IT SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING PROCEDURE PROJECT (IPP)

Maja Čarni Pretnar, Andraž Pernar

Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, Tržaška 21, Ljubljana

Maja.carni-pretnar@gov.si, andraz.pernar@gov.si

Introduction

The cornerstone of any modern state is respecting the rule of law. The quality of regulatory environment depends primarily on the process and actors of drafting and consequently implementing acts. Slovenia embedded the decision making rules in the Rules of Procedure of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (and guidelines for its implementation) and the Rules of the Procedures of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. The drafting process was further governed also by the Nomotechnical Guidelines.

However, even though these rules included vast majority of better regulation principles, the implementation was rather poor. Firstly due to the haste of building the legal order of a new country when gaining independence and secondly due to the catching up with the legal order of the European Union.

Having completed these historical stages and taking part in European and international endeavors Slovenia decided to enact a politically binding document in order to strengthen provisions laying down the principles of better regulation. With intention to bring the implementation to a higher level it linked the regulatory action to the already running setting-up IT activity which was upgraded to the IPP. IT supported decision making procedure now includes also the features of better regulation. One of the most important features is being cooperation with citizens.

Resolution on Legislative Regulation

The document – Resolution on legislative regulation was prepared by the Ministry of Public Administration and Government Office for Legislation. It was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (herein after the Government) and the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia (herein after the National Assembly) in 2009. Resolution refers to the wider field of legislative activity, which is done by the government institutions, ministries and other authorities (statutory authorities and local authorities) as a whole. The resolution incorporates established constitutional, legal and nomothetnical principles. It also constitutes a commitment by the respective political

authorities and civil servants that when formulating policies and drafting regulations take into account the main principles of good legislative policy.

In a nut shell it refers firstly to the policy and law makers to conscientiously implement the impact assessments of proposed regulations and policies on the economy, environment, social and public finance or a broader segment of the public administration. And secondly they shall also act in accordance with the principles, the minimum recommendations and guidelines on conducting consultation with professional and other interested public.

The IT supported procedure enables easier implementation of the principles:

- principle of timeliness: timely informing of the public (expert, interested, and target public) and ensuring reasonable time periods for cooperation (review of the materials, preparation of proposals, comments, and opinions);
- principle of openness: facilitating the transmission of comments, suggestions, and opinions at the earliest possible stage of decision preparation;
- principle of availability: availability of materials and expert groundwork used in the preparation of the decisions;
- principle of responsiveness: informing the participants about the reasons for the regard or disregard of their comments, suggestions, and opinions;
- principle of transparency: ensuring the transparency of the process by presenting the regulation content, as well as the decision adopting levels and procedure, the cooperation manners and timeframes, comments, suggestions, and opinions of all the participants;
- principle of traceability: ensuring transparency when receiving and considering suggestions, comments and opinions, as well as materials, resulting from the cooperation process itself (e.g. minutes), and their availability.

The principles are incorporated in legally binding Rules of Procedure and guidelines of its implementation as well. They lay down the provisions on mandatory inclusion of public and prescribe the manner of action.

Citizens are therefore able to follow the workflow of the administration via sub-portal Edemocracy which represents an external feature of normally internal decision making procedure. Citizens can easily access information on the status of regulation, a draft and other accompanying documents (such as impact assessments, various analyses). With the same ease a citizen can make observations or suggestions. Their comments are automatically sent directly to the drafter. It is in the drafter's discretion to decide whether to answer directly to the citizen (if one provides the contact information) or to include it in the report on public consultation which is a constituent part of accompanying document to the draft proposal to the government.

General overview of the project

The preparation and the final formation of regulation is a process, in which the ministries, the public, government offices, the government and the national assembly are actively involved. Parts of this process had already been supported by some previously developed software tools. The project called *IT supported decision making procedure (IPP)*, therefore, had to cover various aspects to ensure the functioning of various software platforms and the use of full range of related software products. The result of the project is a system which allows coverage of all essential steps in the process of adopting a legal act, operating uniformly in all spheres of competence, which are involved in the process of preparing and adopting legislation. Strong emphasis is also placed on the fostering of the involvement of public contribution in the process of regulation drafting. Linking back-

end systems of the IT supported decision making procedure with the web sub-portal E-democracy will allow for easy monitoring of existing legislation and preparation of new legislation in one place, which is of paramount importance to users. Above all, this part is very useful for non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and professional sphere of the public, which will in this way be able to convey comments and suggestions, thus contributing to better legislation. Also supported in the process is the electronic signing of documents, while the collection of documents and the preparation of all regulation material are centralized.

