Best Practices in the European Countries

REPUBLIC OF SLOVAKIA

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The views expressed do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations and of Italian Department for Public Administration, and Formez
Preface

The aim of this report is to analyze the Slovak status on innovation in public administration reform, underlining the kind of impact that information communication technology has had on the society.

The Republic of Slovakia is divided into four administrative regions called “kraj”. They are: Bratislava, West Slovakia, central and East Slovakia. Moreover they are also divided into 37 districts called “okres” and in this context it is very important to pay attention to the relationship between public administration and citizens in terms of services offered to public.

Slovakia, which became a member of the EU on 1st of May 2004, must do a lot of work to bring e-Government into real life. The main aims of e-Government are to increase the efficiency and transparency of public administration, to increase the quality and accessibility of public administration for citizens as well as businesses. Achieving these aims will have a positive effect also on the economy’s development of Slovakia. The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICT), together with the advantages provided by the Internet, places powerful tools within the reach of citizens, governments, and large and small businesses, everywhere. As we have moved into the 21st Century this has lead to profound changes in the internal organization of government and businesses, as well as in the skills required by the creators as well as the users of technologies in evolving information societies. It is no coincidence, therefore, that new technologies are having a considerable and profound impact on the economy, society and politics of the Slovak Republic.

Moreover, the industrial revolution of the 19th century and the scientific revolution of the 20th century have prepared the conditions for the rise of the knowledge-based economy. Economic activities associated with the production and utilization of information and knowledge have become an engine of economic growth in the developed market economies, increasingly transforming all the other dimensions of development. The knowledge-based economy has a very powerful technological driving force, a rapid growth of information and telecommunication technologies (ICT). Knowledge, based on information and supported by cultural and spiritual values, has become an independent force and the most decisive factor of social, economic, technological and cultural transformation.

ICT in Slovakia

1 Strengths and weaknesses

To assess Slovakia’s possibilities of improving its process and obtaining a good level in the EU it is important to underline its strengths and its weaknesses.

Strengths:
• A highly developed telecommunications infrastructure nation-wide assures easy access to the entire population.
• Slovakia has a high number of skilled professionals in the ICT sector, and still has youth with strong scientific capabilities, emerging from its institutions of higher education.
• Small and medium enterprises, especially in the area of the software development, are well developed and strong in Slovakia. Some have even achieved international commercial success in this field. These can serve as a good domestic economic base once the knowledge-based economy gains momentum in the country.

• Most major multinational firms from the ICT sector are represented in Slovakia, providing work opportunities, as well as opportunities for further development, for young Slovak professionals.

• The regulatory framework for ICT is good, and significant parts of the relevant legislation have been harmonized with that of the EU. Internet service provision is liberalized and competitive. A recently drafted law on high-tech parks may have significant impact on future development of this sector.

• Slovakia is being pressed by the EU to make sufficient progress in the field of human capital development. This is especially the case as regards the State obligation to facilitate opportunities for acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge for all citizens to participate in the information society.

Weaknesses:

• There is still an urgent need for senior government representation at a political level to promote issues related to the ICT development and to the development of the information society in general.

• The Slovak Government does not appear to be sufficiently aware of the threat posed by the inadequate pace of the information society development, and which is becoming more urgent with the coming accession of Slovakia to the EU. ICT and the Internet today form the primary communications medium of the EU countries. Candidate countries, which fail to prepare their civil servants and citizens to use these means of communications, will remain at the periphery of all major EU processes.

• Many public servants are digitally illiterate and lack the capacity to use modern ICTs effectively. The State, as the major employer of skilled professionals, does not have standardized examination processes for the level of ICT skills of civil servants.

• While university education is of a very high level in technical fields and natural sciences in Slovakia, there is a consistent under-financing of science and R&D, leaving Slovakia deprived of young talent and human capacities.

• There is no central government institution to manage conceptually, and supervise the progress of information society development in Slovakia. All such institutions so far were created in an ad hoc and temporary manner and therefore there is a lack of progress in the field.

2 The Information Society

In general, Slovakia is making progress towards building the Information society, but this is rather slow in some areas. The Government of the Slovak Republic declares the informatisation of society as one of its priorities.

