciousness among the larger public to adopt technological apparatus in public services.

- One needs to admit the endeavour to 'widen and deepen' deployment of ICT in local and national levels. Tax collection, for instance, displays a success. However, some services still need further work: there are certain deficiencies among local governments and individual central government departments in proper using the technology. The Action Plan for E-government Transformation contains the following headings (DPT, 2005: 14-17):

- Within the framework drawn by legal and regulatory structure, e-signature, maintenance of privacy, national information security, freedom of information, enactment of laws related to universal public service requirements and Turkish Penal law to reorganise information and communication technologies, and imposition of the rules regarding internet servers as to responsibilities, liabilities, and control.

- Provision of technical infrastructures and attempts to assure information security.

- Taking necessary steps to facilitate human resource planning and management as outlined by the National Education Ministry, introduction of ICT classes, supply of internet connection to all schools to make sure they are used in an efficient and effective manner, development of curriculum, training of teachers to enable them to use electronic material etc.

- The actions to mobilise e-government aimed at better supply of public goods and services without bureaucratic disruption by electronic means and to provide data and experience sharing opportunities for other institutions.

- Production of projects to create a medium for collaboration and cooperation, and integrated services to become a basis for reference points for public decisions makers.

- Thematic areas, as also outlined by eEurope, in health governance and health information management to establish service delivery standards and criteria for the health administration and the public.

- A convenient ground for e-business and e-trade, business organisations including SMEs to promote e-trade activities, development of goods exchange bureaus, sharing of information in foreign trade via electronic process.

E-government empowers citizens and puts them at the focus of discussion, and therefore makes public servants directly responsible for the information and services given by them. This necessarily brings performance measurement and performance based incentives for public workers. Besides, private sector involvement and civil society participation are key points to highlight the electronic process.

Anderson (2001: 85) draws attention to define e-government by stressing on economical aspect and says that it aims to increase speed, performance and efficiency as well as reduction of the costs during the information exchange process between public institutions, citizens and business organizations. In this vein, e-government initiatives not only intend to transform information and service channels but also wish to alter the way the public services are provided (Yıldız, 2003: 307).

As obvious by nature and appearance, public sectors in the developed world are thought to be different from clumsy, traditional and bureaucratic states in the way to promote advanced technology in the provision of the services. Some of the reasons for the new era are the changing nature of human beings to claim different standards and levels in public goods and services, strong demand for strengthening human rights and freedoms, powerful positions given to individuals in public domain, the new facet of democracy to stress both on the rule of majority and the notion of protecting minority (Arifoğlu, 2004: 97).

Incidentally, this changing nature of the public services has started to urge public administrations to obtain ICT in their operations. Private sector seemed to set high levels of standards in their operations. Of course, the scale and scope of the services are different in public and private sector organisations; the intention to use better technology by the private attracts greater attention. E-government is a self-explanatory concept today. Therefore, the concentration of policy makers is intensified around different methods of deployment rather than the need for it.

Widespread acceptance of e-government across the world seems to own very much to administrative dimension than political and environmental facets. The public is demanding more day-by-day. E-government simply facilitates the administrative process, so heavy bureaucratic structures have got to accept electronic activities. Therefore, in a way, this takes some power from the bureaucratic mechanism (loss of control), causing bureaucratic resistance to the change. This resembles the difficulties experienced previously in the history against technical equipment (i.e. resistance to the press machines in the Ottomans).

There is also strong evidence to consider in the evaluation as bureaucrats have started to discover the power they have with the easement of electronic mechanism. There is incredible amount of power in the public bureaucracy; millions of files are only a click away. This supports the claims of public choice believers. Both sides have strong and weak points. All in all, the public bureaucracy is gaining more power and therefore they have usually positive perceptions (Büke, 2001:5) about it.

Even it is a familiar story the table given below produced by OECD compares traditional state and electronic state in an eloquent way. The table shows the priorities and the methods of e-government approach: citizen centred, democratic, efficiency and economy based and inclusive. Therefore, governments can benefit from the principles and means of e-government.

