

Implementation of Electronic Democracy in Ukraine

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the level of e-democracy's development in Ukraine. In spite of difficult social and political situation and staying in war, information and communication technologies play a significant role in society and promote democratic governance. We have found that there are a few political mechanisms of citizens' participation in the conditions of e-democracy, which are regulated by Ukrainian legislation, such as electronic rulemaking, e-discussion, e-appeal, and online authority's session. These tools of e-cooperation between government and citizens provide access to constantly updated information on the activities and policy proposals of the authorities, opportunity to comment on the activity of government institutions, to assess it and to submit suggestions for improving the effectiveness of political management. However, the practice proves that the existing mechanisms of Ukrainian citizens' e-participation do not ensure a stable and strong influence on the political process and political institutions of the country. With the beginning of Euromaidan revolution in late 2013 and till now the surge of citizens' interest to online mechanisms of political participation and control over the authority is noted. Internet and social media have become key tools of crowd-sourcing, raising funds for the army, helping the wounded and refugees from the conflict zone. They are also actively used for discussions on urgent social problems and to impact on the governmental activities.

Keywords Ukraine - Electronic democracy - Euromaidan revolution - Social networks - Volunteer platform

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Information and communication technologies offer new opportunities not only for modernization, optimization and greater accountability of government, they also contribute to the democratic participation of citizens in political life. Increasingly, governments commit themselves to developing mechanisms of e-democracy, which Hagen (1996) has defined as a democratic political system, where ICT are used to perform the essential functions of the democratic process – informing, communication, articulation and aggregation of citizens' interests, decision-making (discussion and voting for a political decision). Implementation of electronic instruments of citizens' democratic participation is aimed at increasing the capacity of citizens, businesses and other organizations to take an active position in society through the use of new technologies and tools. An important advantage of electronic forms of participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policy is cheaper democratic procedures. This includes not only financial costs, but also time-consuming.

Today, Ukraine is at a critical stage of its social and political development. External threats to national sovereignty and territorial integrity to some extent pushed into the background issues and problems of internal political life, but recent events of late 2013 indicate a desire to rid Ukraine of embryonic effects of authoritarianism and take the path of democratic development. Moreover, the fact that a key role in the revolutionary social and political events have played citizens of Ukraine, proving their maturity and willingness to be engaged and actively participate in political decision-making. Beyond this, it is needed to take into account the global trends of informatization and computerization of all sectors of society, including public administration, as ICTs provide simplification and optimization of citizens' participation in political decision-making. This also caused timeliness and relevance of the research.

For the number of Internet users Ukraine is ranked 9th in Europe. Internet audience is 18.5 million of 44.3 million total populations (Internet World Stats, 2014). With the growth of the World Wide Web users' number in Ukrainian society there has been appeared the need for mechanisms of electronic participation. According to a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in September 2014, 24% of respondents said that they would like to be able to influence through online petitions on consideration of an issue by the authorities and to make proposals for governmental decisions' projects. Another 19% expressed their interest in participating in consultations on local regional and state policy organized by the authorities on their official web pages; and 11% are willing to devote to this a few hours monthly. Approximately 3% of Internet users in Ukraine express their interest in the discussion of a projects / reports on the implementation of state and local budgets, projects / reports on the implementation of national and regional target programs, forecasting / regulatory impact analysis, draft legal acts.

Introduction in society the idea of e-democracy primarily requires adherence to the principles of democratic governance and democratic practice. Electronic democracy should carry clear benefits for democracy and society in general and in particular for citizens (Recommendation, 2009). The introduction and implementation of e-democracy's concept starts with amending the legislation, adopting strategic documents on e-democracy and current legal acts. Ukraine's legislation to some extent regulates the interaction between government and society with the use of ICT. However, it is declarative rather than functional because there is a lack of rigid binding mechanisms and procedures of providing the citizens with opportunities for e-participation. So, there are a few political mechanisms of citizens' participation in the conditions of e-democracy, which are regulated by Ukrainian legislation.

Electronic rulemaking. Public discussion of the draft normative acts is a mandatory step in the legislative process in the system of government that ensures the participation of citizens in the process of preparing and making decisions on important issues of public and social life [2]. It ensures a transparent rulemaking of authority. Ukrainian legislation prescribed such a procedure for electronic rulemaking as follows: 1) to take account of public opinion the authorities publish on their websites draft legislation; 2) for a specified period, citizens send their proposals (comments) to the specified e-mail address; 3) after discussing authority analyzes these questions and remarks and takes them into account during the finalization of such acts; 4) authority publishes the comments and suggestions received from the public, and the discussion on its official website. However, in the documents regulating public participation in the drafting of legislation there is no preferred use of the Internet, namely - the official authority's website as prescribed rule-making tool. The preference is given to print media.

