

# Digitalization – The Key for Adapting Good Administration to a Better Governance

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses, in a relatively generalized framework, one of the current challenges of the European public administration, implicitly of Romania, namely digitalization, focusing on the digitalization of public administration. This analysis is closely related to the application of the principle of good administration, a principle regulated at the level of the European Union by the Charter of Fundamental Rights, but also at the level of other international organizations in various forms. Furthermore, the principle of good administration is seen as a component part of good governance, a desideratum of each state, including international actors, globally. In order to achieve the proposed objective, this article has focused on, in principle, both the legislation in force and the literature that discusses the digitalization of public administration in Romania, starting from the theoretical foundations of good administration that should monitor, among many other aspects, also this area of digitalisation, in order to support citizens, to respect their rights, to involve them in the decision-making process at the level of public policies, with the intention of ensuring better governance. Aware of the fact that governments have a duty to ensure good governance for citizens, we appreciate that the digitalization of public administration plays an important role and that there is a need to identify best practices, tools, technologies, etc. in order to provide digitized services to the citizen, but also for ensuring a government characterized by efficiency and transparency.

**KEYWORDS:** *public administration, digitization, citizens, government, human rights.*

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## 1. Introduction

The evolution of the public administration and the adaptation to everyday events in the life of the citizens are the way towards ensuring the protection of the society, of the economic development of a country. This evolution also takes place through the modernization of the public administration system, which has to keep pace with the present reality and which, at least in the current period, is also facing the pandemic generated by SARS-CoV-2. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has caused a wide range of challenges in the public sector and, implicitly, in public administration, given the restriction or limitation of citizens' physical demands, restriction of access to public institutions,

public relations and not only, all this determining the need to identify solutions accessible mainly through digitization.

At EU level, “good governance and the quality of public administrations are recognized as being in the interests of EU citizens and Member States, in order to obtain the maximum value from finite public funds and to create a public-private interface that increases employment and growth. Globally, the evidence is irrefutable: high productivity, high per capita income has the most efficient and effective public institutions. The internal market cannot be completed, the EU *acquis* cannot be implemented effectively, and the goals of smart, inclusive and sustainable growth cannot be realistically achieved without good governance”<sup>3)</sup>.

Located in different stages of implementation in the European Union, some of the states are having a complete, efficient, transparent administration that is as close as possible to the citizen, but we cannot say the same about the digitization trend in Romania, where although it represented and still represents a desideratum to be achieved or achievable (by way of implementation), the current situation has accelerated this process, using tools and technologies to provide public services and contribute to the construction of digital platforms that serve public administration.

This paper reflects our approach and perception on how public administration is being digitised and how this serves the interests of citizens and ensures the exercising and protection of their rights. We also aimed to highlight the fact that the digitalization of public administration is a key element in ensuring good governance, while pursuing compliance with the principle of good governance, given the role that good administration has in generating and ensuring good governance.

We believe that better governance, through better administration and the development of the digitization of public administration, should not only consider the digitized services but, moreover, a series of measures at the level of public authorities and institutions with an innovative side, involving rethinking of strategies, and also the role, responsibilities and objectives of the institution and, at the same time, the involvement of citizens in the transformation of public administration, in the development and adoption of public policies capable of ensuring democratic, effective and sustainable governance from all points of view.

## 2. Methodology

The article involves the interweaving of different methods, mainly qualitative ones, which are meant to study the principle of good administration related to that of good governance, the phenomenon of digitalization of public administration, more in terms of its interaction with citizens' rights, with their involvement in the decision making process concerning public policies. The concepts of “good administration”, “good governance” were briefly analysed in the elaboration of the article as well as how citizens can get involved in the decision-making process, precisely to ensure a good administration, by studying the literature in the field, existing information in national and international reference databases, etc.

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<sup>3)</sup> Thijs, N., Hammerschmid, G., Palaric, E., 2017, *European Commission, A comparative overview of public administration characteristics and performance in EU28*, p. 2, available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e89d981-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

Following this research, we wanted to make a connection between the digitalization of public administration, good administration and good governance, seen/perceived as a cause-effect relationship, and from the conclusions drawn to affirm that the digitalization of public administration is a key element in ensuring good administration for a better governance.