There seems no difference for the application of e-government in developed and developing systems. There could, however, be some doubts in adopting different levels of the approach as there should be relevant accompanying measures to go together. Cultural background and attitudes are two factors to mention in this regard (See: for a comprehensive and comparative analysis in different states; Singh and Endre, 2009; Fozder and Fouzder, 2009; Cayhan, 2009). E-government cannot be diminished to represent only technological project, but also the behaviour to support as a cultural entity. This is often undervalued, especially by the policy makers who are engineers and do not believe in social character of technical issues.

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional State and E-State

Traditional State	E-State
Passive Citizen	Active Customer-Citizen
Paper based communication	Electronic communication
Vertical/Hierarchical Structuring	Horizontal/Coordinated Network Structuring
Administration uploads data	Citizen uploads data
Workers response	Automated voice mail, call centre etc.
Workers support	Self-support/expert support
Worker-centered control	Automated data update control
Cash flow/cheque	Electronic Fund Transfer
Standard service	Individualized/differentiated service
Fragmented/disrupted service	Inclusive/permanent/one stop service
High transaction costs	Low transaction costs
Inefficient growth	Efficient management
One-way communication	Multi-level communication
Subordinate relations	Participation relations
Closed state	Open state
Closed society	Open society

Source: Uçkan, Ö. (2003), "E-devlet, E-demokrasi ve E-yönetişim Modeli", **Stradigma**, http://www.stradigma.com/turkce/haziran2003/makale_09.html (10.11.2009)

3. E-GOVERNMENT IN TURKEY AND eEUROPE

The developments in ICT since the 1980s have paved the way for espousal of new organisational structures, transformation of social priorities, and styles of human beings specifically in education, health, agriculture and industry. This conversion has had parallel effects on public administration; the opportunities brought by technological advancement started to bring transparency, speedy and timely public services and responsible public administration.

The accelerating factor related to e-government in Turkey seems to be possible convenience in the provision of the services to the public. In other words, public sector institutions find it quite attractive to deploy e-supply methods in delivering goods and services. Active part in this relation (between citizen and the public institution) is the organisation responsible for the mandate.

Citizens can, of course, be involved but their involvement would have limited effects in the public life. Heavy legalistic style of government can pose certain degree of threats to the very basics of participation and empowerment of individuals. Yet, there is plenty of room for manoeuvre in encouraging citizens in public policy making processes.

One needs also to stress on cooperation and collaboration in e-government, as the success of the system depends very much on the scale and scope of relations in the field. The 'communication revolution' requires as many partners and information providers as possible, amount of information implies explicit power of the system. Governments should pay special attention to bring related actors together. From time to time international involvement and partners could be sought in an increasingly globalised world. National participation is a 'must' rather than a 'should' (E-Devlet Kamuda Ortak Bilgi-Veri Paylaşımı Grubu Ön Raporu, 01.02.2007).

Having experienced the need for change certain international organisations such as OECD and the EU and major developed countries have defined the caveats of change prerequisite moving from industrial to knowledge society. For this end, they have produced detailed action plans to highlight steps to take; quite often this has been in a pretentious way. eEurope action plan intended to establish cheaper, faster, reliable and secure internet access; popularisation of e-trade and e-services, establishment of relevant internet infrastructure, and guaranteeing data security in internet.

The Action Plan has been reproduced as eEurope Initiative to provide solutions of candidate countries under the name of "eEurope+Action Plan" in 2001. To facilitate successful implementation of eEurope e-business, e-health, e-government, and e-learning programs need to be validated, and broadband access for public institutions should be established to provide internet, digital TV, and 3G mobile phones etc.

Advancement of e-government programs and provision of e-services to the public are central elements highlighted by eEurope Action Plan. Thus, European initiatives associated with ICT have been reflected by Turkish governments; nearly every public organisation has established their ICT centres and websites as well as keeping their records in virtual environment. Hence by nature ICT is likely to support productivity and effectiveness of public goods; the knowledge society target to development of technological, economical and social aspects have been accelerated since the 2000s by the announcement of the Turkish government joining in 'eEurope+' initiative. Independent reports admit Turkey's intention to take certain steps toward being an active partner in the initiative since 2000.

