

Streamlining the Control Activity in the Field of Consumer Protection through Digitization

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Abstract: *The context of the knowledge-based information society requires the need for digitization in all areas. Information has become a primary, critical resource, and instant access to relevant information is a necessity in all activities carried out by the authorities.*

In the field of consumer protection, Commissioners need to access a wealth of information on specific economic operators, legislation and health conditions. This paper examines how the digitization of control and law enforcement activity, through the implementation of a dedicated application, can contribute to streamlining the activity and ensuring a unique and fair practice.

Key words: consumer protection, digitalization, law enforcement, artificial intelligence

Introduction

Today we are all consumers. Every day, we consume products and services as individuals, families, groups and organizations. Consumer behavior is a vast and complex topic to address. Understanding consumer behavior and "getting to know consumers" is not an easy task. It is impossible to predict with 100% accuracy how a consumer (or more) will behave in a given situation. Marketing professionals are interested in following people shopping, flirting, walking, playing and having fun, just as they are strongly interested in the wide range of behaviors they have. Also, the efforts of marketing professionals are aimed at influencing consumer behavior in the way they want. Success or failure towards this goal is what makes the difference between the success and failure of marketing efforts or the business itself.

Consumer behavior is an applied science. However, the complex nature of the topic leads to few nailed answers to questions about successfully influencing consumer behaviors, and no successful recipes that can be transferred from one context to another. In addition, the study of consumer behavior goes far beyond the simple act of buying or using a product or service. It also includes the study of how having or not having objects affects lives and how owning or using products or services influences how we feel about ourselves and others.

Most economically developed societies are also called consumer societies because individuals spend more time involved in consumer activity than in any other activity, including work or sleep (both also involving consumption).

Background E-government policies, strategies and practices are part of the global efforts of governments to improve the quality, efficiency and control of interactions between public administration, on the one hand, and citizens and private organizations, on the other. provision of various public services. In a specific sense, e-government refers to the digital interactions between citizens and administration (known as G2C - Government to Citizen), between administration and other government agencies (known as G2G - Government to Citizen), as well as those between the administration

and the private economic environment (known as G2B - Government to Business). For specialists who are involved in the implementation of various strategies or e-government projects one of the working concepts is that of the life event. A life event covers public services that are related to a certain situation that the citizen encounters during his life or company as long as it works.

At European level, a set of 20 life events (12 for citizens and 8 for economic operators) is monitored, with the aim of increasing the quality of the provision of associated services, increasing the number of users and increasing the coverage for different categories.

In monitoring the progress of e-government for these life events, the grid of sophistication is frequently used as a methodological framework that captures, in a structured way, how advanced is the digital interaction between citizens / business environment and public administration, respectively:

- grade 1 - there are online information materials for the public service;
- grade 2 - the interaction with the citizen is done in one direction (for example, downloading electronic forms);
- grade 3 - the interaction with the citizen takes place in both directions (for example, filling in online forms);
- grade 4 - transactions take place in the use of the online public service. Methods of decision-making, notification, delivery and payment for public services must be included;
- grade 5 - services are automated, customized - user-centered.

1. Strategic orientations, with programmatic character, at the level of the European Union

At the level of the European Union, strategic thinking on the field of e-government has progressed significantly in recent years and has been transposed into several public policy documents of particular relevance to the current and future situation of Romania. In this sense, the public policy for Romania in the field of e-government must seek to align with the general desideratum of the European community, at the same time projecting a vision adapted to the realities and national needs. The main strategic documents in the field of e-government developed at European level are: the Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe¹, the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020², the European Interoperability Strategy and the European Interoperability Framework (originally launched by the EC in 2010³), as well as the Digital Europe Program 2021-2027 presented by the EC in 2018.

