A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF E-GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN TURKEY

ELEŞTİREL BİR PERSPEKTİFTE TÜRKİYE'DE E-DEVLET POLİTİKALARI

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ABSTRACT

The rapid transformation of information communication technologies in the world after 1980 has made the concept of e-government more and more important both in theory and practice. The e-government applications, which are considered to be almost indispensable for the effective and efficient functioning of public administration, have gained a considerable place in both the academic writing and the practice in Turkish Public Administration. Turkey which has shown important development in the subjects such as the creation of infrastructure in the transformation process of e-government, reaching operational adequacy to desired level has still have deficiencies in transfer of public services to electronic environment completely. Via the process e-government provides for Turkey, the country has succeeded both the increase interaction between state-individual and interactions between businesses-state, between officers-state and among public associations The problems such as inadequacy of social demand, transparency and inadequacy of participation, lack of legal infrastructure, security concerns, financial problems in e-government transformation process, failure of qualified personnel, leaving e-government transformation generally to the leaders' authority are the main problems Turkey has to overcome in the process of e-government transformation.

Key Words: Turkey, Transformation of Public Administration, E- Government Policy, E- Governance

ÖZ

Tüm dünyada bilgi iletişim teknolojilerinde 1980 sonrası yaşanan hızlı dönüşüm hem kuramsal bazda hem de pratikte e-devlet kavramını her geçen gün biraz daha önemli hale getirmiştir. Kamu yönetiminin etkili ve verimli bir şekilde işleyebilmesi açısından neredeyse vazgeçilmez olarak kabul edilmeye başlanan e-devlet uygulamaları, Türk Kamu Yönetimi'nde de gerek akademik yazında gerekse uygulamada kendisine hatırı sayılır bir yer edinmiştir. E-devlet dönüşüm sürecinde alt yapının oluşturulması, elektronik servislerin ve operasyonel yeterliliğin istenen seviyeye ulaştırılması gibi hususlarda önemli bir ilerleme kaydeden Türkiye, kamu hizmetlerinin tamamıyla elektronik ortama taşınması noktasında hâlâ eksiklikler barındırmaktadır. E-devlet uygulamalarıyla kaydettiği mesafe sayesinde Türkiye, devlet-birey etkileşimini arttırdığı gibi devlet ile işletmeler, kamu kurumları arasındaki ve yine devlet ile çalışanları arasındaki etkileşimi de arttırmayı başarmıştır. Toplumsal talep yetersizliği, şeffaflık ve katılımcılığın yeterli ölçüde sağlanamaması, hukuki alt yapının tam olarak oluşturulmamış olması, güvenlik kaygıları, e-devlet dönüşüm sürecinde yaşanan finansman problemleri, nitelikli personel ihtiyacının giderilememiş olması, e-devlet dönüşümünün büyük oranda liderlerin insiyatifine bırakılmış olması gibi hususlar e-devlet dönüşüm sürecinde Türkiye'nin aşması gereken başlıca sorunlar olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Kamu Yönetiminde Dönüşüm, E-Devlet Politikası, E-Yönetişim.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modernization process of Turkish nation afterwards of the last periods of Ottoman Empire has evolved in the orbit of external impacts for three centuries rather than its own internal dynamics. Turkey had the experienced various transformations and changes more than other countries, which were brought about by regional or global developments outside of inherent dynamics because of its location at the intersection of three continents. Yet, especially afterwards of Illumination, Renaissance and Reform eras, fast-paced rise of Western world had been its own realities; scientific, technological, political, economic, legal, sociological etc. transformations have caused substantial traumas in the society. Furthermore, Government has succeeded to adjust itself to all these transformation and change with its all body in a brief period of time and exhibited state-of-art administrations. In the countries such as Turkey which import such processes from external resources or the countries which need to find similarities between practices, following five results have emerged simultaneously in general:

➢ Timely, serious or partial successes have been acquired.

➢ The problems that have arisen due to transformation process was not result of internal dynamics were not resolved immediately.

