

RECOMMENDATION 146/2015¹

E-Government in the BSEC Countries

1. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC) stresses the importance of rendering public services through an electronic governance format that minimizes the constraints of time and distance, while providing a qualitatively new form of governance. The PABSEC reiterates the common commitment to promote a people-centric, inclusive, and development-oriented information society in which everyone can access, utilize, and share knowledge and information. Such a society will enable states to achieve their full potential in creating peaceful, just, and prosperous world.
2. The PABSEC is mindful that the main objectives of e-government are to achieve maximum transparency of all public structures by giving citizens the opportunity to control the adoption and implementation process of political decisions at all levels. E-government ensures access to and delivery of government information and services to citizens, business partners, employees, other agencies, and government entities in a format where human contact is minimized and information and communication technology (ICT) is harnessed to the optimal level. E-government envisages not only the maximum utilization of technological innovations, but also government reform. The aim of efficient e-government is to focus on the needs of the public sector as much as on citizens and businesses, that leads to the necessity of wide deployment of ICT and networking technologies to improve the efficiency of services delivery in the public sector, as well as methods of interaction between the public and private sectors.
3. The PABSEC stresses that a rich public domain is an essential element for the growth of e-government, creating multiple benefits. The rapid progress of ICT technologies offers several new opportunities to attain higher levels of development. The capacity of these technologies to drastically reduce the constraints of time and distance can be a powerful instrument of positive change, increasing efficiencies and improving the quality of life for all. Enhancement of ICT, proactive involvement of individuals, and the potential to monitor

¹ Assembly debate on 26 November 2015 (see Doc.: GA46/EC45/REP/15, Report of the Economic, Commercial, Technological and Environmental Affairs Committee, *E-Government in the BSEC Countries*, discussed in Varna on 5–6 October 2015; Rapporteur: Mr. Pavel Hristov – Bulgaria).

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governmental activity has several advantages: more transparent governance, stronger control over public activities, and citizens' increased trust in governments, all of which contribute to the decriminalization of societies.

4. The PABSEC stresses that the key component of e-government is a government portal which guarantees that public services and business have easy and secure access to all relevant government information. The portal also consolidates the information and services provided by various departments so as to create a single point of access to government services, official documentation, and administrative procedures, resulting in citizens who are more willing to participate in governance. The portal also serves as a powerful tool for selection and integration of a significant amount of information at the disposal of public administrations. As e-government progresses within the framework of technological and social networking development, the portal becomes a platform where the government actively requests feedback from citizens and consults with all segments of society, so that it can make informed decisions that meet the interests of all.
5. The PABSEC recognizes that the BSEC countries have achieved some tangible results in their ongoing implementation of integrated programs in e-government. At this stage of transition to the information society, specific changes have only been partly implemented. The immediate requirement is for substantial reforms to modify government functions to keep pace with social transformations. Good governance at all levels has a mutually reinforcing impact, which is why harnessing the full potential of ICT for e-government is essential to promote the goals of steady and sustainable development.
6. The PABSEC is aware that, at present, the benefits of information technology are unevenly distributed within societies and that it is vital to fill the existing gap in digital divide. The common quest is to ensure that everyone can benefit from the opportunities that e-government offers. To this end, all stakeholders have to work together to improve access to ICT and its infrastructure, and correspondingly to accessible information and knowledge, so as to build capacity, increase confidence and security, and encourage international and regional cooperation.
7. The PABSEC is confident that a prerequisite in the process of preparing for successful e-government is the enactment of appropriate legislation and the establishment of a regulatory framework, as the functions of state administration are conducted strictly on the basis of specific legislation.
8. **Therefore, the Assembly recommends** that the Parliaments and the Governments of the BSEC Member States
 - i. *review* the policies, legislation, and practices related to strengthening e-government at national, regional, and local levels, so as to establish a network of national, regional, and local e-government competence centers that meet the strong demand for modernization and innovation in public administration;
 - ii. *support* measures that enable administrative procedures to be conducted online and that ensure the implementation of an e-government portal that offers one-stop services in real time via an integrated system;

- iii. *promote* administrative reforms and establish a favorable legal framework to ensure that operations within government agencies are integrated and simplified, to adapt laws and regulations to make these reforms possible, and to enable interoperability across government agencies;
- iv. *implement* the reforms that will ensure successful transformation of administrations by training civil servants on new ways of working and on networked governance, with ICT included as a mandatory subject for all civil service personnel.
- v. *ensure* that the e-government system has robust security features to ensure that citizens can access, provide, and exchange information (personal and transactional data) online with the assurance of privacy, confidentiality, and reliability;
- vi. *sponsor* the digital literacy of citizens to prevent a digital divide and make the benefits of e-government freely available to citizens, governments, and businesses alike; to bridge any existing divide by using ICT to ensure accessibility of e-government services for all user groups, regardless of individual, social, or cultural characteristics or geographical location;
- vii. *create* an environment to diversify access to e-government services, and thereby further promote the advantages of e-government, by using mobile terminals, digital TVs, and similar media;
- viii. *invest* more in research and development related to enhancement of e-government and better deployment of the necessary technologies and methodologies;
- ix. *update* accountability and transparency regulations to reflect the different contexts and expectations brought about by digital technologies and technology-driven approaches;
- x. *encourage* the online disclosure of all relevant information on government services in a user-friendly format, with the corresponding publications and press releases disseminated simultaneously;
- xi. *enhance* regional integration to collaboratively work toward national capacity-building and alignment of national strategies with common goals, while respecting national and regional particularities.

9. **The Assembly invites** the BSEC Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs to consider this Recommendation.