Key elements of the e-government situation at EU level

Legislation

There is currently a rich package of legislation in the European Community that supports progress in e-government. A large part of the most relevant normative acts are regulations, so normative acts of direct application in Romania and which directly create the legal framework for consolidating e-government at national level. From a thematic point of view, the main Community legislation can be organized around several key topics, namely: European normative acts on the interconnection of company registers, European normative acts on the protection of personal data and privacy, European normative acts on e-procurement and e-invoicing, European regulations on the electronic communications regulatory framework, European regulations on electronic identification and trust services, European regulations on e-payments, European regulations on data reuse, European regulations on the single

point of contact , European regulations on personal information and European regulations on professional qualifications.

Key indicators

To measure the evolution of different countries in the field of e-government, one of the most relevant images is given by the e-government development index regularly measured by the United Nations on the basis of three dimensions: scope and quality of online services, infrastructure situation telecommunications and inherent human resources. According to this assessment, all EU Member States are above the global average and, in fact, the European area is more developed than all other geographical areas of the world.

EU Member States are also above the global average in terms of e-participation measured by three dimensions: the availability of unsolicited public service information; online participation of citizens in the public policy debate; citizen participation through online forms in the elaboration of public policies or the design of certain components of public services. Another relevant measure of progress in e-government is the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) which captures the image of about 30 indicators relevant to the EU's digital performance in terms of five dimensions: connectivity, human capital, Internet use digital technology integration, digital public services. Although the field of e-government is distinctly captured in the dimension of digital public services, it is useful to retain data on the degree of digital literacy of the population or the extent of Internet penetration (for example), the latter can be interpreted as factors that directly influence development of digital public services and their use / popularity.

Infrastructure

At EU level, e-government policy finds a concrete expression and a consistent list of infrastructures that facilitate the exchange of data between national authorities, but also between them and citizens or companies in the Community.

Strategic orientations, with programmatic character, at the level of Romania

This paragraph briefly presents the main programmatic documents relevant to the field of e-government in Romania which already establish principles and key lines of action in this field and which is also taken into account in this public policy proposal. The National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020 (SNADR 2020), adopted by Government Decision no. 245/2015 SNADR 2020 was prepared in order to align Romania with the strategic directions established within the Europe 2020 Digital Agenda which aims to consolidate the digital single market. Starting from the premise that investments in ICT contribute to the growth of the Romanian economy, SNADR 2020 deals with four key areas (including the one dedicated to e-government), respectively:

- Action area 1 - eGovernment, Interoperability, Cyber Security, Cloud Computing, Open Data, Big Data and Social Media;
- Activity 2 - ICT in Education, Health, Culture and e-Inclusion;
- Activity 3 - eCommerce, Research, Development and Innovation in ICT;
- Activity 4 - Broadband and Digital Services Infrastructure.

In the field of e-government, SNADR 2020 focuses on services that provide elements to life events and bring them to level 4 sophistication (at least). Although the field of e-

government is treated separately in the National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020 compared to other areas addressed by it, in reality, the success of e-government initiatives is closely linked to the strategic directions established in government cloud computing, cybersecurity, open data, big data.

Also, in the framework of action area 2 - ICT in education, health, culture and e-Inclusion SNADR 2020 envisages a series of strategic measures aimed at supporting and progress in the field of e-government of life events. Thus, for the life event "scheduling a medical consultation", the sub-field of ICT in health aims, among other things, to create an integrated platform for all services with easy access or accessibility as part of a patient-centered medical system, as well as efficient management of the information generated by the IT system that can be better used in order to manage the resources of the medical system. For life events related to enrollment in various forms of education and the library, national capacity / baccalaureate exams, the ICT sub-field in education aims to provide relevant equipment and infrastructure in schools, as well as ongoing training of staff ICT skills public administration.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Manual of the National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020, launched in 2016 The Monitoring and Evaluation Manual establishes a series of indicators and institutional arrangements for monitoring the progress in the implementation of SNADR 2020.

For the sub-domain of action, e-government, interoperability, cyber security, cloud computing, open data, big data and social media, e-government and cyber security components, their objectives are first defined, respectively: increasing the transparency of public administration acts by computerizing public services; development and improvement of cyber security networks and systems; increasing access to digitized public services; efficient public administrations and reducing public administration costs; improving the business environment; improving governance when implementing computerized public services.