By the same token, World Economic Forum ranked Turkey on the 52nd position out of 122 countries in its 'Global Information Technology Report' according to Network Readiness Index for 2006 – 2007 periods (World Economic Forum, 2006-2007). However, the same organisation ranked the country on the 61st position in the following report. This means that Turkey's attempts are not enough. In addition, the fall of 9 ranks needs proper explanation (World Economic Forum, 2008-2009). Since Turkey is among the Group of major 20 economies, it would be naïve to argue that Turkey could maintain its development with such poor performance (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G-20_major_economies).

The late starting has brought double blessings: on the one hand, Turkey was late to establish its electronic structures in service provisions meaning loss of economical resources; on the other the country has been able to deploy latest versions of technical structure and equipment integrated and

coordinated easily. Apparently, apart from the recently launched initiatives as a part of the e-government processes (E-devlet project) other electronic programs are to provide information to general public, in insufficient and disintegrated manner. Nearly every public organisation has websites, but they contain static information just a one-way information sharing process rather than interactive and a dynamic one. Communication between the public and organisations are rather limited. Therefore, they can be deemed to be enough for information sharing but not enough for e-service supply to the public.

The National Program of Turkey in joining the EU (ABGS, 2003) reads as follows:

“Our government supports and intends to contribute to the implementation of the eEurope initiative for the accession attempt of the country to the EU. As a part of this, toward building up a Knowledge Society it launches a project in Turkey to direct and coordinate the EU programs by establishing an organisational structure with the collaboration of related private sector institutions, academia, civil society organisations and other involved establishments.”

This statement reiterates the intention of the government. Therefore, there is the EU impetus for the e-government in the country. The European effect is not only evident in this field; it is obvious in other projects too (See for a comprehensive evaluation: Kutlu, Çalış; 2004). Central and Eastern European Countries accepted the strategies initially introduced in Lisbon by 15 member states during the Ministerial Conference in 11-12 May 2000 in Warsaw. The candidate countries were admitted to become a part of eEurope and declared their support to the Union’s political endurance/determination. In addition, to search for implementation opportunities on the ground, the candidate countries decided to formulate their own version of action plans to resemble eEurope. The European Commission invited Southern Republic of Cyprus, Malta and Turkey to join in other countries in the creation of action plan. The outcomes of the preparation meetings were shared with the officials of the EU, and Turkey’s membership in eEurope+ Initiative were announced in the EU Summit during 15-16 June 2001 in Goteborg.

A common scheme proposed and formulated by candidate countries for configuration of knowledge society in Europe, eEurope+ 2003 Action Plan, aims to speed up restoration and modernisation of candidate country economies, to strengthen institutions and abilities, to improve general competitive capacities, and to produce actions to meet unique conditions of individual countries. The objectives of the eEurope+ Action Plan (DPT, eAvrupa) are as follows:

- Speeding up of basic elements by knowledge society
- Cheaper, faster and more secure internet
- Investment in human resources
- Encouragement of internet use

To establish a basis for comparative examination between member and candidate countries of the EU, the initiative accepts targets, actions and measurement criteria of the eEurope Initiative. In addition, eEurope+ Initiative takes into account demographic, socio-economical and social features of candidate countries and other measures which are not existed in the initiative are action types.

Examples in different countries of Europe starting with provision of local goods and services are applications of computer machinery as a facilitative means. During the creation of e-government

services in the UK, Netherland, Belgium and France civil society involvements have been quite high. This increasingly intense participation is an evidence of democratic medium in the countries just as an intention highlighted by the advocates of electronic service delivery.

