



# E-Governance Journeys in Serbia and Slovenia

Two democratic countries that have emerged from the former Yugoslavia have taken different paths in providing e-services to their respective citizenries.

by Zorica Bogdanović and Uroš Pinterič

**A**fter Yugoslavia's collapse in 1990, the long period of military engagement in Serbia, and an era of democratic political development in both Serbia and Slovenia, it seems timely to compare e-services to citizens in both countries. Web-driven governance, a relatively recent phenomenon, is enabling states to offer public services to citizens and the private sector much more effectively and efficiently. Is this indeed the case? How are Slovenia and Serbia performing?

To better understand the matter, we provide some historical-political and socioeconomic context. Slovenia, which has two million inhabitants living in slightly more than twenty thousand square kilometers, proclaimed its independence in 1991 and took action to join the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The government has generally been stable during this period, the 2006 gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was \$18,577, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) unemployment rate was 5.8 percent.

Serbia on the other hand, a nation of 7.5 million people inhabiting over eighty-eight thousand square kilometers, was in constant military turmoil under the Milošević regime between 1991 and 2000. NATO forces bombed the country in 1999, the regime fell in 2000, and Serbia has remained politically unstable and economically weak to this day. In 2006, its GDP per capita was \$5,713, and the ILO unemployment rate was 20.9 percent. Given these conditions, we would expect a very different pat-

tern and pace of e-government development in these two emerging democracies.

## Legislative Foundations

### Slovenia

Slovenian e-government efforts started systematically in 2001, when the government adopted its first formal nationwide strategy. From this point, two other strategic initiatives stretched the period of e-governance goals to 2010. That said, the nation has not yet sustained a strategic attitude on the matter; thus, the government has not aggressively explored the full range of e-governance possibilities. However, Slovenia does have a relatively coherent and swiftly adopted legislative framework on security of information, privacy protection, and other aspects of e-communication with the government. The government also adopted binding laws covering internal e-mail communication with citizens, as well as the general use of forms and regular and timely provision of critical information on government Web sites.

### Serbia

Systematic work on creating a legal infrastructure for e-government in Serbia began in 2004, with the adoption of a government reform strategy and several key laws. In the years that followed, several other important laws and strategies have been created, although not all have been formally adopted. In 2007, the government introduced its first officially accepted e-government project, the main issues of which concern (1) creating an integrated, automated network covering all elements of the national government, (2) introducing efficient information systems, and (3) modernizing local government units.

## Executive and Organizational Initiatives

### Slovenia

In Slovenia, many different institutions were involved in e-government development and implementation between 2000 and 2004. The Ministry of Information spearheaded the government-wide initiative, thereby central-

izing e-related action planning and service delivery in one place. After 2004, the ministry was abolished and its functions were transferred to the Ministries of Public Administration and Higher Education, Science, and Technology. Although most of the important work on e-governance was completed by 2004 (e-personal income tax, public administration information portal, ministry Web pages, etc.), the new Ministry of Public Administration developed its own electronic form portal. Prior to this, the Ministry of Information had initiated a common template for all ministry Web pages, thus reducing confusion for users when browsing for information across different government agencies.

Today, all ministry Web pages offer contact data; information on mission, programs, and organizational structure; news of current plans and activities; important links; and information on related procurement opportunities, with necessary guidance and e-forms.

### Serbia

Since November 2006, construction and maintenance of the Serbian e-government Web portal has been assigned to the National Information Technology and Internet Agency (NITIA). NITIA is responsible for the advancement, development, and operation of state information bodies, local government services, and use of the Internet by related public authorities.

To increase usage of existing e-services in Serbia, NITIA developed a Web portal ([www.euprava.gov.yu](http://www.euprava.gov.yu)) that provides citizens and businesses with information on all existing electronic services in Serbia. Through this Web portal, citizens can download all relevant service documents, find links to a full range of public institution Web sites, and learn more about how to use e-government services in general.

