

THE EUROPEAN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SERVICES DELIVERY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIGITALIZATION AND SIMPLIFICATION: NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND PRACTISE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA*

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ABSTRACT

European Union principle of Public administration service delivery is a key principle underpinning the efficiency principle and simplification of administrative procedures. Serbian government has done a lot of efforts and made a progress in the last five years in the sphere of public services digitalization, through strategic, institutional, normative changes, but some weaknesses still remain in terms of realizing the full potential of the different strategies and legislation. The purpose of the paper is to elaborate the application of quality and efficient public service delivery through analysis of Serbian strategic and normative framework de lege ferenda, simplification of administration procedures, focusing to main concerns for effective implementation of general procedure legislation and applying consistent practice. In the Introduction

* The paper is the result of the realization of the Scientific Research Project entitled “Development of Institutional Capacities, Standards and Procedures for Fighting Organized Crime and Terrorism in Climate of International Integrations”. The Project is financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia (No 179045), and carried out by the Academy of Criminalistic and Police Studies in Belgrade (2011-). The paper is also the result of research within the project “Responsibility in the Legal and Social Context”, funded by the Faculty of Law, University of Niš, in the period 2021–2025.

authors emphasize the progressing importance of digitalization of public services, from the perspective of European Union principles. This part also addresses conceptual issues of efficiency and effectiveness for ensuring high quality of public service delivery. The second part reveals the analysis of Serbian normative and strategic framework towards reducing bureaucratic burdens, simplification of administrative procedures through one-stop-shops, coordinating and “connecting” procedures from the jurisdiction of one or more administrative organs or organizations in the way they provide better access to public services across the country. This part contains analysis of general legal framework from the aspect of reducing bureaucratic burdens for citizens and business entities, by imposing the obligation for public authorities to provide the documents ex officio and use them in administrative procedures. The authors analyze the provisions of the General Administrative Procedure Act *de lege ferenda* and its weaknesses for effective implementation. In Conclusion authors will summarize results of research in the way to point out to contemporary tendencies regarding digitalization of public services and means of application of efficiency, transparency, accessibility, openness and quality of public services in practice. Dominant methods of scientific research are dogmatic, comparative, content analysis, analysis and synthesis.

Keywords: administrative procedures, digitalization, efficiency, European administrative principles, Public services

1. INTRODUCTION

The initiatives by European Union and its institutions strongly encourage constant changes in public administration systems of Member States. European administrative standards and values make up the unofficial *Acquis*, which is getting closer to becoming official, and together with other administrative standards, values, procedures, and institutions constitute the European Administrative Space – a basis for the conduct of the participants in the public life of the Member States.¹ Essential administrative law principles common to all EU countries remain the same - reliability and predictability (legal certainty); openness and transparency; accountability; efficiency and effectiveness.² The European Commission devotes special attention and further elaborates the standards for the reform of public administration. The principles use a combination of EU legislation and non-binding texts as benchmark references.

One of the main priorities of public administration is to deliver public services effectively and efficiently. National administrative laws reflect a balance between the traditional administrative values and increasing a concept of “citizens-oriented” public administration. Theoretically, two public administration doctrines that

¹ Vukašinović Radojičić Z.; Čogurić V., *Convergence and symbiosis of public administration principles - International and European Perspective*, Bezbednost, Vol. 59, No. 2, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srbije, 2021, pp. 27-42.

² SIGMA/OECD, *The Principles of Public Administration*, Paris, 2017, pp.63, [<http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/principles-public-administration.htm>] Accessed 10 September 2021.

have substantial influence on public regulations - New Public Management Theory and the doctrine of Good Governance.

The Good Governance doctrine focuses on openness, transparency and participation of citizens.³ While the terms good governance and good administration are often used as synonyms, the content of the two concepts is not the same. “Good governance is a broader concept describing how country institutions perform public affairs and manage public resources.”⁴ The principles of good governance that are most common in the practice of international or regional organisations include accountability, openness, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, and participation.⁵

In contrast to the concept of good governance, the concept of ‘good administration’ refers exclusively to the acts and actions of public administration; however, it is not limited to complying with legal requirements – the principle of legality of administration and the rule of law, but also includes other standards of proper and good administrative practice. Good administration is a key policy objective underpinning the delivery of public service, enacted in legislation and applied consistently in practice. According to Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union (“right to good administration”) “every person has the right to have his or her affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institution and bodies of the Union.”⁶ Key requirements concerning rights to good administration relate to following: a coherent legal framework exists limiting special regulations to a minimum; legal framework is effectively implemented in all state bodies; key principles of good administration are defined in legislation, such as legality, equity, equal treatment, proportionality, lawful exercise of discretion, openness and transparency, impartiality, due diligence, the right of hearing, to state the reasons for the decisions, consultations with civil society, fair balance between public interest and legitimate expectations of individual, repeal of administrative act. Those principles have been further elaborated in European Union documents and guidelines representing a framework for harmonization with national regulation.

³ Vukašinović, Z.; Vučetić, D., *Profesionalizacija javne uprave u Srbiji*, Kriminalističko-policijski univerzitet, Beograd, 2021, p. 211.

⁴ Jerinić, J. et al., *Handbook for Implementing the Principles of Good Governance at the Local Level, Second revised and updated edition (Priručnik za sprovođenje principa dobrog upravljanja na lokalnom nivou, II dopunjeno i izmenjeno izdanje)*, SKGO, Beograd, 2022, p. 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union (2000) OJ C 364/1.