### 3. Theoretical aspects regarding good administration

The starting point in this article is good administration and making an analysis of this concept in relation to the different meanings it has, emphasizing more on the relationship with the citizen and his active involvement in public administration. In order to discuss digitalization as a key element in adapting good administration for better governance, we will first refer to some existing theoretical guidelines in the European Union and Romania. Compared to the concept of “good governance”, the concept of “good administration” is clearer and more precise, although in some specialized works<sup>4)</sup> it is appreciated that “good governance” is much more often used and encountered in public administration. Although there is a conceptual delimitation of the two, considering that good administration can be, in essence, a condition / component of good governance, we appreciate that both serve the general interest of citizens, and digitalization is a step forward, offering a permanent update to society's requirements, in order to satisfy the general interest.

To begin with, we appreciate that “the administration-citizen relationship must be seen as a fundamental relationship that underlies the functioning and organization of any society because the state, through administration and not only, identifies with its citizens, as the citizen identifies himself through the state. Public administration counts on citizens, civil society, organizations, etc. and is more efficient and effective when it uses a procedural approach and when it tries to perform best continuously”<sup>5)</sup>. We also believe that public administration can no longer function without a citizen, and “citizens' participation in public decision-making is a sine qua non of modern governing, both at national and European level”<sup>6)</sup>.

In the related literature<sup>7)</sup>, it is considered that “public administration represents continuity, permanence, and stability, thus increasing its influence on society. This principle expresses the permanence of the state's activities related to organizing the execution and the concrete enforcing of the law carried out by the public administration. Maintaining social balance and public order requires the satisfying of certain general interests of collectivities. The reason for the existence of the state-organized society cannot be understood without the satisfying of common needs, through the collaboration

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<sup>4)</sup> Braibant, G., 2001, *La Charte des droits fondamentaux de l'Union Européene*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, pp. 214-215.

<sup>5)</sup> Marinică, C. L., *The evolution of the relationship between administration and citizens in Romania*, in *Academic Journal of Law and Governance*, nr. 8/2020, p. 23.

<sup>6)</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7)</sup> Bălan, E., 2014, *Continuitate și înnoire a dreptului administrativ sub influența schimbărilor politico-constituționale*, in *Administrația publică- între misiuni și constrângeri bugetare – Dimensiuni juridice și manageriale*, Bucharest:Ed. Wolters Kluwer, pp. 22-23.

of members of the social body, under the coordination of a formal authority. The public administration must be continuous, prompt and energetic because it constantly represents the state, both externally and internally. The rulers are obliged to organize actions to maintain public order and to administer public services without which society could not exist”.

In addition to the above, at the international level, "good governance" has sometimes been seen as an economic concept, sometimes as a new human right, the important thing to remember is that it has caught the attention of international actors, organizations and states<sup>8)</sup>, which are concerned to implement it in the most efficient way since then, by adopting resolutions, recommendations, etc.

In the same way, at the level of the European Union, the concept of “good administration” is regulated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>9)</sup> (art. 41<sup>10)</sup>), ensuring the premises of the democratic character of the European Union, given that it must and is "characterized by representativeness, transparency, accountability and, consequently, by legitimacy and authority"<sup>11)</sup>. Good administration emphasizes the obligation of the Member States of the European Union to comply with the provisions of the Articles of the Charter<sup>12)</sup> but also with those of the fundamental treaties, the jurisprudence of the CJEU and the ECHR outlining it. Also, “article 41 is based on the existence of the Union as a community of law whose characteristics have been developed in the relevant case-law, which has maintained, in particular, good administration as a general principle of law (see, inter alia, the judgement of the Court Case C-255/90 P Burban [1992] ECR I-2253, and Case T-167/94 Nöelle [1995] ECR I-2253; pp. II-2589, July 9, 1999, T-231/97, New Europe Consulting and Others, Rec. 1999, pp. II-2403). The wording of that right in the first two paragraphs is clear from the case-law (Case 222/86 Heylens [1987] ECR 4097, paragraph 15; Case 154/87 of 18 October 1989; Orkem, ECR 1989, p. 3283, Case C-269/90 TU Munich [1991] ECR I-5469) and the judgements of the Court of First Instance of December the 6<sup>th</sup> 1994, Case T-450 / 93, Lisrestal, Rec. 1994, pp. II-1177; of September the 18<sup>th</sup> 1995, T-167/94, Nöelle, Rec. 1995, pp. II-2589) and,

<sup>8)</sup> Council of Europe, United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, North Atlantic Organization etc.