National Interoperability Framework (CNI), approved by Government Decision no. 908/2017, with subsequent amendments and completions. The National Interoperability Framework aims as a central objective to promote and support the provision of public services in Romania by developing inter-institutional, intersectoral and cross-border interoperability. CNI also introduces a set of general interoperability principles that are relevant for the process of establishing electronic public services in Romania.

The Law on the National Reference Framework for Achieving Interoperability in the Field of Information and Communication Technology (CNRTIC⁴) is still in the draft phase. The purpose of the future law is to establish a general framework for managing the interoperability of information systems of public institutions that have to provide services to citizens. The future law aims to establish the premises for the unitary organization of information and communication technology (ICT) architectures of public institutions and authorities, so that they can work together, including cross-border.

Key elements of the situation of the e-government field in Romania

Legislation

Analyzing the package of legislation relevant to the field of e-government we can say that there are two levels of regulation, namely legislation of a rather horizontal nature (covering topics, major topics of e-government) and legislation specific to various fields of activity¹⁷ which also contains provisions that encourage development of electronic public services. For the purpose of this public policy, the horizontal legislative

framework includes laws such as: Law no. 119/1996 regarding the civil status documents, Law no. 455/2001 regarding the electronic signature, Government Decision no. 922/2010 on the organization and functioning of the electronic single point of contact, Government Decision no. 908/2017 for the approval of the National Interoperability Framework or Government Decision no. 89/2020 on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Digitalization Authority.

Using the same evaluation as in the case of the European Union, respectively the evaluation report in the field of e-government published by the United Nations every two years, we notice that in 2018 Romania registered an progress of 8 positions compared to the evaluation for 2016, and a progress of 12 positions in 2020 compared to the evaluation for 2018 in terms of the e-government development index, although previously in the period 2008-2014 it was found on better positions in the ranking (relative to the progress of the other countries analyzed).

Overall, from this point of view, Romania remains at a considerable distance from the world leader (Denmark).

Table no 1. - Romania's evolution in the period 2008-2020 regarding the e-government development index, published by the United Nations⁵.

E-government development index	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Romania	51	47	62	64	75	67	55

Regarding the DESI measurement of the European Commission, Romania is on the 26th place out of the 28 EU Member States, the lowest evaluations being received for the dimensions of the use of internet services and digital public services. Romania is much better at the size dedicated to connectivity, the Country Report for Romania on the Digital Economy and Society Index for 2020 noting the strong competition based on infrastructure registered in Romania, especially in urban areas, which is reflected in the indicators that the country has very good results, namely the coverage of very high-capacity fixed networks and the use of broadband services of at least 100 Mbps (68% and 49%, respectively).

At the same time, according to the same Report, 49% of households in Romania are subscribed to very high-speed broadband services (ranked fifth in speed in the EU), and in terms of ICT graduates, Romania is well placed in the ranking, ranking fifth with 5.6% of all graduates compared to the EU average of 3.6%. At the same time, although Romania registers delays, sometimes significant, at all dimensions of DESI, it is on an upward trend in accordance with the general rhythm at the level of the European Union. Infrastructure E-government is supported in Romania by several key IT platforms that directly serve citizens and companies (a large proportion of them), along with others with a rather sector-specific nature, such as:

- National Public Procurement System;
- The system of the National Agency for Cadastre and Real Estate Advertising for issuing land book extracts;
- The court portal;
- Online Trade Register (ONRC portal);
- The IT system of the Ministry of Public Finance and the National Agency for Fiscal Administration - a generous platform for digital public services, of which the most used are:

- DEDOC electronic document submission system (through which the tax returns and reports of all taxpayers in Romania are processed digitally - companies, public institutions, individuals and public administration);
- Virtual Private Space (SPV) - the largest national public service with a maximum level of sophistication of IT services according to the classification of the European Union, with almost 1.5 million users - individuals, legal entities and other types;
- PATRIMVEN data warehouse and specialized entry-exit registry for tax information (related to assets and revenues), e-government instrument for cooperation (joint data warehouse) between public administration authorities.