The New Public Management Theory entails the notion of efficiency and effectiveness of administrative proceedings, optimization, simplification and digitalization. The concept of efficiency arises within the New Public Management doctrine, emerging in the 1980s, which emphasizes the economic aspects of work of public administration, efficiency, strategic planning, managerial skills, management, and performance evaluation. The concept of efficiency assumes that 'the selected goals are achieved with optimal use of time, material and human resources.'⁷ Cost-effectiveness implies producing a specified amount of results at minimal costs. Effectiveness means choosing the right goals and pursuing them utilising the available resources.⁸

The efficiency principle is generally ensured through key instruments encompassing: optimisation of administrative proceedings, increased digitalisation and application of e-Government, data exchange by official duty, integration and optimisation of multiple procedures through a single administrative point (one-stop-shop). Effectiveness is about focusing on the objectives (values) of a particular community with the aim to protect the public interest. Unlike efficiency, which is quantitative, effectiveness is concerned with issues of qualitative nature. What is efficient is not always also effective. Effectiveness is the *ratio* of the targets set to the results achieved, and most often comprises three aspects – legal, economic, and social.

Reform processes towards digitalization at the European Union level and national administrative systems may be viewed in the context of simplification of administrative procedures through regulatory reform. From the European union perspective, reducing administrative burdens is an essential part of the Better Regulation programme in almost all European Union member states, especially in terms of procedure simplification and deregulation.⁹ "Speaking of simplification and reduction of administrative burdens or costs, two types of measures aimed at rationalising administrative and other procedures and removing unnecessary elements in such procedures without changing in any way the extent of state supervision or public interest protection. ...Rationalisation may, for example, be attained by applying principles of one-stop-shops and "let data circulate instead of the citizens."¹⁰ It is based on the standard for removing administrative barriers, incorporated in

⁷ Jerinić, J. *et al.*, *Priručnik za sprovođenje principa ...*, *op.cit.*, note, 4, p. 295.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ European Commission, *Better regulation guidelines*, SWD (2021) 305 final, 2021 [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/swd2021_305_en.pdf] Accessed 30.03.2023.

¹⁰ Virant, G.; Kovač, P., *Reducing administrative burdens as part of the» better regulation «programme—the case of Slovenia*, *Lex Localis-Journal of Local Self-Government*, Vo. 8 No, 2010, pp. 369-390.

process of drafting and adopting decisions through Regulatory Impact Analysis.¹¹ In terms of simplification and modernization public services, quality regulation principles and standards have been recognized such as necessity, proportionality, subsidiarity, transparency, accountability, accessibility and simplicity. Removal of administrative burdens was furthered by implementing the Lisbon Strategy.¹² European regulatory framework on e-communication from 2002, has significantly accelerated digitalization, technological development and competitiveness of the single market on e-communication.¹³

Nevertheless, putting the needs of service users at the centre of the reform, simplifying the administrative procedures, and intensifying the development of e-government enable greater efficiency in public administration. The paper shall present the importance of public service delivery through digitalization and simplification administration procedures, in view of European principles and national administrative systems.

1.1. Public service delivery through perspective of efficiency and effectiveness - conceptual issues

The synthesis of European Union standards identified by its institutions and programs¹⁴ constitutes a reference framework for assessing the degree of administrative systems development, which is revised over time and adapted to the conditions of the acceding countries complementing it with new elements. The framework set out in 1999¹⁵ was amended and made more specific in 2014 and 2017, respec-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

¹² European Parliament, The Lisbon Strategy, 2009-2014 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empl/dv/lisbonstrategybn/_lisbonstrategybn_en.pdf] Accessed 20 June 2022.

¹³ Council Directive 2002/21/EC on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services – Framework Directive (2002) OJ L108, p.33-50; Council Directive 2002/20/EC on the authorisation of electronic communications networks and services - Authorisation Directive (2002) OJ L108, p.21-32; Council Directive 2002/19/EC on access to, and interconnection of, electronic communications networks and associated facilities - Access Directive (2002) OJ L108, p.7-20; Council Directive 2002/22/EC on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services - Universal Service Directive (2002) OJ L108, p.51-77; Council Directive 2002/58/EC concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector -Directive on privacy and electronic communications (2002) OJ L108, pp. 37-47.

¹⁴ The most effective is SIGMA program - Support for Improvement in Governance and Management as a joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union.

¹⁵ SIGMA/OECD, *Control and Management System Baselines for European Union Membership*, Paris, 1999, [https://www.sigmaxweb.org/publicationsdocuments/35007180.pdf] Accessed 20 June 2020.

tively, by The Principles of Public Administration.¹⁶ The principles were complemented by a monitoring framework, making it possible to assess the state of affairs of public administration and the progress achieved.¹⁷

Main principles set out in the SIGMA documents¹⁸ point to the course of administrative system development towards professionalisation and efficiency. “In a broader multidisciplinary sense, efficiency exist when the most important social goals and values in the work of the administration are achieved to the greatest possible extent”. It is a question of the degree of achievement of well-chosen goals through the maximum use of available resources.”¹⁹ The principle of effectiveness implies that the procedure is regulated so as to ensure that the proceedings are conducted at the lowest possible cost to the party and other participants in the procedure, which includes obtaining data information *ex officio*, prescribing simple and clear application (request) forms, conducting the procedure in electronic form when relevant requirements are met. According to SIGMA document “effectiveness depends to a great extent on fulfilling customer expectations while respecting legal provisions. Effectiveness also entails ensuring equal access to public administration services and the efficient provision of these services saving citizens both money and time.”²⁰

The principle of Public administration service delivery is a key requirement underpinning the efficiency principle and simplification of administrative procedures. It is related to citizen-oriented public administration and the quality of accessibility of public services. Increasing customer expectations mean that effective and efficient public administration reform with a strengthened customer focus are increasingly essential in most countries. In this context, orientation towards clients – citizens and enterprises – contacts, seeking official data, adhering to rules of the administrative procedure, has been the main concern of administrative performance. Public service delivery encompasses: designed and applied policy for citizen-oriented administration, political commitment, vision and strategy, relevant strategic framework and consistently applied policy for administrative simplifica-

¹⁶ SIGMA/OECD, *The Principles of Public Administration*, Paris, 2017, [<http://www.sigmaxweb.org/publications/principles-public-administration.htm>] Accessed 10 September 2021.