<sup>9)</sup> For more details see Irina Moroianu Zlătescu, Claudia Elena Marinică, 2017, *Dreptul Uniunii Europene*, Bucharest: Universitara Publishing House, Universul Academic Publishing House, pp. 269-276.

<sup>10)</sup> “Art. 41 – *Right to good administration* – 1. Every person has the right to have his or her affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institutions and bodies of the Union. 2. This right includes: the right of every person to be heard, before any individual measure which would affect him or her adversely is taken; the right of every person to have access to his or her file, while respecting the legitimate interests of confidentiality and of professional and business secrecy; the obligation of the administration to give reasons for its decisions. 3. Every person has the right to have the Community make good any damage caused by its institutions or by its servants in the performance of their duties, in accordance with the general principles common to the laws of the Member States. 4. Every person may write to the institutions of the Union in one of the languages of the Treaties and must have an answer in the same language”.

<sup>11)</sup> Marinică, C.E., *European Union issues – Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law*, Revista Fiat Justitia nr.2/2018, Cluj, p. 166.

<sup>12)</sup> According to Moroianu-Zlătescu, I., in *Drepturile omului- un sistem în evoluție*, Ed. IRDO, Bucharest, 2008, p. 126, unlike the European Convention on Human Rights "which is limited to civil and political rights", the Charter covers other areas.

in regards to the obligation to state reasons for decisions, from Article 296 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (see also the legal basis for Article 298 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union for the adoption of legislative acts to ensure a European administration that is open, efficient and independent)<sup>13)</sup>.

As time passed, the concept of good administration has managed to develop a number of its own features and principles<sup>14)</sup>, which consider the active involvement of citizens in the governance process, supporting and promoting dialogue between institutional actors, and the transparency, effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of these principles, focusing on the relationship with the citizen, seeking to satisfy the general interest of society.

In relation to the regulations imposed at the level of the European Union, at national level, we are of the opinion that good administration could have an equally extensive approach<sup>15)</sup> observing mainly the real beneficiary of good administration, namely the citizen.

How can citizens get involved in good governance? At the heart of citizens' efforts to get involved in good administration and, implicitly, good governance, are access to public information (transparency of the respective piece of information) and the ability of institutions to provide backup in order to support involvement, the direct effect being the awareness regarding the effects, responsibility and visibility of results; stimulating the desire to participate in the active life of society is also beneficial. Regarding the results obtained as a consequence of a good administration and governance, we can mention the strengthening of the institutional capacity and reaction abilities, the efficiency of the budgetary planning and the reduction of corruption and, last but not least, quality services delivered to the citizen promptly and professionally. We appreciate that the involvement of citizens in ensuring good administration can be oriented in the first phase through easy access to information, public consultations, by supporting and promoting collaborative relationships in public policy making, by obtaining "feedback" and monitoring from citizens in terms of implementation and expected results following the establishment of public policy objectives and, at the same time, the regulation of mechanisms and procedures for dealing with possible irregularities, in order to offer the citizen a maximization of results with a minimization of efforts.

Digitization of public administration is part of a strategy that aims to deliver better access to the market for goods and services for society as a whole, e-government, but also the promoting of information technology that is indispensable for the current period to ensure growth, development and innovation. We support the idea that "e-government supports administrative processes, improves the quality of services and increases the internal efficiency of the public sector. Digital public services reduce the administrative burden for businesses and citizens, making their interactions with public administrations not only faster and more efficient, more practical and transparent, but also less expensive. In addition, integrating the use of digital technologies into strategies to modernize administrations can provide additional economic and social benefits for society as a whole.

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<sup>13)</sup> For more details see <https://fra.europa.eu/ro/eu-charter/article/41-dreptul-la-buna-administrare>.

<sup>14)</sup> The principle of legality, equality, impartiality, proportionality, legal certainty, that of respecting the reasonable term, participation and transparency, according to the Code of Good Administration.

<sup>15)</sup> The Romanian Constitution which refers, implicitly, to good administration, the Administrative Code of Romania etc.

The digital transformation of governance is a key element for the success of the single market<sup>16)</sup>.