The main aims of the Policy of Informatisation of Society in the Slovak Republic, approved by the Slovak Government are:

- to increase participation of the Slovak Republic in the global knowledge economy;
- to support all forms of life-long education relevant for the knowledge economy and thus improve the competitiveness of Slovak citizens on a global labour market;
- remove barriers of e-commerce and e-business development;
- improve public administration services by means of ICTs.

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1 S. National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis 2001, Telecommunications and Informations Technologies
2 Resolution N. 522 in June 2001
- A new central organisational unit should be created, which will be coordinating all activities implied by the state policy of society informatisation: a National Agency for Informatisation of Society.

However, by the end of 2002 a National Strategy of Informatisation still has not been approved by the government and the National Parliament.

Nowadays the Ministry of Education is responsible for the implementation of the information society, but this responsibility is to be transferred to the Ministry of Telecommunication. The Ministry of Education’s Department of Information Society, is responsible for the preparation of conceptual and strategic policies in the field of information society development, as well as for:
- the coordination and supervision of state institutional activities in carrying out strategies and programmes for the development of an information society;
- coordination of cooperation with EU initiatives and programmes related to the information society;
- assessment of international negotiating positions in respective areas related to the information society;
- State positions on drafts of legislation acts related to the development of an information society;
- implementation of modern ICTs into the educational process and development of skills and human capital;
- preparation of standards and benchmarks for evaluation of progress in development of an information society

3 **NPEC**

A draft version of the “National Policy for Electronic Communications” (NPEC) defines a strategy of development of electronic communication networks and services in Slovakia for the coming years. It was submitted for approval to the Slovak government and National Council. NPEC focuses especially on the improvement of a legal framework, enforcement of an independent regulatory institution, development of a competitive environment, protection of rights of end users, support of the development of Information society services, and international collaboration. The specific objectives of NPEC are:
- Harmonisation of a legal framework with situation in the EU.
- State regulation (adapted to a regulation framework for electronic communications), the aim is to establish a National Regulatory Body and to create a system of flexible, transparent processes of regulation of electronic communications, regularly updated based on market development, and development of new technologies and services.
- Development and support of a system of free competition. A long term objective is to secure network integrity and interoperability of services in accordance with the principles of the new EU regulatory body.
- Universal service and protection of end users rights.
- Economic use of frequency spectrum.
- Safe communications.
- Support of development of Information society services:
  - access to the Internet for all, including decrease of tariffs for access to the Internet by means of supporting competition on a market;
  - broadband access;
  - digital TV and radio broadcasting;
  - research and development in the area of electronic communications;
  - International collaborations

3 Collaborations with EU, ITU, OECD, WTO, WIPO, EUTELSAT, IMSO, CEPT, ETSI.
4 Information Communication Technology

Information and communication technologies are contributing substantially to evidence of how important the digitisation of public administration is viewed by EU Member State governments and the European Commission is the fact that e-government has been made one of the priorities of the eEurope Action Plan 2005. This action plan links to the new common political framework for a knowledge economy, agreed at the European Council’s Lisbon Summit in March 2000, which is aimed at increasing competitiveness, ensuring permanently sustainable economic growth, increasing employment and the social cohesion of EU Member States.

In December 2002, the Government approved a draft legislative intent of Act on Electronic Communications. The basic aim of the legislative intent is to create the necessary room for the elaboration and subsequent approval of Act on Electronic Communications. The act will repeal and replace current Telecommunications Act. The aim of the proposed act is to approximate legislation, implement the new EU regulatory framework and achieve full compliance with European Union law. In connection with this fact, it is equally important to build a strong and independent regulatory authority equipped with the relevant competences and powers for the conduct of regulatory activities.

This Draft Act on Electronic Communications entered into force on 1 January 2004, while before, exactly in March 2003, the Government approved the National Policy for Electronic Communications (National Telecommunications Policy) elaborated by the Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications as a framework document for this sector. This document builds upon the full liberalisation of the telecommunications area in Slovakia and follows preceding Telecommunications Policy for 2000–2002 Period. The key tasks arising from the approved document includes the transposition of the new regulatory framework for the field of electronic communications into the national legislation, reinforcement and transparency of the regulatory area and support for high-speed Internet access.