➢ For resolution of problems occurred or prevention of potential problems, Western-originated analogies were established mostly as solution.

➢ Government mechanism has failed to integrate with all its body and to show successful practices.

➢ Citizens experienced difficulties with what to use/do/conduct for what purpose.

In general, consequences of information communication technologies and their transfer have been much worse. Almost every day, a new research, report or scientific study is published on this issue; and in Turkey, misuse of technological products have been emphasized substantially. In our century which has witnessed significant scientific advancements and unprecedented technological jump, majority of Turkish citizens has followed these developments by only their cell phone and game technology. This situation is substantially effective on E-Government policies in Turkey and cast an obstacle before its development. Yet, from the market point of view, something that is not demanded would not be supplied; or it would be left to discretion of a group who would supply at any amount, at any way in any time they would prefer.

As is known, commencement of provision of public services in electronic environment has relieved many citizens from travelling from one public department to another for public services they need, while increased efficiency of these services by allowing citizens to access faster and cheaper manner. In the post-1980 period, giant step taken in information communication technologies, advancements in transportation opportunities and capabilities have resulted in a perception that the world was a "global town", which has transformed the world in almost every aspect. Such that, an incident faced in the one end of the world has gained an impact on others in the other end of the world. Political, social and cultural dynamics have incurred a comprehensive transformation with the changes introduced by this new era. Such world has causes emergence of individuals connected and interacted with the whole world regardless of time and space, not only with their governments or citizens (Bozaslan, 2019:2).

These experienced developments have affected governments most; and the ones failed to adjust themselves to the new circumstances have been assessed as the worst public management examples. Indeed, the new public management understanding has taken capability of performing all bureaucratic procedures in electronic environment without time and place dependency as an obligation; and demanded public administrations to update themselves in this line (Bozaslan, 2019:2).

Whereas the governments that accomplished to establish a ground to respond this demand are able to provide fast, efficient and productive public services, the ones that failed to do so, condemned their citizens to heavy bureaucracy, caused loss of time-labor-money, and most importantly, ranked among the second or third tier countries way behind their contemporary era.

2. WHAT IS E-GOVERNMENT?

Just like numbers of other concepts in social sciences, there is no consensually recognized single description drawn on E-Government concept. Accordingly, after introduction of the concept, others in the relevant literature will be exhibited. Yet, it is not possible to review all E-Government descriptions currently available in the literature here since to encounter hundreds of different ones.

Yıldız (2003), who also addressed extensive literature on description of E-Government in terms of their abundance and contents, explained this complexity and obscurity with three fundamental reasons. The first is that E-Government is mostly described with the process or activity performed rather than utilized technology (e.g. provision of public information and services in electronic environment). The reason for ambiguity and flexibility in description of the concept is that it gains various meanings in various environments and contexts. The second is that E-Government concept leaves different impressions on different persons or groups. Besides, it is not possible comprehend the concept since pace of technology has continuously altered and wore borders of the concept. Therefore, E-Government is usually described with certain practice are in terms of transparency, interaction among parties, and participation. The third, apart from a content making sense for E-Government concept, comprehensive and cutting edge concepts such as "information management" or "information society" which seems trendy (Yıldız, 2003).

Indeed, scope and contents of E-Government practices have frequently changed. Although it seemed that the initial obscurity of the concept has disappeared, this frequent change resulted in inconclusive efforts to describe the concept. Upon introduction of various practices difficult to follow or comprehend, it is even more complicated to draw specific or clear description. However, in general, E-Government could be described as that, utility of all knowledge and information gathered along the history of humanity and of products and tools occurred as result of reflection of all these accumulated information to communication and information technologies by government and other parties interacted with government to complete and provide processes through technological means without necessitating face-to-face interaction. Based on this description, the essential point here is capability of government bodies to perform their operations with citizens without necessitating their presence at the relevant public building to provide their services. The success of a government in this capability would determine the results of its E-Government policy.