Website «Civil Society and Government» (<http://civic.kmu.gov.ua>) can be seen as a platform of e-rulemaking of Ukrainian citizens. Its main advantage is that it contains the draft legal acts submitted for discussion by the central executive power. There is opportunity to give suggestions and comments to each project, see the different points of view on them, learn about projects, and also to see past discussions. The site has a mechanism for easy public access to the discussions held by the executive, namely - service «Public discussion of draft legal acts». In addition, citizens who are the experts on relevant issues can create their own accounts, organize themselves into groups, share experiences and more. This approach promotes expert community's structuring in Ukraine and expert professionalism of the public sector's representatives [1, p. 23]. Referring to the statistics, during the last quarter of 2014 central and local authorities held 1274 public consultations. 1335 issues of public importance, including 405 draft legal acts were proposed for discussion.

Another example is the portal «e-Ukraine» (www.e-ua.org/), which was founded on the initiative of the NGO «Bukovyna Center for Economic Research and

Policy». It contains a section «Write the law together» and provides an additional opportunity for e-rulemaking. Through «e-Ukraine» citizens have the opportunity to: 1) create a draft legislative act; 2) make suggestions to the draft legislation acts which are proposed by other visitors or are prepared by the deputies of Ukraine and registered by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine; 3) propose amendments to existing legislation; 4) vote on draft legislation being developed. The citizens' legislative proposals will be submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine or other public authorities which are competent to these projects. Citizens can also participate in rule-making through the websites of central government bodies and the official websites of the local and regional authorities.

The portal «We have been developing eGovernment» <http://egov.inf.ua/> may become the solution of the problem of a single e-rulemaking website. This portal is a unique platform for storage, preservation, and dissemination of information, knowledge, best practices; it is a mechanism for policy formulation, monitoring and assessing the quality of implementing e-government. The portal also offers options for interactive work as follows: 1) groupware system - an opportunity for citizens to discuss regulations and legislative initiatives in virtual mode, to form their own community pages; 2) expert club - tools for experts' work; 3) exchange of projects - a marketing platform for new projects and ideas of developers and analysts to solve technological, software and hardware problems; 4) «electronic city office» - there has already been e-city office of Lviv, Kalush and Novograd Volynsky. The mechanism of e-rulemaking should be a key area of involvement of citizens in public policy, as it gives citizens the opportunity not only to solve current problems and issues, but also to shape the future course of state development.

Electronic discussion. Ukrainian legislation provides various forms of public discussion, but with the use of ICT - only Internet-conference and e-consultation. There is no obligation on authorities to provide preference to electronic forms of discussion. Instead it is fixed the self-determination of its shape, based on the need to involve as many interested participants and own organizational capacity. If the public debate is planned to conduct in the form of e-consultation, then it uses the official website of the authority, where there are information on the topic of discussion, the necessary materials, timing, and contacts [6].

During the electronic discussions participants send comments by email, noting their name and address. After that the person receives a confirmation mail [5]. All comments and suggestions received during the prescribed period shall be subject to an authority. As a result of this review, the authority in whole or in part takes into account the comments/suggestions or rejects them motivated [4]. Information about the decision is placed on the official website of the organizer of public debate [5]. In Ukraine, the tools of public e-discussion are the government website «Civil society and power» (<http://civic.kmu.gov.ua/>) and a single web portal of executive

power www.kmu.gov.ua, which is the central part of electronic information system «Electronic Government». Another example of efforts to embody the concept of e-democracy is a practice in the Dnipropetrovsk region, where citizens have the opportunity to shape the priorities of regional policy by means of interactive feedback system (www.consult.dp.gov.ua). Citizens act as experts on determining the relevance of certain problems of their city or region and evaluating the effectiveness of local authorities on their solution. After successful registration you can take part in public discussion. For registering it is needed to indicate age, sex, region and area of activity. Evaluation occurs as follows: first citizen chooses the problems of the city (district) from a list, which, in his opinion, are the most urgent, then using the 5-point scale evaluates each chosen problem; the larger is the score, the more urgent is the specific problem. There is also an opportunity to express clarification, comments, suggestions or facts concerning any of the problems.

