INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, public administration in Europe has been undergoing profound transformation. The incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all aspects of work in public administration has been a crucial element in triggering this transformation. Fortunately, public administration work today has little to do with inefficient bureaucratic machineries of the past; however, there is still room for improvement in order to make public services more efficient, cost-effective, burden-less and friendly for citizens and businesses.

The concept that better describes the transformations in the public administration process is the concept of “Transformational Government”. This concept originated in 2003 with the work of European organizations such as Belgium’s FEDICT, and borrows the name from the 2005 British initiative “Transformational Government enabled by technology”2. The notion of transformational eGovernment implies that eGovernment can make a step forward from being a supporting tool for governments or public sector organizations or an information platform; thus becoming a driving force to redesign the way of working in public administration by making effective use of the ICT potential. Such transformative stances aim at making the way public administrations work more efficient and cost effective, citizen-centric and oriented towards customer- (in this case citizen-) satisfaction.

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1 Federale Overheidsdienst voor Informatie- en Communicatietechnologie (Federal Administrations’ Service for Information and Communication Technologies), http://www.fedict.belgium.be/
The changes at stake for public administration to comply with the precepts of transformational government, thus, are:

1. must become an organization that meets and keeps up with high quality standards;
2. must adopt a citizen-centric approach;
3. must work towards the minimization of burden for citizens and businesses;
4. must learn how to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the implantation of ICT, in order to promote internal reorganization, i.e. ‘learning organization’; and
5. must take a leading role in promoting innovation and become a driver for modernization, quality increases and best-value delivery.

Technology itself is the key enabler per excellence for the fulfilment of transformational eGovernment strategies. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that constraints for actual transformation exist, and have to be dealt with. Those constraints are, put simply, avoiding any possible incapacity from leadership within the administration aiming at achieving new a generation of eGovernment. Leadership is the major factor for change in public administration, since it has to guide the organisation to adopt new ways of working, of retaining and organising its knowledge and to orient work more towards technology. Also, a lack of skills allowing administration workers to follow the same pace as technological developments would present a major hindrance for achieving such a goal.

Furthermore, one needs to bear in mind that in order to move public administration towards the transformational government concept, one of the most important points is to ensure that the majority of the citizenry is actively included in the benefits of information society. For this matter, infrastructural modernisation is not sufficient, since skills and awareness of the existing possibilities are equally necessary.

For these reasons, the majority of European governments and the European institutions have actively embarked on the promotion of eInclusion policies, including the promotion of skills.

eInclusion

Digital inclusion has prime importance in enabling transformational eGovernment. Bringing eGovernment one step further and benefiting
from its transformational potential has one main constraint: the existing
digital divide. The digital divide refers to the gap between those
people with effective access to digital and information technology,
and those that do not benefit from it. It includes the imbalances in
physical access to technology, as well as the imbalances in resources
and skills needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen.

In 2006, the Riga Ministerial Declaration set out the goals to be
achieved by 2010, which inspires the eInclusion programme of the
European Commission: objectives that were endorsed in the Malmö
Declaration of 2009. The main objectives are, firstly, to reduce by half
the gaps between the average EU population and older people,
people with disabilities, women, lower-education groups, unemployed
and “less-developed” regions in internet usage. Secondly, extend
broadband coverage to 90% of the EU’s population. Thirdly, reduce by
half the gaps between the EU average population and groups in risk of
exclusion. And finally, increase compliance with accessibility guidelines
by public websites. However, despite significant advances being made
in extending infrastructure and affordable access, today the existing
differences in internet access and usage among the different
European countries remain one of the greatest challenges to
overcome in the fields of ICT and, thus, to extending the potentials of
transformational eGovernment throughout the EU.

The European Commission sees eInclusion as a key enabler of the goals
of economic and social progress set in the Lisbon agenda and will
continue to be in the post-2010 agenda. Departing from the idea of
transforming the risk of digital divide into “digital cohesion” and
opportunities for every citizen to benefit from technology, eInclusion
focuses on bringing the advantage of the internet to all citizens, putting
special emphasis on the risk groups. The main activities covered under
eInclusion policies are divided into eAccessibility and eCompetences.
The first, eAccessibility, deals with promoting assistive technology and
universally accessible software, websites, etc. focusing on the “Design
for all” principle. This includes websites or applications designed to be
friendly to users with disabilities, for instance enabling colour contrasts,
text-to-voice technology, etc. The latter - eCompetences - makes
reference to skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to education in
the context of an inclusive information society.