E-Government is also described as transparent, participative and efficient government operation employing information technologies for providing 24/365 uninterrupted service which prioritize satisfaction of citizen and personnel (http://www.tbd.org.tr; Date of Access 09.04.2019). According to the description suggested by the *Türkiye Bilişim Derneği* (Turkish Association of Information Technology) E-Government is a technological administrative form mostly composed of web-based applications in which three factors of public organizations, private sector and citizens could electronically communicate in the same environment to maintain their operations (Türkiye Bilişim Derneği, 2004:4). In the Turkish Information Technology Summit, E-Government is described as implementation of government tasks and services in reciprocal electronic communication and process environments in an uninterrupted and safe way (Türkiye Bilişim Derneği, 2002:4).

According to Kuran (2005), who made significant contributions to the subject, E-Government is restructuring IT model through strategic utility of superior characteristics such as flexible structure, comprehensive network systems, information sharing, lowering costs, to answer needs of information society, to ensure development, productivity and transparency by allowing citizens and public and/or private organizations to communicate in electronic environment (Kuran, 2005:11-12).

Besides the description in domestic literature, OECD describes E-Government as using information and communication technologies, especially internet, as an effective tool to accomplish better management (OECD, 2003:23). In the report issued by CECR that reflect perspective of the European Union (EU) to the issue, E-Government is described as integration of utility of information technologies with organizational change and new capabilities to develop public services and democratic processes, and to support public policies in public management aspect (CECR, 2003:7).

As general lines of E-Government are drawn above, it is taken together with certain stages. According to Arı (2009), E-Government is accomplished in four fundamental stages. In this context, in the first stage, government bodies establish their individual web pages on the internet. Organizational structure of the body, contact information and announcements are the essential contents of these web pages which only aims sharing information. In the second stage, users are capable of accessing data base of the institution, make search, and establish communication. Whereas the information is static in nature at the first stage, advanced services in the second stage allow citizens to access to data base and to utilize from information open to public. On the other hand, in the third stage, users gain access to safe information to perform available operations. At this stage, software allowing client and citizens to access safe information and implement electronic operations is developed. In the final stage, as allowed by the legislations, institutions share their information with other public institutions. At this stage, holistic online services are developed; and citizens are allowed to utilize from all E-Government services from a single access point (Arı,

2009:54). These four stages addressed in the study of Arı have showed a sequential progress over the time and waited maturation of one another, which ensured development of practical aspects of E-Government. In this process, conventional or classic government model has been left aside gradually and dynamics of E-Government have developed. Comparison of both models displays significant controversies; and it could be recognized that a significant evolution has emerged in this progress.

3. E-GOVERNMENT / CONVENTIONAL (CLASSIC) GOVERNMENT

From the beginning of modern government, the relationships between public administrations and citizens have attracted interest of social scientists substantially. As governments have improved and transformed, public administrations have experienced the similar process; and this influenced dimension, limit and contents of the interaction between citizen and government. In this framework, the table suggested by Özgür (2003) below is considered elemental in terms of revealing the relationship among conventional government and E-Government, citizen and public management:

Conventional Government	E-Government
Passive Citizen	Active-Client-Citizen
Paper-Based Communication	Electronic Communication
Vertical / Hierarchal Structuring	Horizontal/Coordinated Network Structure
Data Upload by Administration	Data Uploading of Citizens
Personnel Answer	Automated Voice Mail, Call Center etc.
Personnel Assistance	Self-Service / Expert Assistance
Personnel-Based Auditing Mechanism	Auditing by Automatic Data Update
Cash Flow / Check	Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT)
Single-Type Service	Personalized / Differentiated Service
Segmented / Discrete Service	Holistic / Continuous / Differentiated Service
High Operation Cost	Low Operation Costs
Inefficient Growth	Productivity Management
One-Way Communication	Interaction
Nationality Relationship	Participation Relationship
Closed Government	Open Government

Kaynak: (Özgür, 2003)

Whereas the differences between E-Government and conventional government are reported as above in general, structural transformations and functional characteristics caused by E-Government have been largely investigated and E-Government vision has been shared by various studies. E-Government spends efforts to eliminate stiff and slow processes of conventional government. First of all, public services are ensured to be given at great pace through resolutions oriented on demands of citizens. In other words, services needed by citizen are given to them fast and satisfactory manner by using public resources efficiently. The bulkiness problem encountered and criticized with the conventional government has been tried to be resolved; and a reciprocal relationship between government and citizen could be established.