Both at the central level and at the level of local administrations, IT platforms and systems have been developed through which citizens benefit from the interaction with public institutions exclusively online.

Some examples in this regard are: the virtual official at the level of the administration in Cluj-Napoca, the online appointment in order to submit the file necessary for issuing passports or the online visa application for entering Romania.

Among the most relevant IT platforms with a horizontal, national role that consolidates governance in Romania with a growing number of users are: National electronic system, National electronic system for online payment of taxes and duties, Electronic single point of contact.

are thus available (some are further completed directly at the headquarters of the respective public authority or institution). In such situations, steps must be taken to digitize all the administrative stages of the public service as comprehensively as possible, and the partial attainment of a certain degree of sophistication must not limit continued efforts to expand the digitization and improve the quality of electronic public services.

Some life events cover more public services with different levels of digital maturity. For example, Event 4 for obtaining funding includes several types of funding managed by different institutions and public authorities with separate approaches to digitization, and the degree of digitization mentioned in the table captures the situation at their general level. Moreover, other financing programs than those captured in the SIPOCA 20 project, for which the form of electronic public service must be provided, can be continuously added to this life event.

The grids or models of digital sophistication of electronic public services can evolve over time, depending on technological developments that impose even greater ambitions than those described by the grid of the 5 levels. For example, in the specialized literature there is also a level 6, in which citizens participate in the development of the electronic public service through opinions, suggestions that they formulate in the exercises for evaluating the user experience.

An authority with control attributions - the Romanian Digitization Authority

In recent years, the protection of the data of European citizens has become a priority at EU level. In this context, a new data protection authority has been set up in Romania: the Romanian Digitization Authority (ADR).

In addition to the already known authorities (the Competition Council or the Romanian Data Protection Authority), the Romanian Digitization Authority has "the role of achieving and ensuring the implementation of public strategies and policies in the field of digitization". ADR "is organized and operates as a structure with legal personality

within the working apparatus of the Government and under the coordination of the Prime Minister".

The institution is recently established, by Government Decision no. 89/2020, and its purpose is to create the public sector digitalization framework and to pursue the interoperability, interconnection, and security of public information systems.

For the private sector, of interest are the competences and attributions of ADR regarding the implementation of the European Union Regulation no. 2017/2394, which aims at cooperation between national authorities responsible for ensuring compliance with consumer protection legislation.

It should be noted that, although the Regulation concerns the activity of public institutions, ADR can carry out controls and investigate companies, being able to request or verify any document related to the observance of consumer law, when there is a possibility of an infringement of interest to the EU. Regulations.

The Authority for the digitization of Romania, in application of the European Union Regulation no. 2017/2394, has a series of competencies, such as:

1. Can access any documents, data and information relevant to the investigation (to determine whether there has been a breach of EU law protecting consumers' interests), regardless of their form or format and regardless of the environment in which they are stored or the location in which they are stored.
2. It may require companies of any natural or legal person to make available any information, data or documents relevant to the investigation, whatever their format or form, and regardless of the environment in which they are stored or the place where they are stored.
3. The ADR may initiate investigations or proceedings on its own initiative if it becomes aware, by means other than consumer complaints, of infringements sanctioned by the Regulation.
4. It may carry out the necessary on-the-spot inspections, including the power to enter any premises, land or any means of transport used by the trader subject to the inspection to carry out his commercial, economic, craft or liberal activity.
5. It may examine, confiscate, take or obtain copies of information, data or documents (for the time necessary and to the extent necessary for the inspection), regardless of the environment in which they are stored.
6. The Authority may purchase goods or services for testing purposes, if necessary, under a false identity, including inspecting and observing, studying, disassembling or testing them in order to detect infringements sanctioned by the Regulation and to get evidence.
7. May impose penalties, for example, fines or periodic penalty payments, for infringements of the sanctioned infringement, as well as for non-compliance with any decisions, orders, interim measures, and commitments of the trader or other measures adopted pursuant to the aforementioned Regulation.
8. ADR may initiate investigations or proceedings on its own initiative in order to put an end to or prohibit infringements sanctioned by the Regulation.