Furthermore, national authorities have also been active in promoting
digital inclusion, in many cases by launching national strategies aimed
at bringing the internet to the widest possible range of the population.
Those national programmes include strategies designed according to
the specific needs of each one of the countries, regions or areas,
ranging from promoting cheaper access to the internet, promoting
courses for disadvantaged groups, to setting up local internet centres or wireless access for remote areas.

**USE OF ICT and SKILLS**

The so-called “New Skills” are a comprehensive group of competences and knowledge areas of special relevance for organisational modernisation. The New Skills include innovation capacities, project management skills, leadership skills, contractual management, basic and advanced ICT skills (better known as eSkills), technology management and process management, information and knowledge management, communication and interpersonal skills, web editing and writing skills, flexible working methods, networking capabilities, and human resource management skills. These are, thus, points that acquire different degrees of relevance depending on both the hierarchical rank of the employees and the level of proficiency required for the fulfilment of their tasks.

The command of ICT has become an indispensable skill for all employees of public administration. This area of competences, better known as skills, encompasses a whole range of capabilities related to the operation and application of ICT systems by individuals, from the basic skills, such as using a word processor or a spreadsheet, to more advanced and specialist skills. Especially in the last decade, ICT has become an integral part of both business and public sector work. Its use can change the traditional role of workers by taking over routine functions and leaving them free to undertake more specialised and interesting tasks. Moreover, as eGovernment is being implemented in European public administration, it transforms the way citizens interact with the administration and it modifies the working settings of public employees, requiring them to gain new competences. Therefore, ensuring that all employees have at least a solid command of the basic eSkills, is an excellent way to guarantee the success of a knowledge-centred modernisation strategy and actual preparedness of employees to cope with the renewed demands of their jobs. On the other hand, employees with more specific tasks may require advanced or specialist eSkills, such as software development, web design, database design, use of specialised programmes, etc. In such cases, the necessary eSkills should be identified and provided, as part of the organisation’s modernisation.

**REDUCTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN**
Using ICT in eGovernment in order to reduce administrative burden has become a priority in today’s public administration in Europe. The potential for ICT in this matter is not yet fully developed, and it allows multiple ways to be deployed. Thanks to being able to use the internet to conduct transactions with their governments, citizens and businesses can save valuable resources in terms of time and money, by not having to present themselves physically at the government’s premises or avoiding the burden of repeatedly providing the same information to the public authorities.

Reducing administrative burden has potential benefits for both citizens and businesses, as well as for governments:

For citizens and business:
- Product improvement related to the quality of service, faster delivery and outcomes/results;
- Service improvement in terms of increased transparency, better cooperation across and between internal units and external public sector partners;
- Cost reduction, for instance in the form of time saving, and saving of material expenses;
- Demand in relation to customer potential for take-up and access.

For public administrations:
- Efficiency in performing in the form of process optimization, synergies between authorities, interoperability, synergies between new and existing systems;
- Effectiveness in performing, for instance, in improving service results and administrative control;
- Sustainability in the form of increased innovativeness, improved presence and performance and better cooperation.

ICT plays a crucial role in enabling this scope of transformation. Nevertheless, one has to keep in mind the need to adjust the increased use of ICT to the new needs, as new dilemmas appear: we need to improve quality, but reduce costs; make a more effective use of ICT, but have an eco-friendly approach; we need to serve citizens better, as some are not yet benefiting from the knowledge society.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Throughout this article it has been seen how ICT has a role of utmost importance in transforming ICT from bureaucratic machineries of the past into efficient, effective, friendly and environmentally conscious organizations.
The most necessary changes in public service delivery to accomplish such goals are promoting eInclusion and eSkills in order to allow the maximum number of citizens to benefit from the information society, and for public administration and governments, to incorporate ICT in their working processes as a valuable tool for efficiently gaining and offering better services to the citizens and businesses.

However, the adaptation and transformation of public administration to the reality and needs of today is a process with evolving and transforming goals. It is undeniable that substantial improvements have been made in the course of this closing decade; new challenges are ever appearing. In the coming years, the necessity to consider ICT from an energy and resource saving point of view will increase, as ICT cannot only reduce administrative burden, but can help us saving energy and money in transport, reduce the amount of used paper, etc.

For public administration, these challenges will have to be met by combining the best strategy of incorporating ICT in its areas of work, and bringing its benefits to the citizens.