Over the time, "good governance" principles have dominated public organizations and bodies; and utilization from public staff has become more efficient and productive. Adoption of "good-governance" principles by the public sector and better utilization from public staff have enhanced satisfaction levels of clients, -service demander citizens-. Saving from time, money, and space increased variety of public services, transparency and determining problematic areas conveniently.

E-Government has allowed citizens (clients) to save serious amount of time through capability of accessing almost all public services by "a click" to have necessary documents, to perform necessary changes without submission of documents from other public institutions. The problems encountered by citizens in the past such as exhaustive and tiring document processes could be eliminated. E-Government applications provide similar opportunities for both real persons and legal entities. For instance, it could be seen that members of private sector have also took advantage of these opportunities. Companies, just like real persons, could make time saving through E-Government, access to all public services, obtain necessary certificates, and make necessary amendments without need for any document from other public organization. The difference from real persons, private sector members would be able to participate in public tender processes through E-Government without incurring in bureaucratic processes and to complete monetary exchange with government online basis.

As seen, when E-Government is considered with respect to its differences with conventional government, its evolutionary characteristics for all stakeholders come to prominence, especially for government's itself. This transformation is mostly perceived positively and recognized. However, there are various adverse characteristics, the most importantly security issues, reported with E-Government. In other words, although it is not possible to emphasize a concrete negation with E-Government applications clearly, it is necessary pronounce risks pertained. Such that, log and storage of all records and information in electronic environment could make unauthorized access possible to these records or information and to exploit them for different agenda. Accordingly, security issue, in this regard, is seen fundamental problematic domain of E-Government applications. Today, although a resolution has not been introduced yet to these fundamental problems yet, significant steps have been taken as a starting point. Undoubtedly, systematic gaps could be existed and they could not be foreseen without experiencing them.

4. E-GOVERNMENT IN TURKEY

As generally accepted, Turkey has followed rather conventional development process in terms of its bureaucratic structure. Such that, bulkiness of bureaucracy and its hieratical characteristic has been core issues of common criticisms. It has been seen that a regular public service took weeks or even months to be completed. Flaws in provision of public services have also affected citizens' perception towards government adversely. The relationship established by government with its servants who are seen as represents of itself has caused negative perception of citizens towards government; and unfortunately intensified corruption such as bribery. The bribery, once common in Turkey, prevented efficient utilization from the resources as a developing country. With the onset of E-Government applications, a transformation has commenced in public sector and the problems caused by conventional government have tried to be eliminated. However, E-Government policies have relatively recent past in Turkey, which may necessarily prevent complete functionality of the process or institutionalization with all of its dynamics. Yet, some difficulties have been encountered with description of problems or to create effective solutions for them.

As is known, the first computer was brought to the General Directorate of Highways in turkey in 1960. Then, this was followed by İstanbul Technical University, the Middle East Technical University (METU), and Government Planning and Organization. Mechanization process commenced in 1960 gained pace in 1990s; and finally PCs gained place across majority of households when it came to 2000s. Aforesaid equipment which lacked of interaction capacity without an internet network have gained further functional capacity with the establishment of internet networks in the US and in Turkey in beginning of 1970s and April 1993, respectively. The internet network project implemented jointly by the METU and Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Organization (TUBITAK) in 1991 was completed on April 12th, 1993 with the first usage of the METU Information Systems Directorate; and since then, internet has expanded all over Turkey with a great pace. In parallel to increasing computer ownership, various deficiencies such as improving internet infrastructure, enacting relevant legislation, training of personnel, informing citizens, establishing connection among institutions, and supply of all sorts of technical support have been made up.