Probably the experience of previous years in terms of consumer behavior in Romania will help economic operators to anticipate and, consequently, to be able to prepare for the management of possible challenges in 2020, generated by the uncertainties looming on the horizon: declining purchasing power, the aggravation of the personnel crisis, the pressure related to automation and technologization, the tightening of the legislative framework, already bushy and complex.

One of the differentiating factors for economic operators in the future will be how they will adapt their behavior to the changes associated with digitization and will use the

information in the most efficient way, in an attempt to maintain and increase the mass of customers.

In this regard, the recent work program published by the European Commission for 2020 refers, inter alia, to the promotion of the use of artificial intelligence and a future initiative on digital services, which will strengthen the existing legislative framework on services and content. digital. At the same time, Romania will have to implement the new directives adopted by the EU on consumer protection in 2019, namely Directive 2019/2161 of the European Parliament and of the Council, called the Omnibus Directive, Directives 2019/770 (on contracts for the supply of digital content and digital services) and 2019/771 (on contracts for the sale of goods). The regulations aim to keep up with the new digital reality, including the online environment, while giving new rights to consumers and emphasizing information and transparency, including consumer reviews or comments on various online sites or in personalizing prices.

Ensuring compliance in consumer protection will therefore play an increasingly important role in the retail sector, especially if we take into account the increase in the number of controls and fines, ANPC projects on tightening sanctions (especially by relating them to the number of business) or the introduction of a criminal record.

One-way companies can ensure that they comply with all these provisions is to adapt business models to the new digital reality, using artificial intelligence algorithms and analysis of personal data in line with legal requirements, good practices and recommendations at European level.

The future of consumption is a combination of online and offline, based on a smart supply chain built to meet a consumer whose preferences are constantly changing. Physical stores will not disappear completely, as shoppers like to see, choose, test, and their comfort will be increased by ensuring a balanced mix between platforms or applications through which they can choose and, finally, buy something personalized, after seeing or physically testing the product.

It remains to be seen to what extent Romania will be able to change the current perception of digital infrastructure and capacity at the level of state and public authorities, as it is necessary, more than ever, to promote an education and culture in this regard, given the context and existing priorities at European level, which cannot be ignored.

Digitization of Romania during the SARS-VOC-2 pandemic⁶

The emergence and spread of the new coronavirus worldwide led to the worst epidemiological crisis of the last century, with social, economic and political consequences that no one could have anticipated when the first cases were reported, in December last year.

In less than five months, the SARS-VOC-2 pandemic may have definitely changed the way we relate to the activities of each of us: from hand washing to how we interact in private, work, or even authority relationships state. In the context of the emergence and development of the concept of social distancing, private and public entities have been put in a position to adapt to the new realities generated by this crisis. Thus, the digitization process was accelerated, the need to go "online" being felt both in the case of members of society who did not agree from the beginning the new means of communication and technologies, or who could not adapt until at present, as well as in the case of states with a considerable bureaucratic apparatus and refractory to the idea of change.

Romania, through its central institutions, fell perfectly into the latter category, being more forced by the situation to change in the direction of digitization of the vast state

apparatus, precisely to encourage its citizens to maintain social distance and thus prevent the spread of the new coronavirus.

From this perspective, from the appearance of the first case of coronavirus, on February 26, 2020 and until mid-April, a series of initiatives and online platforms appeared in record time with the role of facilitating the interaction between the authorities and the citizen. These were mainly generated by a series of economic and social measures that the authorities adopted during the pandemic and were mainly aimed at minimizing the endless queues at the counters of public institutions, a potential factor in the spread of coronavirus. Thus, Romania made a sudden transition from the counter dedicated to online payments to an authentic digitization initiative, with real prospects of extension to the entire central administrative apparatus.