¹⁷ SIGMA/OECD, *Methodological Framework for the Principles of Public Administration*, Paris, 2017, (<http://www.sigmaxweb.org/publications/Methodological-Framework-for-the-Principles-of-Public-Administration-May-2019.pdf>), Accessed 10 September 2021.

¹⁸ SIGMA/OECD, *The Principles of Public Administration...*, *op.cit.*, note 16, p. 64.

¹⁹ Vučetić, D., “*Is Serbian Administrative Procedure Red, Green, or Forever Amber?*”, in: Kmiecik, Z. (ed.), *Comparative legal studies - Contemporary Concepts of Administrative Procedure, Between Legalism and Pragmatism*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Wolters Kluwer, 2023, pp. 163-178

²⁰ SIGMA/OECD, *The Principles of Public Administration...*, *op.cit.*, note 16, p. 64.

tion, consistent legal framework effectively applied in practice and adequate institutional set-up. These standards should contain the following mechanisms for ensuring the quality of public service: regular monitoring of service delivery and analysis of user's needs; modernization to save the time spent by customers, the number of times physical presence is required and improving the ease of obtaining information and services; interoperability of registries and digital services to simplify procedures for citizens promoted through legal framework and technical preparedness; sharing good practices, setting out the standards of service delivery for main public services.²¹

Accessibility of public services, as an important element of public service delivery ensures territorial access for individuals and businesses, one-stop-shops/points covering a wide range of services available, communication of official matters through user-friendly electronic channels, official websites providing contact information, clear advice and guidance on accessing public services, as well as on rights and obligations of users and public institutions providing services, service provision taking into account needs of special groups of customer (disabled persons, seniors, foreigners, families with children, etc.).²² This principle has been elaborated in national regulations and practice.

Administrative procedure acts in European countries represent an important tool to simplify administrative procedures and meet the needs and interests of citizens and business entities. "Administrative procedure is traditionally understood as a system of rules that primarily govern the administrative decision-making process."²³ *Stricto sensu*, administrative procedure means a set of rules that direct a process throughout an orderly succession of administrative actions or proceedings that lead to a binding, final administrative decision affecting individual rights."²⁴ "Succinctly, today's administrative procedure is a central legal institution whose scope far exceeds its original function of merely channeling the issuance of administrative acts."²⁵ Basic principles of administrative procedure relate to legality principle, the principle of impartial administration, the equality principle and the

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Barnes, J., *Towards a Contemporary Understanding of Administrative Procedure*, in: Kmiecik, Z. (ed.), *Comparative legal studies - Contemporary Concepts of Administrative Procedure, Between Legalism and Pragmatism*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Wolters Kluwer, 2023, pp. 21-40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁵ Djerđa, D., *Stages in the evolution of the law on administrative procedures - from the first codification*, in: Kmiecik, Z., (ed.), *Administrative Proceedings in the Habsburg Succession Countries*, Wolters Kluwer, Łódź/Warszawa, 2021, pp. 89-105.

proportionality principle.^{26 27} Some authors state that “solutions of Spanish and Austrian legal though have had the greatest impact on development of the administrative procedure law not only in Europe but also outside it.”²⁸ “We need to face up the fact that the obvious trend toward the law “streamlining” is sometimes at the cost of transparency and utility.”²⁹ Some authors point out to collaboration vs. adversarialism - administrative procedures which are not based on a strict public-private division of responsibilities. “The collaborative model is defined more by the intense participation of a variety of actors – public and private - that do not necessarily represent antagonistic interests..”³⁰

Most of the Eastern European countries adopted general administrative procedure acts during period of EU accession, influenced by principles of European Administrative Space, “which give rise to the different understanding of the role of public administration and a modern perception of its activities.”³¹

Recent studies have indicated that digitalization of public services has been underpinned by simple and clear rules, digital communication, making automatic case handling possible, transverse coherence-uniform terms and reuse of data, safe and secure data handling, use of public infrastructure, preventing cheating and mistakes.³²

2. SERBIAN ADMINISTRATIVE NORMATIVE AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK – REDUCING BUREAUCRATIC BURDENS?

Serbian government has done a lot of efforts and made a progress in the last five years in the sphere of public services digitalization, through strategic, institutional, normative changes, but some weaknesses still remain in terms of realizing the full potential of the different strategies and legislation. The overall objective behind the process of informatisation of government and digital transformation of the work processes is to increase user satisfaction with public services, reduce the admin-

²⁶ Gram Mortensen, B.O., Waage, F., “Trends in the in the Administrative Procedures of Denmark”: Kmiecik, Z. (ed.), *Comparative legal studies - Contemporary Concepts of Administrative Procedure*, Between Legalism and Pragmatism, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Lodzkiego, Wolters Kluwer, 2023, pp. 278-279.

²⁷ Barnes, J., “Towards a Contemporary Understanding...”, *op.cit.*, note 23, p. 37.