In May 2003, the competences in the field of information society were transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications. This is the beginning of the process concerning the establishment of an institutional framework for this area, being one of the Government’s priorities. At the same time, the Ministry submitted the document “Information Society Strategy and Action Plan” to be discussed by advisory bodies of the Government. This basic document built upon 2001 Information Society Policy was approved by the Government and transforms tasks from the eEurope+ Action Plan into the Slovak conditions.

The problem with statistical data describing the situation in the ICT services is that up to the year 2002, there has been no regular, systematic collection of statistical data regarding the Internet; ICT services in general, new economy phenomena etc. Thus, at present only fragmentary data is available. Some of it, presented below, together with some relevant phenomena and trends are the important indexes of development.

Differences between regions are significant 6.7% in Bratislava region and 2.5%-2.9% in other regions4.

Moreover, there are big differences in mastering IT skills – depending especially on the age and level of education (low level of IT skills is mainly among blue collars), but also between cities (the situation is comparatively better in big cities – especially in Bratislava and Kosice) and rural areas etc. The digital divide is closely related to the ability, of the society and of individuals, to adapt to new ICT technologies. According to the results of the analysis carried out in 2000 and 2002, the situation is satisfactory, but far from optimal – about half of society can easily or relatively easily

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4 Slovakia is divided into eight regions: Bratislava, Trnava, Trencin, Zilina, Presov, Nitra, Banska Bystrica, Kosice.
adapt to new technologies. From a socio-demographic point of view, this is particularly the younger generation, with higher education, more qualifications, and higher social status, citizens of bigger cities. “Outsiders” are particularly older people, people with the lowest education, unqualified workers, people with the lowest social status, and people living in small villages. Thus, the creation of a “digital underclass” in the Slovak society needs to be taken into account.

Another problem is the underdevelopment of legislative and regulatory frameworks necessary for the development of the Information Society. Several projects on national level aimed at fostering development of the Information society have been launched. However, in some cases their progress is delayed, and the practical impact thus reduced in comparison with original expectations.

5 Projects: Govnet – Infovek

These projects represent the example the way in which the Slovak government is trying to improve the concept of information technology and thus put it into practice.

The Govnet Project\(^5\) on communication infrastructure\(^6\) is a governmental Internet based data network. It should create a technical and communication infrastructure of one part of the State Information System of the Slovak Republic. At present Govnet connects 42 nodes (41 in Bratislava and 1 in Banska Bystrica) - the Office of Government, Office of the President, Offices of the National Parliament, ministries, and other bodies of central government and their information resources. Unfortunately, there has been no significant progress made in 2002

The aims of the project are to:

• accelerate the development of the Information Society in Slovakia;
• to increase and promote public awareness of the Information Society;
• to create strategic partnerships between key players;
• to support of quality projects.

The “pillars” of the initiative are:

• improving access to computers and Internet;
• increasing the quality of web page content;
• improving computer and Internet skills.

This initiative was presented by the Prime Minister and the President of Slovak Telecom on 30 April 2002.

Instead the success of the infovek or infoage project is not only in its public–private nature, but also in the “structure”, which rests on four basic pillars explained in schematic way:

• Infrastructure – hardware, software and connectivity
• Educational content development – some exported, but a large proportion prepared by specialists at home
• Teacher training – the project has so far trained more than 6000 teachers
• Digital enlightenment – opening the IKT laboratories to local communities

The aim of the Infovek Project is to prepare the young generation in Slovakia for life in the Information Society of the 21st century, in order to prove competent in the knowledge economy, and to create the preconditions for the young generation to be competitive on the global labour market, especially in comparison with the young people of the same age from the European Union.

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\(^6\) Passed by the decision of the Government of SR n. 310/1993
The Infovek Project aims to provide Internet access to 2,500 primary and 800 secondary schools by the end of 2005. Almost 20% of the schools had been connected to the Internet at the end of 2001 and this proportion should increase to 35% by the end of 2002. In addition to the Internet connections, teachers are being trained to use ICT and integrate it with teaching and learning process using multimedia materials and digital content. The major problem of the Infovek project is under-financing.