The official rhetoric revealed by the government related to e-government services (DPT, *eAvrupa+*) are given below:

- Internet speed will be faster, and access will be easier in and outside of the country.
- Internet use in education will be widened. Students and teachers will benefit from internet.
- Individuals will use electronic cards to replace IDs and other material.
- Individuals will have flexible working hours and arrangements, free from office conditions via internet.
- Computer, mobile phone and other equipment will be combined in one and this will assist activities of human beings.
- This equipment will be used by entire population; handicapped people will explore benefits in a full scale.
- E-shopping will be popular.
- The notion of public service will experience greater transformation by easy access.
- Personal health records will be mobilised.
- Turkish websites will be mushroomed.
- Traffic services will be dealt by reaching updated information.
- Environmental problems will be monitored and taken cared.
- The public services listed by *eEurope* (DPT, *Bilgi Toplumu*) to promote are as follows:

Services to Citizens

- Income tax accruing and payments
- Job seeking by public employment bureaus
- Social security transactions (unemployment payments, child benefit/medical care/scholarships)
- Passport and driving licence applications
- Vehicle registration
- Construction permits
- Applications/complaints to/of security forces
- Access to public libraries
- Birth and marriage certificates

- Application to higher education institutions
- Address records
- Health services

Services Related to Organisations and Private Institutions

- Social security payments
- Company tax accruing and payments
- VAT accruing and payments
- Company registration
- Declarations to statistics institutions
- Declaration of wealth/property
- Permit applications for environmental issues
- Public tender

The list is so comprehensive to include nearly every public policy area. Therefore, it gives positive impression initially. One can always be sceptical about this choice, arguing that the government could adopt gradual way of reforming by defining piece-by-piece and implementing afterwards rather than big claims but small outcomes.

4. MAJOR E-GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS AND APPLICATIONS

The Ninth Five Year Development Plan of Turkey pays special attention to transforming social, economical and technical structure of the country to modernise business processes with efficiency and effectiveness concerns. To adopt this change, e-government applications should be accelerated. The following measures will be taken for this end: Public services; administrative processes will be reviewed to meet the fundamentals of private sector, to deploy Information and Communications Technologies to obtain efficient, transparent, sustainable, reliable and one stop shops in public service provision.

E-government is to be deployed in restructuring public services to maintain effective, fast and collaborative features by governance approaches in structures and functions. In public sector, basic information infrastructures have to be established for meeting demands of individuals and institutions through a single number to be used in all instances. The data related to the actors, namely individuals and institutions will be kept in a common base to supply to relevant institutions as appropriate.

Government will focus on intensive and higher added value provisions in the short term in e-government investments. The method of common service provision will make sure that convergence and divergence will be avoided, leading toward effectiveness in public services. For this goal, legal amendments will be introduced. Having done so, privacy of individuals and information security are guaranteed via reliable public network and emergency case units. E-signature will be encouraged and, when possible, urged (DPT, 2006: 96-97).

E-government services in Turkey are carried out to have a unified and compact system rather than fragmented and individualised model, and therefore service duplications and extravagant spendings are prevented; intra and inter organisational electronic information sharing mechanisms are facilitated in different levels. The initiative commencing from 18 December 2008 is starting to bring concrete positive outcomes as a cyber gateway to solving basic problems preventing information and communication technologies (Turkey Portal, <http://www.turkiye.gov.tr>).

The following services are performed successfully as a part of the e-government services in the country: Central Census Administration System (MERNIS), ID Sharing System, Inland Revenue Automation Project (VEDOP I-II), National Justice Network Project (UYAP), Border Point Administration Modernisation Project (GİMOP), Police Information Network (POLNET), Accounting Automation System (Say2000i), e-Form and Prime Ministry Legal Documents Information System.

In 2007, Turkey has joined the program carried out since 2001 by Capgemini Company on behalf of the European Commission in benchmarking provisions of 20 basic public services in electronic way. As of 2007, the 20 public service provision in electronic form showed average 59 % in EU 27+ (EU and Turkey, Switzerland, Norway, and Island), whereas it was 55 % in Turkey. Maturity level in the provision of the services was 76% in EU27+ and 69% in Turkey. Maturity level for business sector displayed better results, 86 % in Turkey and 84 % in the EU27+. In Europe, user focused service supply was 17 % and 12 % in Turkey (Capgemini, 2007).

According to the study by OECD on e-Government Turkey Research in 2006 (OECD, 2006: 3), the following points deserve attention:

a. E-government activities are gaining greater momentum recently in Turkey. Successful results are being achieved in efficient, effective, transparent and accountable e-service performance in the country. Turkey has spared its attention on the following points:

- Instead of more e-service delivery e-tender, social security and health payments electronically, custom and tax rate payments etc. high volume/high income generating e-service provision.