The legislative procedure is, by itself, a relatively simple process. The Government enacts the work programme of the government, which contains plans to either change the existing or adopt new regulation. The ministries in charge of their area of competence usually start with the preparation of new regulation, whether it concerns changing already existing regulation or the formation of new regulation. Individual ministries prepare proposals of regulation and then harmonize them with other ministries, government offices and different spheres of the public. The end result of the harmonization process is then handed over to the internal proceedings of the Government, which afterwards sends the proposal to be discussed in the National Assembly. After the National Assembly completes its' procedure, it can either reject or accept the proposal, thereby making it effective.

The main institutions, involved in changing already existing regulation or the formation of new regulation are:

- The ministries
- The Government Office for Legislation
- The Government
- The National Assembly
- The Official Gazette

And the key element, essential for a democratic society:

Public

The Goals of the IPP project

With the introduction of IPP the next vital goals are being followed:

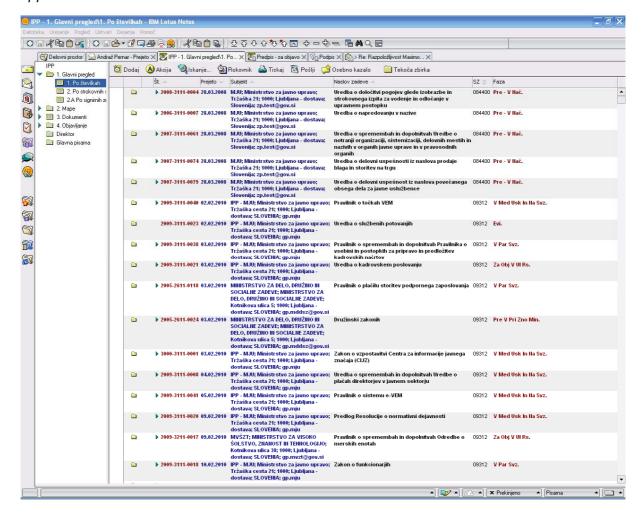
- formation of a unified IT programme support for users at ministries, government offices and the Government, which is user friendly, with maximized automatization of procedures, wherever possible,
- to enable easy access to information regarding regulation in the making to the public via internet,
- encouraging the public to actively take part in all phases of regulation drafting.

A short description of the work processes within IPP

A ministry/government office begins its' work in the IPP application by creating a
map of a regulation that is the subject of a change or is being created anew.
Within this map, a type of document called PDV (work programme of the
government) is prepared. This type of document is prepared by a civil servant in

charge of the preparation of a certain regulation document. The document contains basic information regarding the regulation that is being created, including the goals and intention of its creation. The said document is published on the web portal called E-democracy, where it is available to the public, which can, in this phase already, contribute comments, opinions and suggestions regarding the published information about the regulation that is being created.

Picture 1: Representation of maps of various regulations, which are created in the IPP application

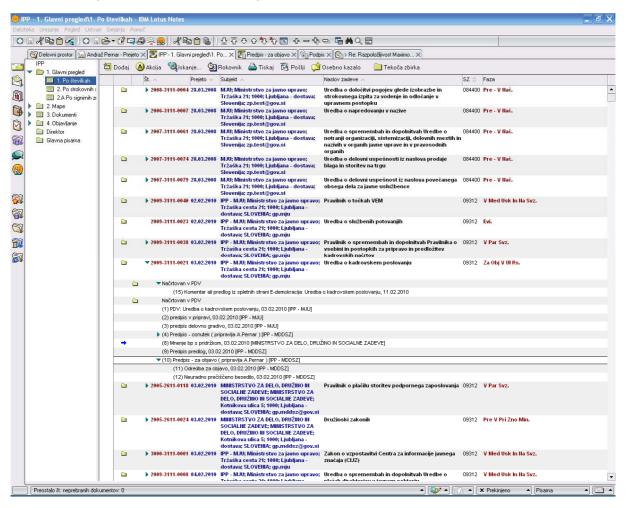


- Next phase of the process is the preparation of the so called "working material" of the regulation. In this phase, the regulation is being formed within the competent ministry/government office, although other institutions can also join in helping to form the document. Usually, with regulations that encompass various specific areas, respective competent institutions are included in the preparation of the said regulation at the earliest possible phase, in order to avoid any possible complications in the latter phases. In the "working material" phase, documents will not be published on the internet (the application, however, enables publishing any material at any phase of the process), although the public can still give its' comments, opinions and suggestions on the material that has already been published.
- The following phase of the process is the so called "draft regulation" phase. In this phase, the competent ministry/government office prepares a draft of a regulation,

which is then sent to every ministry and government office, various syndicates and also published on the web sub-portal E-democracy. The document is published on the fore-mentioned website for a period of 30-60 days. In this period, the public can actively participate by sending their suggestions, opinions and proposals regarding the draft regulation that is published. This phase therefore serves as the main opportunity to harmonize the regulation with various stakeholders involved in the process of forming a certain regulation.