In the following, we intend to briefly present the main initiatives that have materialized so far, in the field of digitalization, together with the perspectives and directions to follow to ensure the sustainability and sustainability of this trend.

The authority for the digitalization of Romania

The most important role in the digitization of the administration was played by the Romanian Digitization Authority (ADR). The institution was recently organized by Government Decision no. 89/2020 and was assigned from the beginning the role of achieving and coordinating the implementation of public strategies and policies on the digital transformation of public administration and implicitly of the Romanian economy and society, as well as the achievement of e-government in public administration in Romania.

To this end, ADR has been given extensive powers to implement digital reform and achieve its objectives, including responsibilities in the following areas:

Regulatory, supervisory and control tasks

ADR is the new supervisory and control authority in multiple areas on digital issues. The competence of the RDA also includes the supervision and control of the application and enforcement of technology legislation, including the legislative framework governing the use of technological solutions in significant sectors of the economy, such as electronic signatures, electronic commerce and consumer protection.

In order to perform the supervisory functions, the authorized staff of the RDA has the right to request documents, and the economic operators have the obligation to present them or to answer any other requests necessary to verify the observance of the legislation in the competence of the RDA.

Development of national strategies in the field of digital transformation, automation, robotics and artificial intelligence and coordination of their implementation

Reporting tasks

ADR publishes annually the Catalog of public services in order to monitor the progress of the digital transformation of the administration; carries out quarterly the digitization report which contains, among others, the summary of the RDA's activity, the progress registered and the degree of compliance of the public authorities with the legal provisions in the field of competence of the RDA.

Representation and European affairs

ADR coordinates the application of international agreements to which Romania is a party in the field of information technology, supports Romania's position in the process of negotiation and adoption at European level of initiatives in the field of digitization and represents Romania in international cooperation bodies in this field.

Duties on projects and technical assistance

ADR endorses, initiates and ensures the financing of programs and projects in the field of digital transformation, supports the institutions with attributions in the field of public procurement for the elaboration of technical solutions within the information technology projects and provides consultancy in the process of analysis of operational flows.

Endorsement of remote access payment instruments, such as internet banking, home-banking, phone-banking or mobile-banking

Endorsement or authorization, among others, of online alternative transport platforms. Exercising the coordinating role for the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2017 / 1.128 on the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market.

Regulation of the operation of the register for “.RO” domain names.

ADR also collaborates with the private sector to consult on areas of common interest to support digitization programs and strategies.

To this end, the National Council for Digital Transformation ("CNTD") has been set up as an advisory body at ADR level, comprising at least five members representing the private sector and five members representing civil society.

The membership of the CNTD is approved on the basis of a substantiated request received from the entity wishing to be represented in the CNTD.

Digitization in the context of the SARS-VOC-2 pandemic

As explained above, the emergence of the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus has forced the Government and the authorities to address more decisively the issue of digitalization of public institutions.

First of all, the need has arisen to encourage social distancing and to minimize the possible number of interactions between citizens as a measure to prevent the spread of the virus. Then came the economic aid programs granted to individuals and legal entities, against the background of the economic problems generated by the SARS-VOC-2 pandemic, as well as the need to grant these aids respecting the social distance imposed.

In this sense, with the support of private companies, several online platforms have been developed through which the citizen's interaction with public authorities has been drastically simplified.

Platform [HTTPS://AICI.GOV.RO](https://AICI.GOV.RO)

In the context of the adoption by the Romanian Government of a series of emergency ordinances regulating the possibility of granting financial aid directly or indirectly to individuals or legal entities in a situation of financial difficulty, this platform has been developed that allows the submission of the necessary documentation in order to access a certain type of financial aid.