The organization of public administration through digitalization ensures in fact a good administration, a quick access to goods and services, with a high degree of quality offered to society<sup>17)</sup>, but it must also involve an education regarding the way to access the benefits of digitization, in order to ensure the right to good administration in an equal and transparent manner. We could even say that the notion of “digital citizen” emerged, which, despite the multiple advantages it confers<sup>18)</sup>, requires increased attention from institutional actors, whose obligation is to ensure that equal and unrestricted access is provided to all citizens and that the information necessary for the proper use of digital services is made available to them. At the same time, they need to ensure that by the time digitalization is used to its fullest, citizens still have access to the classic form of providing goods and services, and the transition (not necessarily a slow one) is accompanied by acquiring and applying the skills needed to use digitized services.

#### **4. Theoretical aspects regarding the digitalization of public administration**

In the current context, where states seek to ensure good governance and adapting it for better governance, including citizen involvement in public administration related work, through participatory collaboration, to ensure universal access available to all citizens, digitization also completes the picture by offering quality services provided in the shortest possible time with increased visibility.

We appreciate that administration is not an end in itself but serves the state and, implicitly, the citizen, ensuring the premises for exercising rights and obligations, and digitalization is a predictable component of the present and future of the administration, which can provide new job prospects. The digitalisation of public administration must start from the premise of providing public services efficiently, effectively and with appropriate quality, in order to reduce the current bureaucracy, but also to ensure free and unconditional access irrespective of physical presence in order to benefit from these services.

At the same time, one must consider that the EU intended that “by 2020, public administrations and institutions in the European Union should be open, efficient and inclusive, providing digital public services without borders, that are personalized, easy to use end-to-end type for all EU citizens and businesses. The design and delivery of better quality services that meet the needs and requirements of citizens and businesses become possible through the use of innovative approaches. Public administrations take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new digital environment to facilitate

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<sup>16)</sup> Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020. Accelerating the digital transformation of governance*, Bruxelles, 19.04.2016, p. 2, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/RO/1-2016-179-RO-F1-1.PDF> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>17)</sup> E.g. electronic signature, circulation of documents in electronic format, conducting procedures in electronic format etc.

<sup>18)</sup> E.g. active participation in the life of society.



both their interactions and stakeholder interactions”<sup>19)</sup>. One must bear in mind that the Digitalisation Strategy at EU level under the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 is based on 7 pillars, namely: the digital single market, interoperability, trust and security, fast internet access, ICT research and innovation, increasing digital literacy, acquiring skills, inclusion and the benefits of ICT for society in the EU. The whole agenda aims to achieve, mainly, employment, research and development, education of citizens, combating poverty and social exclusion, but also climate change and energy sustainability.

We agree that “it is not an easy task to assess the ability to effectively and efficiently provide high quality services to citizens, to examine the extent to which public administrations are able to use the potential of new technologies and to digitize to improve services or to identify how public administrations are performing in these areas”<sup>20)</sup>. Regarding digitization one needs to keep an eye on and appreciate “the activity carried out by the European Commission. There is the European Index of the Digital Economy and Society (DEISI<sup>21)</sup>), eGov baseline reports and an EU innovation scoreboard. Other institutions also provide interesting comparative data, such as digitization assessments (UN) or performance data (results) in key areas of delivery, such as health and education (OECD)”<sup>22)</sup>.

In fact, according to recent studies, digitalization involves, among other components, the component of digital governance, in this respect being considered of major relevance “The UN study, which measures the efficiency of e-government internationally through a composite index (“EGDI”), which is the weighted average of the telecommunications infrastructure index, the human capital index and the online services index”<sup>23)</sup>. Equally relevant is the European Commission’s Study on the Digital Performance of EU Countries. This European Commission study found a number of trends and reforms that confirmed “a wide range of initiatives and programs in the field of service delivery and digitization” in EU Member States “to increase the efficiency and quality of public services, increase access to services and customer orientation”; in this context, following the analysis applied to the Member States, it was observed that a ranking can be made according to e-government users, Estonia being by far in the top of the progress made, with the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania at the opposite pole<sup>24)</sup>.

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<sup>19)</sup> Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020. Accelerating the digital transformation of governance, Bruxelles, 19.04.2016, p. 3, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/RO/1-2016-179-RO-F1-1.PDF> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>20)</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>21)</sup> The European Commission’s Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) is an index that concentrates a series of indicators among the most important in the field of digital performance in the Member States of the European Union following the evolution in the field of digitalization of the EU Member States.

