Issues (not) addressed in the OPIS

In 2008, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved two basic, strategic documents regarding the informatization of public administration (eGovernment Strategy and the National Concept of Public Governance Informatization). In 2009, a more detailed discussion of objectives arising from these documents began.

Most professionals saw many benefits for the government as well as for citizens and businesses. There is probably no doubt that eGovernment is a key for achieving these benefits through more efficient and pro-active performance-oriented public administration services. The mentioned period also meant for us (authors of this article) the opportunity to look into the "kitchen" where it all started.

Today, after more than three years, the results of the Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Program of Informatization of Society (OPIS)[1] should already be visible. Efforts should be reflected at the Central level, in the so-called common modules of the central public administration portal (CPAP), as well as on the level of specific projects run by institutions under public administration. It should be noted that the current situation does not live up to the goals set, but it is important to analyze the problem and its solutions before looking for an offender to blame.

Based on our experience, we could easily say that the problem is the lack of management of interactions, relationships, dependencies and requirements on all relevant levels. The next section will clarify what each of these levels actually conceals.

Political-steering Level
For large projects such as eGovernment projects where individual solutions and modules are closely related and many activities overlap across the whole public administration, it is important to have a well-defined management "entity" and its "status". In addition to well-defined roles, responsibilities and obligations, it is important to define the powers of this entity especially in terms of management, control and, where possible, sanctions. Whether it is a new individual entity or an existing institution or organization is a secondary decision, and may even be irrelevant. An important aspect is that the entity is given relevant powers conferred by the Slovak Government, towards both other ministries and institutions of public administration as well as implemented OPIS projects.

Project-organizational Level
Another key aspect of successful OPIS project management is undoubtedly the division of the whole into important individual and relatively independent areas with sustained joint management and coordination of their mutual relations, requirements and dependencies. Collection of information, analysis, evaluation and adoption of conclusions must be provided within each area and at the same time coordinated with other projects. One possible way to execute this distribution is to create working groups for each key area. The members of such groups should be not only entities from specific projects, but professional representatives as well. It is important to have clearly defined tasks and goals for each group, which must be regularly evaluated by the management "entity."

One of the main purposes of such distribution should be a detailed knowledge of issues, potential problems and "Show Stoppers". The identification of such common problems, which are of interdepartmental or inter-institutional nature, is very important in terms of their subsequent successful solution.
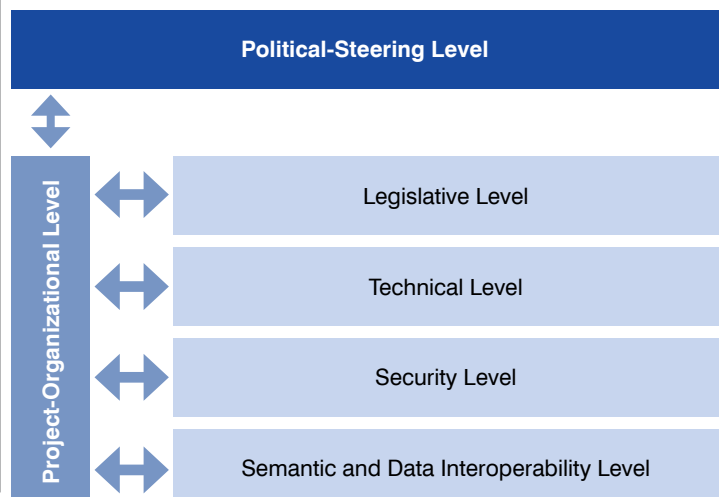
Legislative Level
In line with previous statements, one could say that the legislative level is one of the first major autonomous areas. There should be a legislative-working committee consisting of representatives of all key ministries and institutions of public administration who carry out OPIS projects. This committee should collect necessary stimuli for legislative changes from all projects. These stimuli should be subsequently identified and classified according to defined criteria and specific legislation. Then possible solutions, based on legislative and technical analysis of the problems and the requirements of individual projects, should be proposed. Based on the results of such analysis, one can determine the level of adjustment (e.g. a "central" act of law or individual regulations of particular entities) and consequent realization. Only this central processing will show all the links and problems but also potential duplicities and common aspects of various external problems of various entities.