Thus, the platform allows the submission of documents for the following procedures:

1. The procedure for granting the indemnity for the employed personnel to an employer by another modality provided by law;

2. The procedure for granting the indemnity for the persons who carry out their activity based on the sports activity contracts, where they will submit the sports structures;
3. The procedure for granting the allowance to natural persons who obtain income exclusively from copyright and related rights;
4. The procedure for granting the allowance to the authorized natural person (PFA), to individual (II) and family enterprises (IF), to the liberal professions (PF);
5. The procedure for granting the indemnity for the persons who have concluded individual labor agreements based on Law no. 1/2005 on the organization and functioning of the cooperation;
6. The notification form for Ordinance no. 37/2020 on granting facilities for loans granted by credit institutions and non-bank financial institutions to certain categories of debtors;
7. The procedure for granting the technical unemployment according to GEO no. 30/2020 amended by GEO no. 32/2020.

Platforms used to inform the population about the evolution of the SARS-VOC-2 pandemic

Unprecedented social phenomena such as self-isolation and teleworking, in the context of the widespread dissemination of false or unverified information, as well as the harmful potential of such information in the authorities' fight against the spread of the new coronavirus, have facilitated the creation of official information platforms. The explicit purpose of combating misinformation and maintaining citizens' confidence in the authorities' ability to act.

We list in this way, without having an exhaustive character, some of these platforms: <https://stirioficial.ro>, <https://cetrebuiasafac.ro>, <https://rohelp.ro>

Adaptation and extension of existing platforms and programs

Real progress has also been made on existing initiatives or platforms. In this sense, the use of the online platform <https://www.ghiseul.ro> has been extended to legal entities.

Also, regarding the Virtual Private Space, a platform of the National Agency for Fiscal Administration, the use has been simplified by the fact that individuals who do not have a qualified digital certificate can also request registration based on username and password. Thus, in order to register in the Virtual Private Space, it is no longer necessary to travel for authentication to ANAF headquarters, they have the possibility to choose that the authentication be performed in electronic environment, based on documents issued by the Ministry of Public Finance and / or ANAF.

Moreover, during the existence of the state of emergency in Romania and other public institutions or services had to adapt to the new social realities, mainly using e-mail or other dedicated platforms in the relationship with the citizen. For example, the Trade Register now registers documents, mentions and requests only through the online portal or on the e-mail address, and with regard to consultations provided by medical staff, they are carried out by means of distance communication. Even more formalistic areas such as justice have adapted to new trends. In this regard, the first court hearings have already taken place on Skype, and summonses and procedural documents are communicated by e-mail.

Conclusions and perspectives

Although we are far from a real change in the digitalization of the public sector, the progress made so far can be easily maintained and adapted even after the current pandemic has ended.

They fully respond to the pressing needs of our society in recent years, namely the transparency of the decisions of public institutions, the efficiency of these institutions, as well as the interactions between them and the citizen.

Beyond the many studies and practical examples from other countries that have brought to light the benefits of the digitization process, we now have the opportunity to truly observe some progress in Romania and we can only wish that they will continue even after we overcome this situation exceptional.

Conclusions and proposals

The use of electronic public services will accustom the population of the country with low digital skills to be exposed to interaction with information systems, thus encouraging the development of these skills. This process will also include public administration employees, who are directly responsible for the delivery of electronic public services, who will have to learn more and more about the use of IT systems created to provide electronic public services. Increasing digital skills also has the potential to improve the quality of life for society at large. For example, according to a 2011 study, if emerging markets could double the digitization index score for the poorest citizens in the next 10 years from the time of the study, the result would be an overall gain of around € 4 billion in nominal GDP, an additional EUR 866 billion in cumulative household income for the poorest and 64 million new jobs for most socially and economically marginalized groups. This would lead to the fight against poverty and the improvement of the quality of life for 580 million people⁷.

The mandatory use of electronic public services will force the development of the digital and financial skills of the population and will have an indirect positive effect on their appetite to use financial or e-commerce services. Thus, the banking degree of Romania will increase, the tendency to digitize the interactions in various industries will be more accentuated.

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