

ELF Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable

„Open and Accessible Public Services. From E-Estonia to E-Ukraine”

1 June 2018, Inveria, Kyiv

Long Report

The Inveria flow space in the centre of Kyiv was packed with around 100 guests when Estonian and Ukrainian experts discussed on 1 June how to best implement “Open and accessible public services”. The event was part of the “Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable” series, organised by the European Liberal Forum (ELF) with financial support from the European Parliament. It was hosted by Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) Ukraine and Belarus together with the Center for Civic Initiatives (CEHRIN) in Lviv. FNF and CEHRIN have been building up a Network of Free Local Politicians during the last four years which aims at empowering liberal forces on the level of local self-government. The roundtable was addressed to members of this network, giving them hands-on and inspiring experience from Estonia and enabling a discussion about the opportunities and impediments for implementation of digital solutions in public services in Ukraine.

The attractiveness of the topic does not come as a surprise for those following the Ukrainian efforts to not only implement a decentralisation reform but also change the relationship between state administrations and citizens in general. Ukraine is still showing a digital divide, and service orientation in public services has still much room for improvement. The decentralisation reform that follows the principle of subsidiarity, giving the local level much more competences and resources than they had before, poses a window of opportunity to implement digital solutions and making life for the citizens easier. The Estonian example is of utmost interest for Ukraine, as the two countries share some decades of common Soviet history and started from similarly difficult positions and as Estonia is at the same time the most advanced European country in terms of digitalisation.

The Estonian speakers all gave very practical insights in how much the relation between citizen and the Estonian state has been digitalised. In his welcome words, the Estonian Ambassador to Ukraine **Gert Antsu** illustrated the rapid development with a personal example: When his first daughter was born, he told the audience, he had to go to the city hall and register her personally. When the second daughter was born four years ago, he got her registered online. But when his son was born one and a half year ago, even this was not necessary: His birth was registered automatically by the hospital.

Victor Guzun, Manager of Guzun Consulting, visiting lecturer at Tallinn University of Technology and former Ambassador of Moldova to Estonia, provided the audience with a systematic overview of digital public services in Estonia. Showing his personal e-portal on eesti.ee, he demonstrated how the whole life cycle can be managed online:

- new-borns get an automatic ID code and e-birth certificate and are provided with two e-mail addresses by the state; they get a medical insurance and are put on the waiting list for kindergarten automatically;

- parents can follow their kids' progress in school online, including homework, absences and statistics; admin time of the teachers has been reduced by 50%, skipping of lessons by 30% over the last five years;
- e-health system provides all medical data online, including analysis results, anamnesis and drugs; the system is accessible only for doctors and pharmacies authorized by the patient;
- e-police system has made the work of police 50 times more effective;
- billing and accounting has been simplified extremely; the speaker opened an app, made a photo of his hotel bill, chose an option for "type of costs" and submitted the bill with one click to his accounting system which will also automatically report to the fiscal authorities on a monthly basis;
- GOSWIFT provides digital border passing to avoid real queues at the border crossings;
- Many more examples such as e-land register, e-voting, cutting Christmas trees or fishing with e-registration and payment and so on.

Victor Guzun highly recommended making use of the many Estonian university programs that deal with digitalisation of public administration. He is convinced that digitalisation is not a question of choice: "People are online, business is online, and government must follow. There is no other option."

Andres Jaadla, Member of the Committee of the Regions, member of the City Council and former mayor of Rakvere, first introduced the work of the Committee of the Regions as a body of European parliament, including the CoR initiative "Free Wi-Fi for Europeans". He then focused on the efforts of his home town Rakvere to digitalise. His practical examples covered the "best kindergarten in Estonia" with an e-solution for energy saving, the e-land register and the "smart city hall" which is a near-zero-energy building. District heating has been transformed from 100% fossils to mostly renewable energies; an electronic car system has been established. The changes were part of a 10 year smart city project called "Smartvere" (from smart + Rakvere). Last but not least, Andres described how he was working as an e-mayor, managing his city basically by his smart phone.

After learning about the amazing Estonian successes, the audience was brought back to Ukrainian reality by **Valeriy Bakal**, Deputy Head of the State Agency for Electronic Government of Ukraine. The State Agency was founded with the aim to coordinate digitalisation efforts in state institutions. It passed a concept until 2020 and was just rewarded as the "breakthrough of the year" by the Estonian government. So far, more than 50 electronic services have been launched, with a target of up to 100. Valeriy Bakal stressed two points in particular: First, digitalisation alone will not bring much improvement. It has to come together with a simplification of administrative procedures. Second, the whole project has to be accompanied by a broad communication and transparency campaign in order to increase public trust into the system and reduce corruption.

He also made clear that Ukraine has different preconditions due to its size: "For us, it is 30 times more difficult than for Estonia, as we have 30 times more population."

Victor Tymoshchuk, expert in public administration and Deputy Head of the Centre for Political and Legal Reforms, supported some of these points. For him, the sheer number of digital services is not an indicator for success. On the contrary, he proposed a critical analysis which services are really needed. An important step to

more accessibility would be the integration of different services which works very well in Estonia. The core question of open and accessible public services, according to Tymoshchuk, is not a question of digitalisation, but a question of bureaucracy. First, the ideology has to change, and then digitalisation can follow. He also brought up the question of data protection and privacy which is not solved sufficiently in Ukraine. Still, he admitted that there has been much positive change since 2014, and ended on an optimistic note.

The lively discussion following the presentations illustrated that the topic is a really hot one in today's Ukraine. Comments showed that first personal experience with digital services have not been purely positive. One participant addressed the question how elderly people could be included into the process, given that they are unlikely to use smart phones. The Estonian guests denied the assumption that double structures were needed at least for a certain period of time. Instead of offering "paper versions", Estonia provides assistance in service centres, community centres and libraries for any digital service, plus country-wide courses for elderly people. Another topic discussed was the question of data security and possible misuse. Here, the Estonian experts could give concrete examples of effective counter measures as well.

In the end, the audience was encouraged and inspired to bring open and accessible public services forward also in Ukraine – even if the conditions might be more difficult than in Estonia. Victor Guzun said from his own experience with introducing a paperless office as the first ambassador of Moldova: "I had to do this at my own risk, but it worked. So, try, take risks, make mistakes and learn!"