## Citizen-Centered E-Services

### Slovenia

Slovenian citizens now have a well-developed e-governance framework. First, they have the right to expect quick responses to e-mail inquiries—although in practice, not all public institutions meet this standard. Second, they can send personal income tax forms via secured Web connections, and many of the forms necessary for different services can be obtained from agency Web sites and completed at home. This allows citizens to prepare themselves in advance before visiting a government bureau, enhancing the likelihood that their documents will be processed more

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efficiently and effectively. Lastly, another example of a 360° e-service transaction is the automobile registration process. Every citizen with access to the Internet can register a car, ensure it, and pay all expenses from the couch at home in just a few minutes.

Despite this seemingly enviable e-governance profile, room for improvement remains. Not all government Web sites are properly organized, some involve unusually long waiting times for receiving a response, and transaction procedures may be unnecessarily complicated for many who are not well informed on the public sector or savvy about using the Internet.

## Serbia

E-governance in Serbia is understandably quite different at this time. Although the rollout of citizen e-services was billed as “easy to find, easy to use, and available in one step,” only a small number of public institutions offer electronic services. Almost all government organizations have Web sites, but most offer only information, and some offer document downloading or the opportunity to request forms electronically. Also, although most institutions encourage communication by e-mail, response times vary widely.

Nevertheless, several municipalities have reached a very high level of e-governance performance. Indjija municipality is the first and only community in Serbia offering comprehensive electronic government ([www.indjija.net](http://www.indjija.net)). All services are available through a Web portal, ranging from issuing basic registry documents to providing licenses and permits. Several other municipalities offer different kinds of e-services, such as issuing documents or searching databases, but most have only Web sites with descriptive content and offer no e-services.

## Business-Related E-Services

### Slovenia

The Slovenian Web site for businesses is available as a national government subportal on [e-uprava.gov.si/e-uprava/poslovni.euprava](http://e-uprava.gov.si/e-uprava/poslovni.euprava). The main page includes a special application—“e-*vem*” or one-stop-shop—that enables e-registration for independent entrepreneurs and lists different types of interaction between a private company and government. Still, after getting initial information, users are referred to another Web site (pop-up) for further e-applications. Users can be bounced around through four pop-ups before arriving at the final application to start the desired e-procedure.

Most information available for different types of organizations concerns establishing a business, taxation, employment, accounting, a wide range of particular business process issues, and closing down an organization. Sending annual business reports via Internet applications, paying taxes, announcing job openings on the national e-portal, etc., are also possible. However, many of the e-forms and applications available on the business e-portal are connected with registering the grape crop and licensure for selling homemade wine and other alcoholic fruit drinks.

Nevertheless, most applications available to the business community are strongly linked to taxation and reporting business results. This leads us to conclude that the government’s main interest in e-service is more in collecting taxes than in providing business-friendly government services aimed at improving company performance and profitability. Also, e-tax applications are more widely accepted among private enterprises because of the significant reduction in paperwork. In this regard, business e-tax forms and interactive applications are available in three different areas: (1) an e-VAT (value-added tax) application for the private sector, (2) e-contributions and tax deductions for private-sector organizations and self-employed persons, and (3) company income tax payment.

## Serbia

E-services for citizens and private-sector enterprises in Serbia have not yet gone beyond a nominal level. Using the e-government Web portal described previously, enterprises can easily get texts, laws, and other regulations, reports, information bulletins, and related publications. Citizens and private firms also can download forms or search databases (to register their businesses, etc.). However, only a few services enable interactivity (submitting tax applications and customs declarations, for example), and the information mainly flows from government to enterprises.

## Comparative Governance

The events of the last fifteen years make it no surprise that Slovenian e-governance is much further along than that in Serbia. The principal advantage of the Slovenian situation is the well-defined legislative foundations and robust executive strategies that have enabled development of a high-performing e-government system. In Serbia, the absence of such structure and leadership has postponed similar forward-looking initiatives.