The aim of the Infovek project is to change through information and communication technology the traditional school to a modern school of the third millennium. Within the horizon of five years, there is the intention: to build up in all secondary schools and basic schools in Slovakia (about 3300 schools) Internet multimedia classrooms connected to Internet, to prepare a modern curriculum for individual subjects, to contribute to a great extent to introduction of new concept of education and teaching, to train thousands of teachers for the use and application of latest ICT.

All pupils of Slovak schools should have a real possibility to work with the Internet in the near future, from the large cities up to small villages; not only the children from rich families in private schools but also the children from poor families that would not have otherwise a chance of access to a computer and Internet. The basic goal is to secure that all children have equal opportunity to find a placement in the information society.

6 E-democracy

Closely connected with e-government is electronic democracy (e-democracy). “Electronic democracy” means the use of information and communication technologies to strengthen democratic processes, or to be more precise- strengthen the participation of citizens in the democratic processes of a society. Within the framework of e-government/e-democracy there are three user groups: citizens, politicians and public administration staff. The aim of e-government applications is to improve communication between all these groups. Besides the advantages of improved communication between the individual user groups (without restriction on place and time), e-government brings also other advantages, for new types of services – the electronic provision of certain services (e.g. the registration of businesses, payment of taxes and fees, disbursement of social benefits, handling various applications – change of residence, car registration, issuing of a driver's licence, etc), it improves access to an extensive volume of information in the framework of public administration, the creation of electronic forums intended for the discussion of various public and professional problems, the realisation of online voting and public opinion polls, or local referenda, public procurement via the Internet, etc.

In exploiting the advantages of ICT in the public sector there is also expected support for modern forms of work and subsequently also a change in the way of managing information and knowledge in public administration institutions. The implementation of e-government systems should improve all aspects of communication and support the decision-making process as the basis of political activities. Since every decision is based on knowledge and since public administration institutions (similarly, as for example also financial and banking institutions) are typical knowledge-based organisations, a new quality in e-government applications is brought by the use of knowledge management techniques. One of the definitions of knowledge management says that it is a “process of gaining and providing the right information, by the right (authorised) people, in the right format and at the right time”. In general, e-government applications are aimed at strengthening democratic processes. It is however necessary to emphasise that e-government

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type projects and e-democracy do not mean the development of direct democracy. On the contrary, they should primarily support the existing system of representative democracy. In the framework of reforming public administration in Slovakia, citizens’ rights are growing and thus also local authorities are becoming more accountable. In this respect, e-government application systems at the local government level are acquiring an ever greater importance. In fact it’s too difficult to know every way to issue the application of information and communication technologies in public administration, with a focus on supporting democratic processes. It briefly outlines e-government and e-democracy applications, the aims of and requirements for their successful realisation. These applications are directed towards fulfilling the aims of the eEurope Action Plan and are one of the foundations for building a knowledge economy. These linkages to public services and community agencies are key as people are concerned about a range of issues that involve a number of services that do not necessarily fit into Council departments, such as cleaner streets, crime, and public health.

Moreover e-democracy brings the workings of government closer to people, making it more accessible and easier to understand, one of the aims of the Webocracy project.

7 Webocracy

The Webocracy project aims to empower citizens with innovative communication, access and polling system, supporting increased participation in democratic processes. One of the main project goals is to develop an open source web-based system called Webocrat as a multi-channel communication platform supporting e-government and e-democracy applications. Some of the Webocrat modules were tested in first trial of our two pilot applications, one of them running in Wolverhampton, UK and the other one in Kosice, Slovakia. Currently, the whole integrated Webocrat system is being tested within the second trials.

“Web technology supporting direct participation in democratic processes – Webocracy”, was realised in a specific programme co-ordinated by the Technical University in Kosice, the Faculty of Electronics and Information Technology. Project partners: Wolverhampton University (Great Britain), Regensburg University (Germany), JUVIER, s.r.o. (Slovakia), CITEC Information Oy Ab (Finland), Kosice Town Quarter Tahanovce (Slovakia), Kosice Town Quarter Dargovskych Hrdinov (Slovakia), Wolverhampton City Council (Great Britain). The aims of the “Webocracy project”, which has been carried out in the framework of the Information Society Technologies programme (IST programme) of the 5th EU Framework Programme. The project is coordinated by the Technical University in Kosice and involves partners from Great Britain, Germany, Finland and Slovakia.