Electronic appeal. In 2012 there was created a single website of citizens' appeals to government agencies and local governments (<http://z.gov.ua>). It was created for fast processing of requests and responding electronically, providing operational control of the citizens for the consideration of complaints, maintaining statistical accounting of appeals by authorities and controlling the solution of issues raised in appeals. Today, however, this portal is still running in pilot operation mode. Effective exploiting of this mechanism is complicated by the fact that sending e-appeal citizen must use the electronic signature. In Ukraine, only several hundred thousand people have digital signature.

Online authority's session. This mechanism provides an opportunity to submit questions, respond to polls and access background information and in a few days access to digital copies of press releases and speeches in real time. In Ukraine, this mechanism of electronic participation is partly available on some governmental websites. For example, on the website of the Lviv City Council there is possibility to view the live broadcast of the plenary session (<http://city-adm.lviv.ua/realaudio.php>), but there are no specifications for public participation and no video archive. Barriers to the effective functioning of this mechanism are the next: the absence of a legally enforceable obligation to broadcast regular session on the official website of the authority; poor technical level of authorities' websites which does not allow feedback from the public. According to the program of informatization of legislative process, during 2013-2015 years the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is planning to create a parliamentary web portal «Internet Broadcasting» for transmission parliamentary activities on the Internet [7].

Available tools of e-cooperation between government and citizens provide access to constantly updated information on the activities and policy proposals of the authorities, opportunity to comment on the activity of government institutions, to assess it and to submit suggestions for improving the effectiveness of political man-

agement. However, the existing mechanisms of Ukrainian citizens' e-participation do not ensure a stable and strong influence on the political process and political institutions of the country. General lower level of efficacy of existing instruments of public participation in the formulation and implementation of public policy is explained by underlying problems of governance, mediocre competence of civil servants, their underdeveloped political consciousness. However, the situation was changed. During and after the events of late 2013 - early 2014 in Ukraine there was a surge of public participation and was created a demand for new mechanisms and forms of democratic control over the activities of government and innovative tools of influence on them.

During the events of Euromaidan revolution and till now in conditions of Russia's war against Ukraine, Internet technologies and social media in particular have a great influence on the political system of Ukraine, on the interaction between the authorities and Ukrainian citizens.

For the first time the word «Euromaidan» appeared November 21, 2013 in the social network when the government of Azarov-Yanukovych had suspended the preparation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU. In social networks there began spreading appeals to people to protest. Spark that started the protests was largely post of known journalist on Facebook. The official EuroMaidan Facebook page served a dual purpose: to provide information about the ongoing protests to individuals who were not participating, and to coordinate protestors. The most popular Facebook posts on this page provided news updates that generated intense discussions, but also it was used to provide important logistical information for protestors. There were, for example, posts with maps of places to get free tea and access to warm spaces, advice on how to avoid being provoked by government agents, flyers to print and distribute around the city, as well as information on where protestors will be gathering (Barberá and Metzger, 2013). By continuing to exist as a mass movement, Euromaidan has a powerful on-line measurement, where activists share information, discuss reform and continue to organize themselves to influence the new government of Ukraine.

In the early stages Euromaidan-protesters used Facebook for organizing and communicating with each other, while Twitter was a tool to convey information about the protest to the rest of the world and to draw the attention of the international community. Barberá and Metzger (2013) observed a reciprocal relationship between social media and protest in Ukraine, where social media could serve as an important strategic tool for protest, and at the same time attract new users to online communication platforms. With the help of social networking Ukrainians had repeatedly drawn the world's attention to the revolution in Ukraine. Flashmobs #digitalmaidan, #NATOforUkraine, «for the resignation of President Yanukovych» and many others took the first place in the micro-blogging network and collected

hundreds of thousands repost worldwide (Борона, 2015). Live Internet broadcast of the «Hromadske TV» («Public Television») has become a key tool for observing Euromaidan protests remotely, and after the overthrow of Yanukovych's regime in late February 2014 it has been on-line platform for public debate about the future of Ukraine.