<sup>22)</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23)</sup> PWC, *Study on the implementation of Digital Governance in Romania*, p. 4, available at: <https://www.arb.ro/wp-content/uploads/Studiu-e-Guvernare.pdf> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>24)</sup> It is true that the study is carried out at the level of 2017 and refers to the period immediately preceding the year in question (2013-2015), and since then some progress has been made in all Member States of the European Union, but we appreciate that the proportions are kept properly.

We believe that the benefits of digitalization of public administration can be found in reducing costs in the case of public administration, in stimulating economic growth, but also in reducing tax evasion, by increasing the share of electronic payments<sup>25)</sup> as well as reducing corruption.

The digitalization of public administration in Romania has been and is a challenge for some time, the institutional actors involved in the act of governing and in public administration being forced to constantly adapt to the evolution and expectations of society and, implicitly, citizens. In a context in which citizens' expectations are higher and higher, more adapted to the age of technology, the desire and pressure put on those involved in the act of governing and public administration make it necessary to closely monitor the stage of digitalization of administration, visibility of these services to citizens, the proactive involvement of citizens, including the strengthening of public-private partnerships, also seen as a way to increase access to digital services.

A modern and efficient public administration "must provide fast and high quality services for citizens and a favourable environment for businesses" and, at the same time, "must transform its administrative services (back offices), rethink and redesign existing procedures and services and to open access to their data and services to other administrations and, as far as possible, to businesses and civil society"<sup>26)</sup>.

Over the years, the increase in results and trust in the national public administration through digitization has been achieved by "providing electronic services, by developing mechanisms for coordination and institutional collaboration within the public administration, by creating portals (virtual one-stop shops) and related internet pages for reducing bureaucracy, and a number of normative acts have been adopted in this regard (e.g. Government Decision no. 58/1998 approving the National Strategy for computerization and implementation at an accelerated pace of the information society and of the Action Program on the large-scale use and development of the information technology sector in Romania, Law no. 677/2001 for the protection of persons regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of the afore-mentioned data which was recently repealed by Law no. 129/2018, for amending and supplementing Law no. 102/2005 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Supervisory Authority for the Processing of Personal Data, as well as for the repeal of Law no. 677/2001 for the protection of persons regarding the processing of personal data and the free movement of this data, Law no. 455/2001 regarding the electronic signature, Government Decision no. 1007/2001 for the approval of the Government Strategy regarding the computerization of the public administration, Law no. 161/2003 regarding some measures to ensure transparency in the exercise of public dignities, public functions and in the business environment, preventing and sanctioning corruption, with subsequent modifications and further additions)"<sup>27)</sup>.

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<sup>25)</sup> For more details see *PWC, Study on the implementation of Digital Governance in Romania*, p. 4, available at: <https://www.arb.ro/wp-content/uploads/Studiu-e-Guvernare.pdf> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>26)</sup> For more details see Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020. Accelerating the digital transformation of governance*, Bruxelles, 19.04.2016, p. 5, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/RO/1-2016-179-RO-F1-1.PDF> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>27)</sup> Marinică, C. L., *The evolution of the relationship between administration and citizens in Romania*, Academic Journal of Law and Governance, no. 8/2020, pp. 25-26.



With regard to the legislative measures adopted in the field of digitization, we should mention, in particular, the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 41 of June 28, 2016 on establishing simplification measures at the level of central public administration and for amending and supplementing some normative acts<sup>28)</sup>, with subsequent amendments and completions, where, in Article 3, it is specified that “public institutions and specialized bodies of the central public administration are obliged to accept documents issued by legal persons governed by public or private law in electronic format, which have a qualified or advanced electronic signature, defined according to the provisions of art. 3 points 11 and 12 of Regulation (EU) no. 910/2014, in order to provide public services to the beneficiary”. The use of electronic signatures will facilitate the interaction between citizens, the private sector and institutional actors and will significantly reduce the bureaucracy reflected in the number of paper forms required for submission by citizens and businesses when going through various government procedures<sup>29)</sup>.