²⁸ Kmiecik, Z., *In the Circle of the Austrian Codification Ideas*, in: Kmiecik, Z., (ed.), *Administrative Proceedings in the Habsburg Succession Countries*, Wolters Kluwer, Lodz/Warszawa, 2021, pp. 23/37

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 35.

³⁰ Barnes, J., “Towards a Contemporary Understanding...”, *op.cit.*, note 23, p. 37.

³¹ Djerda, D., *Stages in the evolution of the law on administrative procedures...*, *op.cit.*, note 25, pp. 97-98.

³² Gram Mortensen, B.O., Waage, F., *op.cit.*, note 26, p. 280.

istrative burden for citizens and businesses, and improve public administration efficiency and national and cross-border interoperability.³³ The information and communication technologies assisted simplification of administrative procedures leads to rationalisation and restructuring of administration, reduced administration costs, and a more efficient exercise of citizens' and businesses' rights.

Digitalisation has become the strategic goal of the Serbian Government³⁴ in the field of public administration, and it essentially refers to the use of information and communication technologies means in all public administration activities.³⁵ The Office for Information Technology and e-Government has been established as a Government service responsible for designing, harmonising and developing the electronic government system of public administration authorities and Government services and providing technical assistance to all public authorities in the development and implementation of electronic government.³⁶ Regarding institutional framework, other state authorities have also significant competences for developing e-government (Ministry for public administration and local self-government, Public policies Secretariat, other ministries and state administration authorities, local self-government units, etc.).

Notably, in accordance with Serbian Public Administration Reform Strategy,³⁷ key strategic objective is increasing efficiency of public service delivery. Main goal is to respond to citizen's and business's needs and increase their satisfaction. As regards, European Commission monitoring reports indicate that citizen's perception of the

³³ Vukašinović Radojičić, Z., et al., *Challenges of applying advanced information technologies and the public administration reform in the Republic of Serbia (Izazovi primene savremenih informacionih tehnologija i reforma javne uprave u Republici Srbiji)*, 32. Susret Kopaoničke škole prirodnog prava, Pravni život, 2019, pp. 285-297.

³⁴ Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia, E-Government Development Programme of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2019-2022 and Action Plan for its implementation [<http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Program-razvoja-e-uprave-za-period-od-2019-do-2022.pdf>] Accessed 20 September 2020; The Draft Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2021-2030 [<http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Predlog-strategije-reforme-javne-uprave-u-Republici-Srbiji-za-period-2021-2030..docx>] Accessed 20 December 2022; The Draft Action Plan for the period 2021-2025 in the Republic of Serbia [<http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Predlog-akcionog-plana-za-period-2021-2025..xlsx>] Accessed 20 December 2021.

³⁵ Vučetić, D., General Administrative Procedure Act and information technology improvements in Serbian public administration. *Collected Papers from the international scientific conference 'Law and Multidisciplinarity' („Pravo i multidisciplinarnost“)*, Law School, 2020, Niš, pp. 3-17.

³⁶ Regulation establishing the Office for Information Technologies and Electronic Government, Official Gazette No. 73/2017, 8/2019.

³⁷ Serbian Public Administration Reform Strategy for the period 2021-2030, Official gazette No. 42/2021, 9-2022.

efficiency of administrative procedures in Serbian public institutions has increased remarkably (from 39% to 64%) since 2017.³⁸

With the Strategy for the Development of Electronic Government in the Republic of Serbia,³⁹ the Strategy for the Development of Electronic Communications in the Republic of Serbia for 2010-2020,⁴⁰ and the Information Society and Information Safety Development Strategy for 2021-2026,⁴¹ the main directions and goals were set for the successful development of electronic communications and ensuring a more favourable position in the global economy. Key development goals concerning e-government relate to finalising the institutional and legal frameworks, establishing functional interoperability, setting up basic e-government registers, developing new services tailored to match user needs, and increasing knowledge not only in public administration employees but also in citizens.⁴² Reform processes towards digitalization have been also implemented through E-government Program⁴³ and standards for removing administrative barriers, incorporated in the process of drafting and adopting decisions through Regulatory Impact Analysis.⁴⁴ Administrative capacities have been constantly and effectively monitored and accessed by the European Commission and its programs in the context of future enlargement.

2.1. Accomplishments of the general administrative procedure act: increasing digitalization of public services

Traditionally, the Serbian administrative procedure has both protective role, based on the rule of law principle and full transparency, predictability (legitimate expectations) and effectiveness of administrative procedures (“the green light” model).⁴⁵

³⁸ SIGMA, OECD, *Monitoring Report, The principles of Public Administration*, Serbia, 2021, [https://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-2021-Serbia.pdf] Accessed 12 December 2022, p. 114.

³⁹ Strategy for the Development of Electronic Government in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2015-2018, Official Gazette No. 107/2015.

⁴⁰ Strategy for the Development of Electronic Communications in the Republic of Serbia for 2010-2020, Official Gazette No. 68/2010.

⁴¹ The Information Society and Information Safety Development Strategy for 2021-2026, Official Gazette No. 86/2021.

⁴² Strategy for the Development of Electronic Government in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2015-2018, Official Gazette No. 107/2015.

⁴³ Serbian E-government development program 2020-2022, Official gazette No. 85/2020.

⁴⁴ Milovanović D.; Nenadić, N.; Todorčić, B., *Study on improvement regulatory process in the Republic of Serbia* (Студија о унапређењу законодавног процеса у Републици Србији), Belgrade, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2012, p. 271.

⁴⁵ Vučetić, D., *Is Serbian Administrative Procedure...*, *op.cit.*, note 19, p. 177.