Science Policy Act could be shown as significant milestone in terms of creating E-Government policies in Turkey in the context of systematic approach to science and technology policies in the period of 1983-2003. Then, the High Board of Science and Technology which undersigned significant decisions on E-Government was included by aforesaid act. The first policy document regarding distance access to public services was the bill issued by the High Board of Science and Technology in 1993. Within the Policy of Breakthrough in Science and Technology, establishment of National Information Network and provision of some public services through this system came to the agenda. Again, the same board initiated establishment of Information Master Plan in 1997 together with National Information Technologies Council to play role in commissioning this plan. The board was determined to prepare the National Information Infrastructure Master Plan in 1998 and this plan was assumed to put in action in the very same year. In 2001, studies on e-Türkiye and e-Europe came to the agenda of the board. The High Board of Science and Technology has then brought subjects concerning E-Government to forefront and took important decisions (Demirhan, 2011). All these efforts have reached their merit with "E-Devlet Kapısı (E-Government Gate)" commissioned in 2008; and this application allowed an extensive group of users from students to officers, retirees, businessmen to take advantage of system.

"E-Government Gate" has continued its development by addition of new services since 2008. Especially, significant developments have been seen with the health and education domains. For instance, "e-nabız (e-pulse)" application in health area allowed citizens to access their health reports, imaging results,

prescriptions conveniently as well as physicians or health institutions could recall this information from the system.

5. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Turkey has recognized and followed the scientific and technological leadership of the western world in the last four centuries. Transformation experienced by the western world based on its inherent dynamic and economic, political, cultural and most importantly scientific environment emerged as result of this transformation caused developing countries to mimic western world. This mimicking behavior has resulted in both positive and negative consequences in terms of contribution into their development and advancement.

From the aspect of E-Government, first of all this transformation requires intellectual transformation. Western-like transformation and change does not seem possible in a country in which government views its people as its citizens rather than individuals. In Turkey, while government continues to adopt this point of view, Turkish population continue to view the government as "guardian father" whom all solutions are expected. In an environment in which both approaches of government and individuals are contradictive to contemporary world, no matter how giant steps are taken in information communication technologies, comprehension of vision of E-Government would be hindered and missions would not be accomplished.

As known, there are two millions illiterate populations in Turkey. When this figure is added up on the populations of literate ones with no formal education and the primary school-graduates, an unpromising view could be faced. It is extensively acknowledged that an effective and productive E-Government requires superior computer / technology literacy. Accordingly, it seems that it is rather difficult to accomplish a comprehensive e-government transformation in an environment in which major part of population is illiterate or lack of formal education experience since all citizens are to be expected to join in the transformation.

The most prominent problem introduced by the information communication era has been digital fraud which has increased every day. Tens of digital fraud cases are reported by agencies every day. Spread of these fraud news urge people to keep distance with digital platforms and accordingly E-Government applications and lose their confidence in such applications. In this regard, measures to prevent issues that could be encountered with digitalization are required to be explained effectively to all society through public announcement channels.

In fact, since E-Government transformation requires full scale intellectual evolution, it seems rather difficult to accomplish this as long as public organizations are perceived as guaranteed employment opportunity for citizens, in which they stay permanently without any performance assessment; and these were major motivations of the personnel.

It is possible to claim that Turkey is one of the countries with no policy on E-Government practice while Turkey is capable as much as developed countries in terms procurement computers and foundation of required infrastructure. Yet, it is not possible encounter a systematic policy including all bodies of government, which was prepared by participation of all stakeholders and based on common sense by taking short, medium and long term targets into consideration. All relevant initiative on the subject depends on competency and point of view of some relevant institutions and politicians toward the E-government issue.

Finally, it is necessary to introduce public services access from E-Government Gate as well as documents and information that they could obtain through public announcement campaigns. Yet, it is important for citizens, clients of public series, to get acquainted with the opportunity that they could handle their bureaucratic operations in seconds without face-to face contact over E-Government applications, which normally they could complete through conventional procedures for days.

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