At the same time, at the beginning of this year, the Government Decision no. 89/2020 on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Digitalization Authority<sup>30)</sup> (ADR), whose objective is to achieve the digitization of the public sector, but also to “b) develop and ensure interoperability between public authorities and institutions; c) development of computer authentication systems and interconnection of public information systems; d) development of electronic public services; e) implementation at national level of information systems that provide eGovernment services; f) operation of information systems that provide eGovernment services; g) elaboration and implementation of regulations on specific activities of governing by electronic means in accordance with European and national strategies in the field of digitization; h) the operation of interfaces between the computer systems of public institutions and citizens or the business environment, being a gateway to their electronic public services provided by the public administration; i) implementation of digital services that capitalize on technical mechanisms for certifying authenticity and ensuring data protection; j) implementation of specific technologies and models of shared exploitation of IT resources, to support the implementation and provision of digital services, including on the basis of cloud platforms; k) implementation and operation of access mechanisms to digital services in a regime of mobility and independence from access technology, in order to maximize their addressability; l) ensuring cyber security for the public sector; m) implementation of artificial intelligence in the public sector; n) elaboration and implementation of the national program of digital literacy of the citizens of Romania”<sup>31)</sup>. As it has to report on a quarterly basis on the progress of digitization, the content of these reports is worth monitoring. In parallel with this activity, ADR has a series of projects in implementation, such as: Centralized Software Platform for Digital Identification – PSCID, National Information System for Adoption, Technological Interoperability System with EU Member States, Integrated Information System for Issuance of Acts for Civil Status, National Disability Management System, Interoperability Solutions for European Public

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<sup>28)</sup> Published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 490 of June 30, 2016.

<sup>29)</sup> For more details see The European Commission, *eGovernment factsheets anniversary report*, 2019, p. 22.

<sup>30)</sup> Published in the Official Gazette of Romania no. 113 of February 13, 2020.

<sup>31)</sup> Article 1, paragraph 2 of Government Decision no. no. 89/2020 on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Digitalization Authority.

Administrations, Establishing the framework for the development of e-government tools (EGOV)<sup>32)</sup>, integrated management system for a high – performance information society (SIMSIP) etc<sup>33)</sup>.

However, we hope that history will not repeat itself since in 2014, “Romania took a series of measures to increase e-government services, of which only ~ 25% were addressed,” but which “are still in an early stage of implementation, the blockages being determined by” the lack of a responsible entity, gaps in legislation, the lack of digital education as well as high costs and high investment required<sup>34)</sup>. In the same study were identified a series of measures that, if implemented within four years, can ensure a possible overcoming of existing bottlenecks, namely: "institutional framework (designation of the government institution responsible for implementing the digital strategy); electronic signature – amending the law on electronic signature; E-id – implementation of digital identity; Digital education – updating the curriculum in schools; Conventions – finalizing the agreement with ANAF, finalizing the e-seizures project; E-tax – submitting and editing online forms; "One-stop shop" – integration of personal information in a common database accessible via e-id; online registration and electronic communication – online company registration and electronic communication with the Trade Register; online public procurement portal – a portal that includes the complete public procurement process<sup>35)</sup>.

We believe that a premise in the implementation and development of the digitization process is given by the assessment of citizens' skills, an extremely useful assessment in evaluating how the population adapts to changes concerning the provision of goods and services electronically, which must take into account an elementary education in the digital field, especially if we consider that “Central Europe is proud of some of the most educated populations in the world”<sup>36)</sup>.

Clearly, an important role is played by the level of involvement of citizens, given that in the process of developing public policies it is knowledge, experience, perceptions and values that ultimately give confidence and credibility to decisions taken and implemented. Citizen involvement leads to a better information of institutional actors, better governance, constructive interaction doubled by sustained credibility. At the same time, in order to

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<sup>32)</sup> Regarding this project, it is considered that “Romania now has the chance to progress rapidly in the process of digitization of public services, so as to honour its citizens promptly, respectfully and efficiently, through digital / electronic means, without the obligation to present himself at the authorities' counter, when it is not necessary. Public institutions must take into account the need to exchange data with each other in order to become interoperable, so that the citizen is no longer obliged to provide documents that institutions already have in databases, and the implementation of these services becomes possible while respecting European principles of digital governance, in particular "once-only", information found in *EY Romania has finalized the programmatic document for the digitization of public services*, available at: <https://www.juridice.ro/695456/ey-romania-a-finalizat-documentul-programatic-pentru-digitalizarea-serviciilor-publice.html> (accessed on 6 October 2020).