The main aim of the project is to develop a web knowledge system supporting the following functions: discussion, the publication of papers on the web, public opinion polls, processing various summaries and statistics, an intelligent system of acquiring information, as well as knowledge Management. A Webocrat type system can be used also by types of organisation other than public administration institutions, in particular for improving communication and cooperation with their customers or partners.

This organizational objective is achieved through scientific objectives, which are of technical and methodological nature. Technical objectives involve design and development of a Web-based system Webocrat. Webocrat will support: communication and discussion, publication of documents, browsing and navigation, voting, intelligent retrieval (access to requested documents), calculation of summaries/statistics. All functions will be supported by a

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8 Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Electronics and Information Technology, Technical University of Kosice – Egovernment, BIATEC, Volume XII, 2/2004
knowledge model module. The methodological objectives are focused on development of a methodological framework and organizational practices for development and management of systems providing on-line support to public administration (PA) services.

8 Webocracy: democratic process electronically elected

The launch of a new IST online interactive programme enhances communication and participation of citizens in governmental issues. It is often noticed that participation in the electoral process is generally weak, mostly because voters may feel that candidates are not expressing issues they are concerned with, or because they feel their vote will make little difference in the eventual outcome. Some may feel too beleaguered to attend voting stations, others may not have the inclination to travel and some may be incapable of doing so. Whatever the cause or reason, democracy is only as good as a system as the people participating in it. With this in mind, eight partners from the UK, Finland, Germany and the Slovak Republic joined together with the view to create an online e-democracy platform where citizens will have the chance to participate in online discussions and opinion polls about key local issues.

Webocracy is an interactive website service, where citizens would gain access to local government information and join in discussion groups via online discussion forums. The website primarily aimed at people who may feel less comfortable speaking openly in public or to opinion pollsters. During discussions, citizens are presented with a list of discussion topics. There, they can choose issues such as crime, cleaner streets, public health, law and order and even recreational facilities. The system was designed upon the needs of potential users-citizens, elected members and council officers. Those who require specific information can now have online access to important documents, reports, budget proposals without their physical presence as a requirement. They can locate their desired documents from a variety of menus, indexes and search facilities automatically retrieved by an Information Desk and published by a Web Content Management system. An important asset of the present e-democracy website is that it offers links to other community events and involved agencies, keeping the user better and more currently informed. In addition, open dialogue discussions are classified and citizens contributions are organised accordingly while keeping better track of the topics discussed. Finally, a voting room module allows citizens to vote electronically using authentication and voter's privacy security systems. This new Webocracy aspires to a more open and direct medium of communication, granting local government with a transparent face and citizens with a vivid voice to raising crucial local concerns.

Moreover the Webocrat is a Web-based e-Government enabler solution that combines a powerful knowledge management technology backend with a fully customisable Web user interface. The Webocrat solution consists of independent modules that can be installed either as a complete system or as standalone enhancements to existing systems. The Webocrat system in its basic configuration is based on (and integrates) the following building blocks:

- Discussion Forums
- Opinion Polling
- Electronic Submissions
- Citizens' Information Helpdesk
- Web Content Management system
9 E-activities

E-business, e-signature, e-government services, IT education and learning: it is very interesting to know how e-government services offer transactions that would be available on electronic media and on an electronic basis, with quick access to information and quick processing of the needs of the citizens. The citizens come to one place and, based on their life situations (somebody getting married, moving, graduating), they can find an approach, come to one place and be serviced without knowing whether it is the Department of the Interior, Department of Defence, or whoever provides the license or processes the transaction. We have numerous examples from other countries where we can help with best practices. IT education and learning is a multifaceted problem in Slovakia. The IT education of government employees is an important issue and several companies have been working on this with the Slovak government. Also, raising the level of IT education in the general population, not only in schools but for those who are older and do not go to school anymore. They need to catch up on the technology and still be able to find new jobs and be value-adding members of society. We are trying to create a general approach, some action items and maybe suggested projects that the Slovak government could implement and achieve improvement in this area. The area of e-learning is an easy area for showing cost benefits and providing cost-benefit analysis and making a business case for it.