After Euromaidan Facebook has become one of the key online platforms to discuss current political events in Ukraine. Many officials have begun to lead an active political life in social networks, working more promptly than press service of their department. Often here they write about their intentions and draft decisions, gaining thousands of likes and hundreds of comments. It is the crucial events of late 2013 -2014 years that have provoked the growth of e-participation of Ukrainian citizens, because till this time the use of social networks by officials were the exception of the rule and it looked quite formal (Червоненко, 2015). Minister of Internal Affairs A. Avakov is famous for regular reports about his activities in the social network Facebook. His posts are ahead of Ministry's press releases, are fiercely debated with involving the minister himself. A. Avakov's post on January 12, 2015 was the primary source of information about the announcement of former President V. Yanukovych and Prime Minister M. Azarov wanted by Interpol. Many members of parliament and leaders of Deputy Factions almost straight through Twitter and Facebook broadcast the events where journalists do not have access to. It was during the coordination of the coalition agreement, when every decision or conflict appeared online almost immediately. President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko also actively uses Twitter and Facebook. In addition to the posts about international meetings and conferences, on his pages there are also announced of decisions that have not yet adopted. For example, it was the announcement of the signing of the law on lustration, and the provision of Ukrainian nationality to prospective government ministers. Foreign Minister P. Klimkin on Twitter tries to write informally and joking. His posts are much more anticipatory than the official comments of the Ministry, and the majority of meetings and visits are initially announced through social networks.

Security Service of Ukraine has got official pages on social networks Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/SecurSerUkraine>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/ServiceSsu>). It is assumed that these pages will become not only a source of timely information on Service's work but a platform for professional discussion on security issues that are particularly relevant at the present time for Ukraine. In addition, the SSU puts videos on Youtube - mostly video reports on the its activities and operative videos from areas in eastern Ukraine, where there is fighting.

In Lviv, all the rulers of district police departments have been registered in the social network Facebook. Link to the profiles of policemen in the social network can be found at the Lviv police department. Thus, citizens can now send their com-

plaints directly to the Chief of any police station.

At the beginning of Russia's military operations against Ukraine Internet and social networks were practically the only available channels for Ukrainians to get «hot» news and objective information. Under these circumstances there had been posed a threat to the Ukrainian information space in connection with the Russian Internet campaign to discredit the actual data and spread misinformation to justify Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine. In response, Ukrainian volunteers have created the projects (www.stopfake.org/, <http://fakecontrol.org>), which are designed to verify the facts and expose the lies and fight against Russian propaganda in traditional media and social networks.

Another example is the project «Stop terror» (<https://stopterror.in.ua/>) which was launched in June 2014 for searching, collecting and processing information coming from patriotic citizens for more efficient operation of military units. Basically, it is designed to: 1) monitor and analyze information, aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian military and senior management of the state; 2) detect the information that are intentionally distorted or falsified for manipulation of citizens' consciousness; 3) track such information or overt misinformation to establish the source; 4) make actions for preventing of its expansion or publicate the reliable material to prevent manipulation and provocation in the Ukrainian information space. «Stop terror» is used for assisting the military forces to determine the terrorists' place of deployment, their firing positions, fortifications, presence and amount of equipment and manpower of terrorist groups. This project is also intended to ensure communication and coordination between Ukrainian military units, as well as between civilians and government officials to carry out operations to combat illegal terrorists' activities in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

Data from social networks, including photos and videos, which fixed the movement and basing of Russian military equipment have allowed activists to create an interactive map (<http://mediarnbo.org/>). It makes possible to track the movement of Russian military equipment in Russia and on the Ukrainian territory, controlled by terrorists. The map is constantly updating based on proven materials.

The war of Russia against Ukraine has made soberly evaluate the conditions of Ukrainian Armed Forces and find significant problems caused by underfunding. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, the needs of the military and the need to modernize the army, the citizens of Ukraine have begun an active campaign to raise funds, food, and clothing. Most of the donations come from organized groups of civilians in Facebook, the online private initiatives and individual volunteers whose posts on social networks persuade users to donate on the army funding. Today, the founders of these organizations and key volunteers have become counselors of Ukrainian President P. Poroshenko. They also work at the Ministry of Defence where are involved in reforming this structure. Volunteers actively share impres-

sions, opinions and reports on their activities in the social network Facebook. There have been also created numerous charitable volunteer platforms – «People's Project» (<http://www.peoplesproject.com/>), «Wings of Phoenix» (<http://wings-phoenix.org.ua/en>), «Army SOS» (<http://armysos.com.ua/>). These initiatives are intended to raise funds through the Internet and provide the army with everything needed, e.g. military equipment, means of individual protection (body armor, helmets), repairing buildings of military units, individual first aid kits.