The Austrian administrative procedure law codification has had a strong influence on the grounds of Serbian administrative procedure.⁴⁶ Likewise continental systems of administrative law, according to the Serbian general administrative procedure act,⁴⁷ administrative procedure is a set of rules applied by state bodies and organizations, bodies and organizations of provincial autonomy and local self-government units, institutions, public enterprises, special bodies which perform regulatory function and legal and natural persons entrusted with public powers when acting in administrative matters.⁴⁸

Similarly to other European countries (Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Check Republic, Slovakia, etc..) General administrative procedure act states key principles of administrative procedures preserving characteristics of Austrian tradition of administrative procedure law: the principle of legality and predictability, the principle of proportionality, the principle of protection of the rights of the parties and the exercise of public interest, the principle of assistance to a party, the principle of the efficiency and effectiveness of the proceedings, the principle of truth and free assessment of evidence, right to submit pleadings, principle of independence, the right of appeal and objection, the principle of validity of the decision and the principle of access to information and data protection. Notably, administrative procedural rules are fully harmonized with principles and standards of “European administrative space”.

Main goal of the Serbian administrative procedural legislation is to shorten administrative procedure, to extend protection of the parties to the provision of public services, to regulate the basics of administrative contracts, to protect the parties’ rights in broad areas governed by special administrative procedures. “The most significant accomplishment of General Administrative Procedure Act (which exceeds legal effects *sensu stricto*) is the full implementation of digitalization in every possible area of administrative decision making. It has enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative proceedings to a completely new level and significantly reduced the costs for citizens and even more for entrepreneurs.”⁴⁹ “The Act has struck a good balance between the demands of the EU regulation, the

⁴⁶ Vučetić, D., *Stages in the evolution of the law on administrative procedures - from the first codification*, in: Kmiecik, Z., (ed.), *Administrative Proceedings in the Habsburg Succession Countries*, Wolters Kluwer, Lodz-Warszawa, 2021, pp. 181-198.

⁴⁷ Art. 1 of the General Administrative procedure act, Official gazette No. 18/2016, 95/2018, 2/2023.

⁴⁸ According to Article 2 of the Law administrative matter is defined as an individual situation in which an authority directly applying the laws or regulations legally or factually influences a party’s position by issuing administrative acts, guarantee acts, concluding administrative contracts, undertaking administrative actions and providing public services. It includes a wide range of almost all administrative activities.

⁴⁹ Vučetić, D., *Stages in the evolution...*, note 46, p. 194.

adaptation to the Good Governance doctrine and the successful implementation of the ICT solutions into the administrative decision making.”⁵⁰

With the General Administrative Procedure Act,⁵¹ specifically the provisions of articles 9, 102, 103 and 207, grounds were set for developing the e-government information system for the exchange of data *ex officio* and removing a major burden for citizens and businesses, which, with these provisions’ entry into force, ceased to be obliged to provide, as proof for their rights, the documents already contained in the public administration bodies’ and organisations’ records. These are the crucial provisions that have contributed to the modernization of Serbian administrative procedure.⁵² The provisions of these articles were subsequently elaborated in a series of laws and regulations.⁵³

Under the provisions of paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 9, the competent authority has an *ex officio* obligation to inspect, following the law, the data concerning the facts relevant to decision making that are kept in the official records, to acquire and process them, and is allowed to request from the party only the data essential for its identification and the documents acknowledging the facts on which no official records are kept.

In accordance with Article 9, the procedure is conducted without delay and at the lowest possible cost to the party and the other participant in the procedure, ensuring that all the evidence necessary for the proper and complete determination of facts is presented. The principle of efficiency has been also underpinned by the possibility of using videoconference tools for oral hearings if the authority and parties have adequate technical capacities and making decisions in electronic form.⁵⁴ This principle has been further elaborated by articles 102 and 103 of the Act. According to paragraph 2 of Article 102, the party has no obligation to acquire the evidence capable of being collected by the competent authority itself or the certificates or other documents in respect of which the authorities have no issu-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ General Administrative Procedure Act, Official Gazette of RS No. 18/2016, 95/2018 – authentic interpretation.

⁵² Vučetić, D., *Stages in the evolution...*, *op.cit.*, note 46, p. 191.

⁵³ Rulebook on the ways in which public authorities inspect, acquire, process and provide, or deliver from the electronic registers the data concerning the officially recorded facts that are necessary for the decision in the administrative proceedings, Official Gazette No. 57/2019; Regulation governing the acquisition and provision of data concerning the facts recorded in the official records and registers, Official Gazette No. 56/2017; Regulation specifying the conditions for establishing the e-government, Official Gazette No. 104/2018; The Act on Electronic Document, Electronic Identification and Trust Services in Electronic Transactions, Official Gazette No. 94/2017.

⁵⁴ Art. 111 of the General Administrative Procedure Act, Official gazette No. 18/2016, 95/2018, 2/2023.

ing obligation. In addition to that, article 103 of the Act mandates the competent authorities to *ex officio* inspect, acquire and process data concerning the facts kept in the official records and necessary for decision making. If the official records are kept by another authority, the authority conducting the procedure must promptly request the relevant data, and the requested authority must provide them, free of charge within 15 days, unless stipulated otherwise. If the requested data can be obtained electronically, the requested authority delivers them as quickly as possible. In the procedure instituted at the party's request, the competent authority is allowed to inspect, acquire and process personal data concerning the facts kept in the official records if necessary for the decision, except when the party expressly states that it will acquire those data by itself.

