

## PROMOTING THE DIGITALIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN MOLDOVA AND ROMANIA THROUGH CREATING THE COMMON DIGITAL SPACE

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**Abstract.** The digital economy and society are strategic objectives of the European Commission, as they represent preconditions for a context conducive to innovation, growth and competitiveness. From 2021, the digital skills strategy has a new dimension and orientation. The digital transformation strategies developed and implemented by Romania and the Republic of Moldova from the very beginning were focused on the digitization of public services, a process that will be boosted by the creation of a common digital space.

**Keywords:** digital economy, digitization of public services, innovation, competitiveness, common digital space.

**Rezumat.** Economia și societatea digitală reprezintă obiective strategice ale Comisiei Europene, deoarece acestea constituie premise pentru un context favorabil inovației, creșterii economice și competitivității. Începând cu anul 2021, strategia privind competențele digitale a căpătat o nouă dimensiune și orientare. Strategiile de transformare digitală dezvoltate și implementate de România și Republica Moldova au fost încă de la început axate pe digitalizarea serviciilor publice, un proces care va fi impulsionat prin crearea unui spațiu digital comun.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** economie digitală, digitalizarea serviciilor publice, inovație, competitivitate, spațiu digital comun.

The digital transformation strategies developed and implemented by Romania and the Republic of Moldova from the very beginning were focused on the digitization of public services. Among the actions taken through the joint efforts of specialists from both banks of the Prut, the alignment of the relevant institutions from the Republic of Moldova and Romania to the same strategic objectives on digitization and the establishment of the time frame for their achievement are included.

It is essential that the digital transformation strategies developed and implemented in the public sectors of Romania and the Republic of Moldova align with the policies, programs, and digitalization strategies of the European Commission. One of the main priorities for the Government of the Republic of Moldova is the deep digital transformation of the country across all levels. Digital transformation is a priority in the current administration's program, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalization, aiming to coordinate all efforts in this field at the government level, specifically through major specialized institutions: the Electronic Governance Agency (AGE), the Public Services Agency (ASP), and the Information Technology and Cyber Security Service (STISC).

In Romania, digital transformation has a significant societal impact, being one of the core components of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) is designed to ensure a balance between the European Union's priorities and Romania's developmental needs, in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that has severely impacted the country, as well as the entire EU and the world.

Thus, the digital transformation component of Romania's PNRR, known as C7, aims to establish a coherent and integrated digital infrastructure within public administration to provide high-quality digital services to both citizens and businesses. Achieving this objective will create conditions for adopting digital technologies across all sectors and state institutions, increasing the number of citizens and businesses able to leverage the benefits of digitalization. The broad implementation of digital solutions will contribute to enhancing transparency in state authorities' activities and reducing bureaucratic barriers, while also supporting sustainable development goals.

Digital transformation is no longer a specialized, niche field; it is a necessity across all sectors of life and activity in all countries, including Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Any sector can and

should benefit from modern technologies to simplify or eliminate bureaucratic procedures, reduce human dependency, avoid repetitive and purely technical procedures, eliminate corruption factors, and increase trust in state institutions. Every country has the choice to implement a genuine digital transformation that includes most of its citizens, thereby becoming more competitive in an increasingly technologically driven world, or to fall behind this global trend, preserving inefficient, bureaucratic, cumbersome, and costly procedures and practices.

Efforts are currently underway to align digital transformation strategies in the public sectors of Romania and the Republic of Moldova with the policies, programs, and digitalization strategies of the European Commission. The first level of alignment is with the Digital Single Market. The Digital Single Market is the European Commission's strategic initiative to provide citizens and businesses with access to digital online environments. Essentially, the Digital Single Market ensures the free movement of people, public services, and capital, allowing access to and use of online public services under fair competition conditions. Its three main pillars are access, the digital environment, and the economy and society.

A strategic goal of the European Commission, significantly impacting the adoption and use of digital public services, is facilitating citizens' access to digital media and services. The Commission is taking steps to increase the number of citizens with access to digital media, develop digital skills, and further capitalize on the strategic potential of institutions in digital transformation.

For the process of change and transformation to be successfully implemented, a comprehensive process of developing digital skills and abilities within public sector institutions is necessary. The European Commission promotes various initiatives aimed at developing digital skills and competencies for the workforce, citizens, and the modernization of education across the EU. Digitalizing public services and migrating them exclusively to digital environments require, as a prerequisite, the development of digital competencies so that citizens and stakeholders of public institutions can access and utilize these services. [1]

Digital economy and society are strategic objectives of the European Commission, as they are prerequisites for a favorable context for innovation, growth, and competitiveness. Since 2021, the strategy for digital competencies has taken on a new dimension and direction. Given that most fields of work and interactions with digital environments require digital skills, the European Commission has launched the new Digital Europe Program. [2]

This program is crucial for developing digital skills and, more importantly, for increasing the use of strategic institutional potential. Institutional strategic potential is defined by capabilities, capacities, competencies, and institutional skills. Achieving levels of institutional digital maturity involves developing and using the digital skills of employees and citizens. To foster these competencies, the European Commission established the Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs. This coalition brings together member countries, companies, social partners, NGOs, and educational institutions to build digital skills in Europe. The coalition promotes excellence by supporting digital education initiatives, and within the EU, there is a repository of projects for digital skills training that can be applied at any time in any country. As a strategic objective, the coalition aims at digital competencies for citizens, the workforce, IT professionals, and the educational sector.