At the end of 2014, volunteers have created an interesting project - trading platform «Ants» (<http://muraahy.com/>). Here you can buy and sell secondhand things, and all profits from the transaction will be transferred to aid the army, the wounded and refugees from the area of anti-terrorism operations. Currently, the site is operating in the mode of filling goods catalog. Activists also create numerous sites aimed to raise funds for treatment and rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and suffered citizens. For example, volunteers' web site «Heroes ATO» <http://atoheroes.org/> offer information about the wounded soldiers who need help. The Internet resources <http://vostok-sos.org/>, <http://www.helpua.center/> provide refugees from ATO area assistance in finding housing and employment.

In early February 2015 there has been created the web site <http://ato.com.ua/>, which is dedicated to the discussion of the antiterrorist operation in Ukraine. Everyone can freely express his/her views on the situation that has arisen in the country. The forum is accessible not only in Ukrainian, but also Russian and English. There is also access to Twitter through hashtag #NATO.

There has appeared a large number of online projects aimed at promoting self-associates, joint efforts on solving not only military but urgent problems of modern Ukrainian society, initiation of issues for consideration, preparation and discussion, giving proposals for the content of the governmental decisions. Representatives of civil society actively make use of not only their own resources, but also the social networks Facebook, Twitter, and others. In Ukraine, examples of active use of online methods in social work are such independent initiative:

- civic campaign «New Citizen» (<http://newcitizen.org.ua/>). It is successful politically unbiased public initiative, which is aimed to influence on social and political processes in Ukraine to a greater extent, to search new mechanisms of control and pressure on the authorities. Participants protect human rights, the freedom of speech. They are involved in monitoring, exploring current issues of public policy, solving problems of local government, caring for environment and health, helping youth etc.
- «Map of action» (<http://newcitizen.org.ua/map>) is an interactive map of the events and projects organized within the campaign «New Citizen». Anyone can join the meeting in their city or initiate a meeting, set the venue on the map and hold

it in real life. At the meetings, participants speak on the theme and look for ways of solving actual problems.

- civil movement «Fair» (<http://www.chesno.org/>) is an initiative of civil society to monitor the transparency, accountability and accessibility of every Member of Parliament.
- «Vladometr» (<http://vladometr.org/>) is draft public monitoring of political promises. This is a new Ukrainian Web 2.0 tool of public control of the authorities content of which is generated not only by editorship, but also by the users. Its goal is to make Ukrainian politics more transparent and less populist.
- <http://costua.com/> is online service that shows how the government spends taxes. This website enables for everyone to thoroughly understand the mechanism of tax sharing and equips people with arguments and knowledge to fight against embezzlers and corrupt officials.

Ukraine also has some examples of effective crowdsourcing media projects. «Kantselyarska sotnya» («Office Hundred») is volunteer project that emerged during the events on the Maidan in winter 2014, after the escape of former Ukrainian President V. Yanukovich. He tried to conceal a large amount of documentation that could confirm his involvement in many crimes and fraud. This «Hundred» is engaged in the restoration of many documents which people of Yanukovich hastily tried to destroy. With the support of many Ukrainian journalists there was created website <http://yanukovychleaks.org/>, which has issued all recovered documents. This form of online activism is based on free participation of many people. Participants of the project «Kantselyarska sotnya» have also created a Web resource «Garna hata» («Good house») (<http://garnahata.in.ua/>), where everyone has access to the database of the most expensive real estate's owners in Ukraine. Engaging in such on-line initiative, anyone can find out not only about luxury properties, owned by Ukrainian officials and relatives of politicians and businessmen, but also can complement the database by his/her own information. This project is an online mechanism for improving transparency, accountability and openness of Ukrainian politics.

These examples show that such initiatives arising from the need to implement the tasks that traditional public and media structures can not solve. The demand for this in a significant part of society points out an attempt to find alternatives in solving social problems. This method of creating compensatory mechanisms indicates that modern society creates new orders for themselves. The Internet and new technologies have made it possible to implement new solutions in a fast, affordable and cheap way. Taking into consideration that all these projects are relatively simple and affordable, everyone without being an expert in a particular field gets an opportunity to take part in solving a specific problem. That's why decision-making is

more effective with attraction of crowdsourcing.

For developing e-democracy and e-participation of Ukrainian citizens in governance it is needed to solve a number of problems, namely the identification of citizens, security and protection of personal data, the digital divide, the legal status of e-participation mechanisms and results received on their basis (surveys, discussion, voting, etc.). Also at this stage there is necessity to inspect thoroughly numerous initiatives in the field of e-democracy in order to identify the most successful and critically important for their maintaining, developing and providing the appropriate legal framework.

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