Adhering to European Union standards and best practise in national administrative systems, in accordance with Article 42 of the General Administrative Procedure Act, a party may address the single administrative point (one-stop-shop) if the exercise of one or more of its rights requires action by one or more authorities. It represents the point of either physical or digital contact, through which public services are provided to citizens or businesses without changes in jurisdiction and internal relationships among the organisational units within the public administration authorities and organisations. The main functions of the single administrative point are: to instruct applicants on what relevant authorities require to act upon a request, to receive applications and submit them to responsible officers, and to notify applicants of the actions taken and the documents adopted. These functions can also be performed electronically, by mail or other appropriate means, with time limits for the decision starting from submitting an orderly request. This provision also extends to the work of local government units, whereby the establishment of the single administrative point, as per paragraph 2 of the said Article, affects neither the authorities' jurisdiction nor the party's right to approach the competent authority directly.

According to SIGMA Monitoring Report, the number of municipal one-stop-shops is increasing and providing better access to public services across the country.⁵⁵ The accessibility of public services has improved thanks to the gradual expansion of one-stop-shops. In 2020, 14 one-stop-shops were operating and the plan is to reach 24 in 2022.⁵⁶ However, in terms of realizing the full potential of the different strategies, some weaknesses remain. The degree of integration competent institutions and their outcomes service delivery remains unclear,⁵⁷ since different

⁵⁵ SIGMA, OECD, Monitoring Report..., *op.cit.*, note 38, p. 109.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 112.

units deal with the projects related to service delivery – Public Policies Secretariat (simplification and the registry of procedures), Ministry of Public administration and Local self-government (integration of services in one-stop-shops), the Office for Information technologies and electronic government in charge of digital one-stop shops and simplification of digital services.

In this respect, making a series of organisational, functional, technological, normative, IT-related, and educational arrangements is necessary. Public servants employed in the unit for communication with citizens (front office) should become ‘personal officers’, taking due care of citizens’ or businesses’ requests. They should be client-oriented, advising the citizens, responding to all their inquiries and resolving their concerns quickly and efficiently. To do so, they must possess expert knowledge of various fields, be well familiar with the work of the public administration and the rights and legal interests the citizens can realise within their administrative authority or organisation, and be capable of acting proactively. There is a demand for trained staff, for work in a dynamic environment, with a duty to keep up to date with relevant trends and meet citizens’ and other users’ needs.

Without The E-Government Act,⁵⁸ it would have been impossible to achieve fully-functional e-government since now, for the first time, we also have a systemic obligation for each subject of the state mechanism, particularly the administration, to apply modern technologies in all administrative procedures establishing relationships between the citizens and businesses and the public administration. The Act applies to all electronic activities taken by public authorities, organisations, or other holders of public authority, as well as to electronic communications of these subjects.⁵⁹ There are two significant areas that this Act regulates: electronic procedure and electronic communication, proceeding from the principle of efficiency in equipment management, the principle of e-government security and the prohibition of discrimination. Under The E-Government Act, the electronic administrative point is a web portal or other software solution allowing for the electronic administrative procedure of one or more public authorities to realise one or more rights to be conducted in one place. Also worth noting is that introducing the electronic reception office (with a document management system) enables a simple electronic exchange of data between different organisational units

⁵⁸ The E-Government Act, Official Gazette of RS No. 27/2018.

⁵⁹ Electronic administrative procedure can be defined as acting in administrative matters by electronic means. For the authorities to act electronically and citizens and businesses to exercise their respective rights in the like manner, the Act lays down specific requirements, which primarily include: authentication and authorisation of all types of users, authorities’ obligations concerning communication in electronic administrative decision making (a term we will use to refer to electronic administrative procedure), electronic application and its receipt, electronic delivery and electronic delivery confirmation.

of the public administration system and the delivery of electronic services to citizens and businesses.

For further development in this area, the Register of Administrative Procedures Act has been adopted in 2021, foreseeing that the Register will cover all administrative procedures for citizens and businesses by 2025.⁶⁰ The legislator intended to make the procedures uniform and transparent to the greatest extent possible. Within the meaning of this Act, administrative procedure refers to the exercise of rights and obligations and legal interests of businesses and citizens for which purpose public authorities issue licences, permits, consents or approvals, decisions, various certificates, opinions, notices, records, extracts from the official records, and alike. In one place, the Register provides all public service users with information about the administrative procedures of their interest via the Internet, thus eliminating the need for them to visit physical office locations.⁶¹

The aim is to establish a publicly available electronic database of all administrative procedures to streamline the exercise of rights and fulfilment of obligations for businesses and citizens by providing publicly available, accurate and up-to-date information on the procedures managed by the administration.⁶² It was made possible for businesses to initiate the procedure electronically, by submitting a digital request, which the competent authority, upon the receipt of the required documents, decides in the shortest time possible, issuing the electronic decision and delivering it to the applicant's electronic mailbox on the e-Government Portal. While, at this point, the Register contains more than 2600 procedures, there are 2582 procedures carried out by the state authorities and authorities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina that are currently available to the public.⁶³

According to Article 7 of the Act, each procedure comprises the following elements as mandatory: the entity submitting a registration application with the Register, the authority responsible for conducting the procedure, the responsible data entry clerk, the supervisory body, information about parties, legal basis, purpose and description of the procedure, manner of initiation, time limits for initiation,

⁶⁰ The Registry of Administrative Procedures Act, Official Gazette No. 44/2021.

⁶¹ The Act defines the principles for regulating and conducting administrative procedures, the authorities for adopting methodological rules governing administrative procedures, and the management, maintenance and content of the respective Register.

⁶² Vučetić D., Dimitrijević P., *Registration of administrative procedures – dilemmas in theory and consequences in practice (Registrowanje administrativnih postupaka – teorijske nedoumice i praktične posledice)*, Pravna riječ, No. 64/2021, Banja Luka, 2021, pp. 77-95.