<sup>33)</sup> For more details see <https://www.adr.gov.ro/proiecte-in-implementare/>

<sup>34)</sup> For more details see PWC, *Study on the implementation of Digital Governance in Romania*, pp. 22-24, available at: <https://www.arb.ro/wp-content/uploads/Studiu-e-Guvernare.pdf> (accessed on 6 October 2020).

<sup>35)</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

<sup>36)</sup> The Economist Intelligent Unit, *E-government in Central Europe. Rethinking public administration*, 2004, p. 9, available at: [http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad\\_pdfs/Central\\_Europe\\_egov.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad_pdfs/Central_Europe_egov.pdf) (accessed on 5 October 2020).

ensure an interaction between the citizen and the public administration, at European Union level, the European Commission has considered and analysed the application of the "once only" principle to citizens in a cross-border context, with full respect for legal framework on the protection of personal data and privacy"<sup>37)</sup>.

Although there are studies that confirm that citizen involvement results in improved access to public services in low and middle-income countries, evidence of development outcomes is limited<sup>38)</sup>, so we appreciate that citizen involvement implies not only improved access to public services but much more, a civic education, a long-term change of mentality, with visible effects.

Involving citizens in ensuring better governance requires intensive activity in public policy-making activities, including determining the needs and stages of public services, so that they seek to achieve and meet the needs of the community, encouraging cohesion and sustainability. Also, the involvement of citizens in the public administration entails the taking of measures at institutional level that give an equidistant and constructive positioning at the same time compared to the elaboration of public policies.

## 5. Conclusions

Being aware of the timeliness of the topic and the focus on the need for "quality administration" as a key element in ensuring good governance, of the desire of all states and citizens to benefit from "good governance", we appreciate that digitalization is an essential component of good governance, characteristic of the 21st century, which demonstrates the commitment of the state, but also of the citizen in promoting good governance, with the recognition of all political, economic and social benefits.

The digitization of public administration brings to the forefront a series of distinct and complex challenges, starting with the adaptation of public administration and continuing, among others, with an aspect we are interested to focus on in a future study, namely adapting, educating and making citizens interact and create a new digital culture adapted to the "digital citizen", able to react positively to the current demands of society, in an era of technology and artificial intelligence.

This paper captures, in a relatively brief manner, the importance of digitalization as a key element in ensuring good administration and, implicitly, good governance, and ensuring access to its benefits to all citizens, public and private, interested in de-bureaucratization and digitization of public administration, but also willing to be actively involved in the elaboration of public policies, in order to satisfy the general interest.

We notice how important the connectivity of the citizen to the life of the community is, as well as how important it is to acquire and exercise digital skills, which support

<sup>37)</sup> For more details see Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020. Accelerating the digital transformation of governance, Bruxelles, 19.04.2016, p. 12, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/RO/1-2016-179-RO-F1-1.PDF> (accessed on 4 October 2020).

<sup>38)</sup> For more details see Hugh Waddington, Ada Sonnenfeld, Juliette Finetti, Marie Gaarder, Denny John, Jennifer Stevenson, *Citizen engagement in public services in low- and middle income countries: A mixed-methods systematic review of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability (PITA) initiatives*, in Campbell Systematic Reviews, volume 15, issue 1-2, June 2019, pp. 1-90.

not only an efficient digitization and accessibility for all, but also ease the access to the labour market adapted to the XXI century. Finally, we believe that the beneficiaries of digitalisation – the citizen, the public and private sectors – must be the focus of the development of future strategies that are sustainable and provide the necessary conditions for the development and support of economic and social inclusion.

We appreciate that as the development of public administration has been subjected to constant challenges, digitalization will succeed in providing all stakeholders with the expected result, by interconnecting and identifying appropriate solutions to serve as the basis for streamlined procedures and mechanisms. It depends on the decision-maker at the level of public administration to achieve and implement the digitalization of administration, emphasizing and pursuing the European ideal of "good administration" and "good governance", to develop and ensure the functioning of digitized mechanisms and procedures, without losing sight of the risks of a major impact of such digitally non-functional procedures, sometimes doubled even by their actual non-functioning, regardless of how they are offered.

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