Some examples of such problem areas are:
- missing equivalent to the requirements of the decree in an electronic form;
- the process of conversion from electronic form to paper form and vice versa;
- ways and terms of electronic delivery;
- electronic signature of a legal person and issue of an electronic signature created by an information system;

Political-Steering Level		
Project-Organizational Level	Legislative Level	
	Technical Level	
	Security Level	
	Semantic and Data Interoperability Level	

implementation

- clear identification of a natural person in the electronic world.

Technical Level

Another equally important autonomous area is the technical level. The absence of "Architect of eGovernment" is notable to this day. Only clearly determined base architecture of particular building blocks, which are common CPAP modules, with the definition of particular functionality and mutual "workflows" can answer the question of all projects – what can be expected from CPAP. It is important to define basic principles of CPAP functions (this is an old issue from 2009 when feasibility studies for individual CPAP modules were written). In other words, it is necessary to divide definitions of the National Concept of Public Governance Informatization (NCPGI) into more mandatory requirements. What does this mean? Previous definitions were sometimes ambiguous or contradictory, leading to many questions. These questions might include:

- How will the "Enterprise Service Bus" be realized at the common CPAP module level?;
- What features will be available at the central level? e.g. Will the central level inform about status of the transaction in particular institutions or will this be left to the specific institution and its project solution?
- Will the electronic mailbox be long-term documentation storage place or just a temporary space?
- What module will provide functionality of electronic delivery? How will the delivery be designed?
- What solutions will be used for legal entities and natural person identification toward the eGov services?

Special attention should be given to the Module for Long-Term Archiving of Electronic Registry Records (MLTAERR). The creation of proprietary solutions on the level of several public administration institutions, carrying out their own MLTAERR modules and their non-coordination with central solution and future solution of state electronic archive bring high risk into the future. Particularly in terms of clarity of the original document, but also in terms of maintaining its credibility and validity.

Security Level

Within the "security" level it is not enough only to define basic rules for information security management, such as "Security project." In addition to the basic requirements of information security management, specified in the Decree of the Ministry of Finance about Public Administration Information Systems, it is essential to define the requirements for the performance of information security. The focus should be mainly on security requirements for operational systems, applications (especially web applications), network infrastructure, data flow definitions, and network device configuration. It is also not sufficient to remain at the level of definitions themselves, but it is important to provide inspections and audits of the fulfilment of particular requirements and provide professional advisory, support and/or training. Security monitoring and evaluation of logs are necessary, at least on common CPAP module levels.

Assumption for the implementation of the security level is assignment of a particular mandate and competences to relevant institution for the performance of the above mentioned activities, but also sufficient capacities and resources mainly for the performance of information security reviews at the lowest level (including various types of technical reviews, such as configuration or application reviews, or penetration tests). A part of the mandate has to be a right to claim to mitigate identified deficiencies to eliminate potential risks and the ability to impose sanctions for violation of the requirements at the information security level.

Semantic and Data Interoperability Level

Semantic and data interoperability is not a new issue. Foundations can be found at the level of the Act on Public Administration Information Systems or in the particular Decree of the Ministry of Finance. Some relevant paragraphs can also be found in other legislation, such as National Security Authority regulations regarding electronic signatures. The common aspect and problem of this legislation may be a reference to the particular, mainly international standards. Standards are a good thing, but in most cases they are not entirely clear and provide flexibility for the implementation. Those who once tried to implement a standard know what is it about. When implementing the same standard on two independent subjects, the two implementations may be in accordance with the standard, but mutually incompatible.

For this reason it is necessary to centrally define binding profiles within particular standards. The creation of such binding profiles is necessary to coordinate at least on the CPAP level and provide instructions for relevant projects.

For the effective creation of eGovernment, it is necessary to implement and use suitable tools for recording and analyzing relevant data (various quantitative and qualitative attributes, assumptions, risks and open questions, contingencies, terms, etc.) to support decision making and monitoring within eGovernment project management at all the levels mentioned above.

Most of the above mentioned areas, issues and facts are known at least to the professionals and interested persons. Some issues are addressed with more, some with less effort. Perhaps only some of them are not addressed at all. This situation is reflected by the brackets used in the title of the article. The conclusion of this article should not lead to the reinvention of the wheel, but instead to a focus on systematic, conceptual management and coordination of the activities at every level together with a pro-active approach adopted by the responsible managing "entity". This is an important fact that could help eGovernment projects to be successful, if it is not already too late.

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1 http://www.informatizacia.sk/what-is-opis-/4633s