Slovenia also has achieved a superior e-mail communication between citizens and the public sector by ren-

dering this kind of interaction virtually the same as face-to-face contact at government offices. Meanwhile, in Serbia, the level of e-mail communication is a function of policies defined within individual institutions. Customer e-service in Slovenia is widespread and standardized, so no citizens are privileged. In Serbia, the availability of e-services for citizens depends on the information communication technology ability of their individual municipality. Also, the Slovenian government offers a lot of business-related e-services, while in Serbia most of these services involve downloading documents and forms.

Table 1 shows a comparative analysis of e-services in Slovenia and Serbia. Details on the method used can be found in the document *Online Availability of Public Services: How Is Europe Progressing?*

## Slovenia

Data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia show that in the first quarter of 2007, the Internet was present in 58 percent of all Slovenian households (44 percent accessed the Internet via broadband connections) compared with 56 percent for the same period in 2006. Regular Internet users aged 10–74 rose from 50 percent in 2005, to 54 percent in 2006, and to 56 percent in 2007 (data from the first quarter in each year). Of the 56 percent in 2007 (a bit less than 950,000 individuals), 40 percent use the Internet daily—3 percent more than in the same period in 2006. Also, e-services were used by 83 percent of businesses in the first quarter of 2007, or 8 percent more than in the same period in the previous year. The business community used e-services to obtain in-

**Table 1. Comparative Analysis of E-Services**

Services	Slovenia	Serbia
For citizens		
Income taxes	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Job search	Online transaction	Two-way interaction
Social security benefits	Two-way interaction	Information
Personal documents	Two-way interaction	Information
Car registration	Two-way interaction	Information
Application for building permission	Online transaction	Information
Declaration to the police	Online transaction	Information
Public libraries	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Birth and marriage certificates	Online transaction	Information
Enrollment in higher education	Online transaction <sup>a</sup>	Information
Announcement of moving	One-way interaction	Information
Health-related service	Information	Information
For businesses		
Contribution for employees	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Corporate tax	Online transaction	One-way interaction
VAT	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Registration of a new company	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Submission of data to the statistical office	Online transaction	One-way interaction
Custom declaration	Two-way interaction	Two-way interaction
Environment-related permits	Two-way interaction	Information
Public procurement	Online transaction	Information

Source: Data for Slovenia are from *Online Availability of Public Services: How Is Europe Progressing?*, June 2006.

<sup>a</sup> Depending on individual faculty.

formation (78 percent), obtain forms (76 percent), and return completed forms (61 percent). Ninety-two percent of businesses used the Internet for banking and financial services, and the share of firms that used the Internet for training and education of employees was 47 percent.

### Serbia

The latest survey by the Republic of Serbia shows that 12 percent prefer using e-services to personally contacting or visiting public institutions and administrative bodies, while 52 percent are interested but currently don't use it for these purposes. Compared with 2006, the number of persons using public-sector e-services increased by more than forty thousand—a jump of more than 20 percent. E-government services for the private sector account for 60.5 percent of businesses with an Internet connection—a significant growth compared with 2006 (48.6 percent). Most enterprises use e-services to acquire information (84.4 percent), download forms (75.5 percent), and return completed forms (46.2 percent).

### Comparative Utilization and Growth Rate

Figure 1 shows the percentage of people and businesses that used e-government services in Serbia and Slovenia during 2006 and 2007. Although utilization rates in Serbia are dramatically lower, the rate of growth is encouraging.

### Conclusion

Even though e-governance has come along way in recent years, room for improvement remains in the quality of e-services—especially in the way of reliability of the general e-government portal and easier access to e-forms. As for Serbia, although the country has a long way to go to achieve basic standards and quality of e-services, accomplishments over the past few years provide a workable foundation on which to build for the future. Emulating best practices seen in the Slovenian experience can accelerate a transition to the next level of e-government—an interactive architecture and increased two-way transactions between the public sector and citizens and the business community.

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Figure 1. Percentage of Enterprises Using E-Services in Serbia and Slovenia