The Slovak government approved on 21st of January 2004 the “Strategy for Building an Information Society”. The aim of the e-Government business roundtable in Slovakia - Possibilities and Challenges - was to evaluate the present state of e-Government in Slovakia, to introduce progressive world solutions and to analyse what the academic community, commercial sector, public sector and the branch informatics expect from the approved Strategy.

10 Slovak portals: občan.sk and mesto.sk

Občan.sk (Citizen.sk - www.obcan.sk) is a good example of providing general, but very practical, information to people. It is an information website: www.obcan.sk (www.citizen.sk), which is a joint initiative of the Slovak government and the IT firms including Microsoft. The data is regularly updated and this website is a good starting point in searching for information and help. It is a public information portal facilitating communication between the public administration and citizens. Občan.sk is a foundation of public administration transition to its own electronisation, i.e. foundation stone of e-Government development in the Slovak republic. Občan.sk is aimed towards a wide population as a gate to public administration information. It searches for office addresses according to localization and provides instructions on how to proceed during the administrative chores in various life situations. Public information portal Občan.sk has been prepared in such way that it becomes an electronic gateway for electronic offices, a place, through which citizens will have possibility of not only gathering and searching for information but also submitting declarations and solving their requirements. The variety of public information portals with useful information significantly facilitates citizens’ orientation in contact with public administration.

In the Slovak Republic there are several associations which operate with NGO and eSlovensko (eSlovakia), founded in 2002. The main aims of this association are to support the development of IT through eGovernment services, internet presentations and portals, public meetings and conferences, consulting, publishing and informing activities, trainings, seminars and other forms of educational activities and tourism through information technology. The main website is “Mesto.sk” which offers a map of Slovakia with 138 towns or cities. The website of each city or town has the same structure, function and design. The aims of Mesto.sk are to build the infrastructure for its producers and users, to create interesting and useful eContent and provide IT education for users of mesto.sk. The Project is managed by the Slovak National Library in association with the University of Žilina. The Project includes descriptions and scanning of graphical documents, such as historical photographs, postcards and portraits. The record files and
digital materials will migrate to a new software environment, in which digitization of selected library material will proceed further.

11 VIKS: virtual Library of Slovakia

Another example of how ICT tries to enter various environments to develop itself more is represented by this initiative: an integrated complex of electronic primary and secondary information resources that belong to the most important collections of the Slovak National Library, other libraries or Slovak museums, archives and galleries. The aim of the “Viks Project” is to create technological and organizational conditions for digitization of Slovak cultural heritage. The Project will be built on the objectives and experience of similar EU and US projects in the area of the content information industry, so that Slovakia becomes an equal partner to other European countries.

Key actions proposed to ensure further fruitful development in Slovakia:

- Access to public services for all via multiple platforms (PC, TV, mobile terminals);
- New services via broadband development;
- Trust and confidence building measures;
- Swift adoption and transposition of directive on re-use of public sector documents;
- Three-year action plan on electronic public procurement by 2004;
- Development of pan-European services;
- Interoperability framework to be adopted by end of 2003;
- New approaches to benchmarking needed;
- One-stop shop for eGovernment related activities.
Conclusions

The advocacy and promotion of a national development dialogue will remain a core objective in support of the articulation of national priorities in a clear strategy with dedicated development commitments. UNDP, the United Nation Development Programme within the context of an inter-agency approach, will support initiatives for the elaboration of a governance vision as a framework for long-term action. Key anticipated results include the formulation and monitoring of a governance roadmap; increased partnerships and participation around national processes related to multilateral agreements and expansion of ICT as a tool for good governance and pro-poor development. The principle vehicle for these efforts will be the National Human Development Report (NHDR) process, managed jointly with UNDP’s planning counterpart (CDR). The NHDR, which was recognized globally in 1998 and 1999, will continue to catalyze policy dialogue, pre-empting national debate and forging development alliances.

As regards the decentralized nature of social work and balanced regional development, there is an integration and collaboration between the Private and Public Sectors in different fields. It is distinguished in several fields. Its core of work is people: people are the Ministry’s first concern, thus, it should set an exemplary role of public administrations in serving the citizens. The administrative framework should be well structured. That’s why the regulations must be flexible with a capacity of taking the initiative in accordance to the different needs of people related to different social circumstances.