Another strategic objective of the Digital Single Market is creating an inclusive digital society. Smart cities, improved access to e-Government and e-Health services will enhance convergence towards Digital Europe. A digital society with access to digital public services, skills, and tools will foster inclusion. The Digital Single Market aims to create conditions for the development of digital networks and services. Cyber-secure broadband networks can ensure a higher rate of adoption of digital public services by citizens. Strategic intentions to innovate public services and their digitalization require a favorable environment, flexible infrastructure, and a protected framework for investment in digital networks, as well as a competitive environment. Digital public services are delivered to citizens through digital platforms, with the European Commission placing significant importance on the central role digital platforms play in the digital transformation process.

The current strategic direction of the European Commission is based on the dynamics of socio-economic contexts and the data-centered approach to activities, regardless of their nature. Consequently, the role of digital technologies and solutions in the evolution of systems, institutions, and society as a whole is evident. Institutions must become "strategically intelligent," not only to understand the dynamics of change but also to leverage their institutional potential through digitalization.

To align with these EU strategic directions, the Republic of Moldova and Romania are working on creating a shared digital space, as enshrined in the Memorandum of Understanding on Digital Transformation between the Government of Romania and the Government of the Republic of Moldova, signed during the joint meeting of the Governments on February 11, 2022, by the Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalization of the Republic of Moldova and the Minister of Research, Innovation, and Digitalization of Romania. The signing of this Memorandum represents a first and an important step in developing a shared digital space between the two countries. The document outlines several objectives for bilateral cooperation, including:

- ✚ Developing digital platforms, infrastructure, and electronic public services;
- ✚ Enabling data exchange;
- ✚ Mutual recognition of electronic signatures;
- ✚ Facilitating investments and innovative entrepreneurship in information technology;
- ✚ Ensuring cybersecurity.

The Memorandum on Digital Transformation between the Republic of Moldova and Romania (4) aims to boost bilateral cooperation in this area and ensure the adoption of European norms and the application of common standards, which will open opportunities for joint participation in digital development and transformation projects funded by EU financial assistance programs. This will yield numerous benefits felt by every citizen, the public and private sectors, academia, and associative sectors, as these advantages promote participatory digital democracy, foster economic relations, drive e-commerce, and expand and leverage electronic public services.

In line with the Memorandum, a Joint Intergovernmental Commission was established as the institutional framework for implementing the Memorandum of Understanding on Digital Transformation between the Republic of Moldova and Romania. The Commission's mission is to facilitate bilateral cooperation, exchange experience, and mobilize technical, financial, and human resources to develop a shared digital space between the Republic of Moldova and Romania. [3]

In this context, we believe that creating and enhancing the strategic partnership and functional dialogue between the governments of the Republic of Moldova and Romania in digital transformation will positively impact all sectors, necessitating the adoption and adaptation of new digital solutions that can effectively address the emerging needs of users.

Joint efforts from specialists on both sides of the Prut include aligning profile institutions in the Republic of Moldova and Romania with the same digitalization strategic objectives and establishing timelines for achieving them, with key objectives identified as follows:

Developing digital public services according to European standards and raising national digital literacy levels;

- ✚ Identifying legal mechanisms to ensure the reuse of digital solutions;
- ✚ The Republic of Moldova will share with Romanian institutions efficient and globally recognized electronic services and government platforms;
- ✚ Preparing the technical platform for developing public services provided by Romanian authorities as prototypes based on government services developed in the Republic of Moldova;
- ✚ Initiating procedures for mutual recognition of digital signatures issued by both states, ensuring interoperability of electronic identity, and starting joint negotiations with the EU for the recognition of qualified signatures issued by the Republic of Moldova;
- ✚ Making progress in developing the cybersecurity framework for the Republic of Moldova. In cybersecurity, Romania has achieved remarkable results, with the expertise of Romanian and Estonian specialists highly appreciated in the development of a cybersecurity model supported by EU and US-funded projects.

At the end of 2022, two important documents were signed aimed at strengthening digitalization cooperation relations between the governments of the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and two private companies, Microsoft and the Romanian company UiPath. The trilateral collaboration between the two governments and companies Microsoft and UiPath opens new perspectives and opportunities for the digital development of the Republic of Moldova and Romania. These collaboration agreements are not commercial or commitment-based but are strategic partnership agreements, where the parties are motivated by the desire to work together as a team to digitalize the

two countries.

The Commission will focus on implementing joint projects and initiatives, fostering investments in the information technology sector, and developing innovative digital solutions in the interest of citizens on both sides of the Prut. Cooperation areas that need to be highlighted include:

- ✚ Developing electronic public services at all levels of government;
- ✚ Data exchange and interoperability of IT systems between the two countries;
- ✚ Automation of administrative processes;
- ✚ Mutual recognition of electronic signatures;
- ✚ Cybersecurity;
- ✚ Facilitating investment and entrepreneurship, business development;
- ✚ Implementation of platforms and infrastructures developed here and in Romania;
- ✚ Joint participation in programs and initiatives conducted at the EU level;
- ✚ Experience transfer and best practices,

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