⁶³ Vučetić D., Dimitrijević P., *Registration of administrative procedures...*, note 62, p.78, Public Policies Secretariat, Register of Administrative Procedures, (<https://rap.euprava.gov.rs>), Accessed on April 14 2023.

legal consequences of (not) acting within the stipulated time limits, application form, service price (fee, charge, etc.), other bodies participating in the procedure. Interestingly, some of these data are published on the E-Government Portal, by which practice the principle of openness of the administration is fully applied. These solutions result from applying good governance principles and concern "the economisation of administrative procedure law, having as the primary instrument the simplification of the administrative procedure."⁶⁴ It is suggested to align the solutions of the Administrative Procedures Register Act with the existing elements of the entire normative system.⁶⁵

The efficiency principle within the meaning of this Act assumes that related and interdependent procedures are merged, if justified and possible, or conducted through a single administrative point, that is, through unified procedure, depending on the authority for administration, or abolished if there is no justification for their continued existence. In this respect, the procedure is regulated to allow for its administration at as low a cost to the party and the other participant in the procedure as possible, with the acquisition of data *ex officio* and carrying out of the procedure electronically when conditions for doing so are met.

A significant role is played by the Republic Public Policies Secretariat, which monitors procedural compliance and makes proposals to competent authorities for alignment with the Methodology. This practice entails appointing the administrators within the relevant authorities and notifying the Republic Secretariat thereof to be granted access to the Register. Data on the procedures are published on the E-Government Portal. The principle of responsibility is underpinning the efficiency principle, implying that the competent authority is required to institute proceedings for establishing the liability of authorized persons in case of non-compliance with the prescribed principles, methodology and implementation of administrative procedures.

The responsibility for the development of public services is still fragmented and some of the aspects remain uncovered. Despite of the good progress made in improving the enablers of digital government an analysis of a sample of services for citizens indicate that they are still highly bureaucratic and are at low level of digitalisation.⁶⁶

In view of essential European principles, particular importance is attached to the e-Government Portal – a national webpage through which citizens can make re-

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁶⁶ SIGMA, OECD, Monitoring Report..., *op.cit.*, note 38, p. 108.

quests, receive responses, and acquire documents. Additionally, the the Portal allows citizens to get informed about the list of services offered by the authorities, monitor the status of their case, pay fees, and exchange data through the Government Service Bus. Within the provision of E-government services on the E-Government Portal, the latter keeps the register of users of those services and the records of system access and service usage.

In the domain of e-government, the legislator specified the key concepts that constitute a precondition for service provision and electronic administration. These concepts include: unified e-government information and communication network, Government Service Bus, establishment and management of electronic registers and records and their data usage, data and documents protection in the process of their acquisition and transfer, setting up and management of a Meta register, email account of an authorised official, unique electronic mailbox, software solution, E-Government Portal and government operations on it, rights of users of e-government services, establishment and maintenance of web portals within e-government, renewals and accompanying licences, Open Data Portal, development and maintenance of the web presentation, physical data protection and storage of backup data, maintenance, repair and withdrawal of the work equipment, requirements for the establishment of e-government.

Open Data Portal is a central point in which data from administrative authorities and organisations are integrated and made available to citizens and the private sector. Each authority is required to publish the open data from its scope of powers on the Open Data Portal so that they can be easily searched and reused. Open Data Portal is managed and maintained by a competent authority, while the Government sets out detailed requirements regarding its establishment and operation, including the organisational and technical standards.⁶⁷

Definitions of the above notions were given on the basis of the E-Government Act and its accompanying regulations, the most essential of which include: Regulation on electronic office management in public administration authorities,⁶⁸ Instruction on electronic business,⁶⁹ Regulation on acquiring and transferring data concerning the facts recorded in the official records⁷⁰ and the Instruction on its

⁶⁷ Regulation on the operation of Open Data Portal, Official Gazette No. 104/2018.

⁶⁸ Regulation on electronic office management in public administration authorities, Official Gazette No. 40/2010, 42/2017.

⁶⁹ Instruction on electronic business, Official Gazette No. 102/2010.

⁷⁰ Regulation on acquiring and transferring data concerning the facts recorded in the official records, Official Gazette No. 56/2017.

implementation, Regulation on the operation of Open Data Portal,⁷¹ Regulation specifying the conditions for developing and maintaining public authorities' web presentations,⁷² Regulation specifying the conditions for establishing electronic government,⁷³ Regulation on the management of Meta register, manner of approving, suspending and denying access to the Government Service Bus and modes of operation on the e-Government Portal,⁷⁴ Regulation on technical and organisational standards concerning the Unified information and communication network of e-government.

All those regulations have led to the creation of the system for electronic communication which is used in decision-making processes in different administrative procedures. While significant progress in the area of simplifying administrative procedures is evident,⁷⁵ major transformations in this respect are yet to come.

Harmonisation of regulations with the General Administrative Procedure Act continues, with ongoing training also being conducted in this field. After the amendments to the General Administrative Procedure Act, the E-Government Act, and other acts, the revision and harmonisation ensued of special laws governing administration in different areas (tax matters, state survey and cadastre, health, customs, etc.).⁷⁶ As previously noted, education in e-Government is needed at all levels, for both end users (citizens and the business sector) and public sector employees, particularly the decision-makers.

⁷¹ Regulation on the operation of Open Data Portal, Official Gazette No. 104/2018.

⁷² Regulation specifying the conditions for developing and maintaining public authorities' web presentations, Official Gazette No. 104/2018.

⁷³ Regulation specifying the conditions for establishing electronic government, Official Gazette No. 104/2018.