- Formation of infrastructure via establishing revenue offices, Ministry of Finance accounting division, national justice network and national police network, and information and communication technology networks.

- Through personal information sharing opportunities among related public bureaus and being based upon allocating a single ID number for every individual and institution, and establishment of a database for national citizen number and tax number projects have played vital roles in developing and facilitating factor of friendly reception of e-government in the country.

b. The research finds tangible results. Annual savings of over \$1 billion in government investment by preventing fraud, with \$2,5 m cost in social security sector, and through increasing efficiency in the public total \$3 billion savings have been achieved. The study also finds that due to technical capacity brought by e-government social security payments have been able to witness partial success if not whole, increase from \$12.5 billion in 2003 to \$17.9 billion annually in 2009 (DPT, Bilgitoplumu). Collection of the taxes by banks has reduced the unit costs from \$2 to \$0.35. This could also be attributed to the electronic delivery of public services.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Due to increasing effects of globalisation on nation states, the attempts of Turkey to join the EU and growing expectations from the public have been urging the country to find better ways and means of delivering public services. These conditions have been pushing successive governments to increase scale, scope and quality of public services at least since 1999, the EU Helsinki Summit when candidacy status was declared for Turkey. Turkish public administration has to adopt contemporary processes not to fall behind the levels required to catch its European partners and criteria. The fundamental principle has been to integrate the country with the rest of the world, but keeping individual differences and elective choices for their control.

This paper reiterates the major argument for public sector provision of services and claims that the three Es (efficiency, effectiveness and economy) are still valid for obtaining value for money. Electronic government is the answer found by vast majority of developed and developing countries in the regard. This has the potential to heal certain problems of Turkish public administration. Therefore, the existing attempts should have prolonged effects to gain public confidence as well as public servant supports. The empirical data provided by so many diverse and contrasting international studies support the argument that apart from the recent e-government initiatives, there is a need for strong determination to strengthen electronic infrastructure of public administration.

In a globalised world where border points have been eroding ICT is dominating the agendas of every nation, Turkey has been scoring poorly in the account of technical modernisation. The country has to fill in the gap left by lack of relevant technical apparatus. This is not to say that Turkey is doing nothing. On the contrary, the country has achieved certain degree of success but needs more to climb in the rankings rather than the other way around. Public sector institutions have been keen on giving up paper work and concentrating on virtual environment. This electronic process is rather informative, instead of interactive. Citizens cannot, in many cases, get direct services from public institutions by electronic process. One needs to evaluate private sector in this regard as well.

The examination of Turkey vis-à-vis the EU reveals valuable lessons to draw and act upon. Firstly, websites of public organisations should be transformed to a interactive and organic structure, and therefore allow their application, complaints, suggestions and comments in its widest sense. Secondly, in satisfying the demands of the public to receive information, the concept of 'confidentiality' has to be redefined in a way of promoting openness and transparency. Finally, there is also the case for reviewing the law to promote democratic instances by obtaining, storing, processing, and protecting data on individuals. In doing so, basic rights and freedoms of individuals have to be guaranteed.

One needs to bear in mind that large scale and cross-subject evaluations can be possible with the support of involved actors. The legalistic structure of public bureaucracy in Turkey presses on autonomies of administrative units, so every institution has certain degree of power to block and prevent success. Lack of cooperation among different institutions could be overcome by strong support to coordinating institutions. Considering that even in a single ministry or a general directorate different divisions do not establish strong ties to share information, which is vital in e-government, different ministries would be difficult to estimate results.

As illustrated above, establishment of e-services for justice, security and revenue are vital, while poor relations among the service providers are disastrous. There is a strong case for integration of

these services. Otherwise, population statistics, say, related to social security, police, health and passport would not be coordinated and compared, directing toward corruption and breach of law. Who will be the contact point (or driving force)? A central office would play this role. A ministerial position would be an excellent place: minister for information and communication rather than transportation. This body would also set professional standards for public sector institutions on central and local levels.

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