⁷⁴ Regulation on the management of Meta register, manner of approving, suspending and denying access to the Government Service Bus and modes of operation on the e-Government Portal, Official Gazette No. 04/2018.

⁷⁵ Particularly in business registration, geodetic affairs, tax affairs, school enrolment, 'Baby, welcome to the world' and other areas designing new solutions (e.g. sick leaves and salary compensations for employees on a sick leave) and involving only electronic procedures.

⁷⁶ Under the Central Population Register Act, adopted in 2019, the Central Population Register was set up as the crucial database enabling the integration of personal data of citizens of the Republic of Serbia, both domestic residents and foreigners exercising rights and obligations, in one place. These data must be available to the public administration to help it act on administrative matters less costly, more quickly, more efficiently and to the benefit of citizens and businesses. The primary purpose of the Register is twofold: the efficient management of the administrative and other procedures, that is, their administration with minimum expense and without delay, and the efficient management of the electronic population data records. The Central Population Register Act, Official Gazette No. 17/19.

3. CONCLUSION

The possibility to use modern technologies presents enormous potential for application in public administration and the public sector. The overall objective behind the process of informatisation of government is to increase user satisfaction with public services, reduce the administrative burden for citizens and businesses, and improve public administration quality and efficiency.

National administrative laws tend to maintain a balance between the traditional administrative values and “citizens-oriented” public administration. Two public administration doctrines - New Public Management Theory and the doctrine of Good Governance promote key administrative principles: openness, transparency, accountability, efficiency, participation, effectiveness of administrative proceedings, optimization, simplification and digitalization. Increasing customer expectations mean that effective and efficient public administration reform with a strengthened customer focus are increasingly essential in most countries.

Reform processes towards digitalization at the European Union level and national administrative systems may be viewed in the context of simplification of administrative procedures through regulatory reform. Better regulation includes removal of administrative barriers at the EU and national government levels. Main purpose of administrative procedure acts in European union member countries is to simplify administrative procedures and meet the needs and interests of citizens and business entities. At the European Union and national level, E-governance involves using information and communication technologies to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, participation, openness, transparency and quality of work of public administration. It can be employed in the domain of interactions between the public administration and citizens, between the public administration and the economy, and between different administrative authorities and organisations, or between the latter and other public authorities (interaction between the state and non-state administration, etc.). In practise, in national administrative systems, the efficiency principle is generally ensured through optimisation of administrative proceedings, increased digitalisation and application of e-Government, data exchange by official duty, integration and optimisation of multiple procedures through one-stop-shops.

Essential European Union administrative principles point to the course of administrative system development towards professionalisation, quality and efficiency of public services. One of the key European principles is Public administration service delivery related to citizen-oriented public administration and the quality of accessibility of public services. Public service delivery implies to designed and implemented policy for citizen-oriented administration, political commitment,

vision and strategy, relevant strategic framework and consistently applied policy for administrative simplification, consistent legal framework effectively applied in practice and adequate institutional set-up.

Serbian service delivery policy framework has received strong support from the Government in order to fulfil those requirements. Main achievement is the creation of a flexible public administration which will within reasonable time deliver public services and become client-oriented, considering vulnerable social groups and rights of minorities. Serbian authorities are committed to reducing administrative burdens by strengthening the program of process simplification and the approval of a register of administrative procedures is a step in this process. In the domain of e-government, the legislator specified the key principles of legality and predictability, the principle of proportionality, the principle of protection of the rights of the parties and the exercise of public interest, the principle of assistance to a party, the principle of the efficiency and effectiveness of the proceedings, the principle of truth and free assessment of evidence, right to submit pleadings, principle of independence, the right of appeal and objection, the principle of validity of the decision and the principle of access to information and data protection. It provides a basis for full and effective implementation of digitalization in all areas of administrative decision making. The most significant accomplishment of General Administrative Procedure Act should be full implementation of digitalization in every possible area of administrative decision making. Main goal is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of administrative proceedings to a completely new level and significantly reduced the costs for citizens and even more for entrepreneurs.

Serbian General Administrative Procedure Act has been harmonized with European administrative principles addressing crucial issues regarding e-government information system - the exchange of data *ex officio* and removing a major burden for citizens and businesses, integration of administrative procedures into a single administrative point (one-stop-shops), facilitating e-public services. The provisions of the Act were subsequently elaborated in a series of laws and regulations. The implementation of the robust general legal framework established with the General Administrative Procedure Act is still progressing.

Under The E-Government Act, fully-functional e-government has been established, introducing a systemic obligation for each subject of the state mechanism, particularly the administration, to apply modern technologies in all administrative procedures establishing relationships between the citizens and businesses and the public administration. Particular importance is attached to the e-Government

Portal – a national webpage through which citizens can make requests, receive responses, and acquire documents.

Harmonisation of regulations with the General Administrative Procedure Act continues, with ongoing training also being conducted in this field. For further development, under the Register of Administrative Procedures Act, a Register has been established covering all administrative procedures for citizens and businesses. The intention of the Act is to make the procedures uniform and transparent to the greatest extent possible.

The General Administrative Procedure Act cannot be implemented without amending numerous laws that regulate different areas of social life. As previously noted, education in e-Government is needed at all levels, for both end users (citizens and the business sector) and public sector employees, particularly the decision-makers. However, the responsibility for the development of public services is still fragmented and some of the aspects remain uncovered. Despite of the good progress made in improving the enablers of digital government an analysis of a sample of services for citizens indicate that they are still highly bureaucratic and are at low level of digitalisation. While significant progress in the area of e-government and simplifying administrative procedures is evident, major transformations in this respect are yet to come.

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