• The last main phase of the IPP is the "regulation proposal" phase. In this phase, that follows the "draft regulation" phase, a harmonized version of the regulation proposal is published, along with a report on citizen participation. This version of the regulation document is then sent via the IPP system to the Secretariat-General of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, where the internal processes of government proceedings begin, resulting in either accepting/rejecting certain types of regulation or sending the regulation proposal to be discussed in the National Assembly. The public can give its' comments, opinions and suggestions on the regulation proposal material that has been published, possibly resulting in changes to the document, while it is being worked on in the government's procedure.

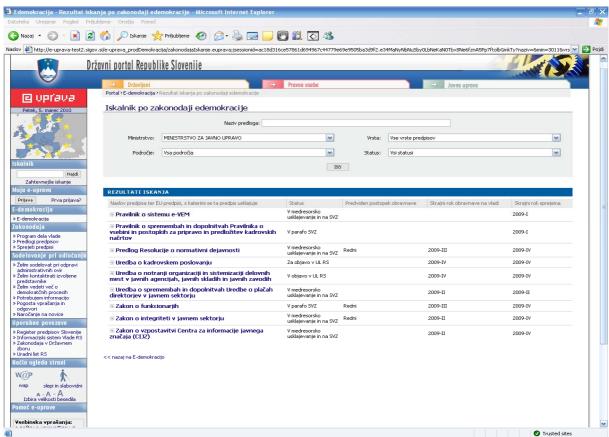
Picture 2: Representation of various phases of IPP



Participation of the Public in the process of regulation drafting

Web sub-portal E-democracy (http://e-uprava.gov.si/e-uprava/edemokracija.euprava) allows for publishing of documents of regulation that is being created.

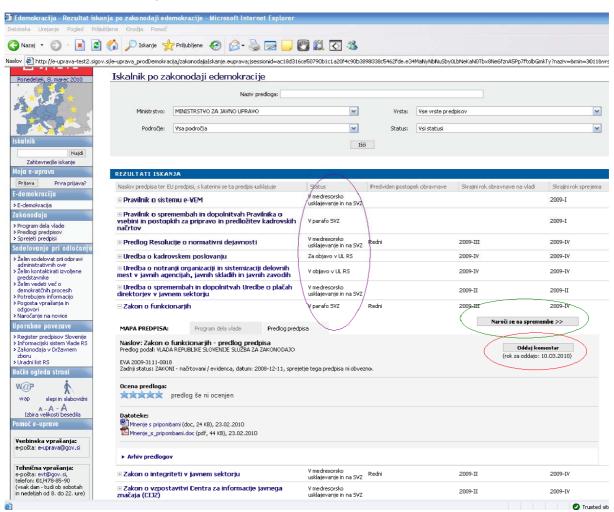




The interested public (citizens, NGO's,...) can, therefore, participate in the regulation drafting process by sending their comments, proposals an opinions via the E-democracy website. From the first version of the document that is being formed, the central module with the E-democracy website provides information to the public as well as participation enabling tools. In every phase of the regulation drafting, the application allows the ministry/government office that is in charge of producing the document, to define a period of time, in which the public can actively participate in an open discussion. The Resolution on Legislative Regulation (chapter 6, item 2) propounds that the period of time, allocated to public participation in the process of regulation drafting should be 30-60 days; the exception being the specific cases, where public participation can not be carried out (urgent procedures, drafting of the budget,...). IPP enables public participation in practically every phase of regulation drafting, while the 30-60 day consultation period, written in the Resolution on the Legislative Regulation, is being taken into account in the "draft regulation" phase, when the draft itself is also distributed to every ministry and government office, various syndicates with the aim to maximize the harmonization of the regulation with various stakeholders involved in the process of forming a certain regulation. E-democracy portal uses simple web tools that enable public users to write and send their comments, proposals and opinions via a "Post your comment" window directly to the institution that is the propounder of the regulation. In the IPP back office

system, those comments are automatically arranged in suitable electronic maps of various regulations that are being worked on at that moment. IPP also enables the propounder of the document to reply to comments and opinions and also publish those replies on the E-democracy website, if they are found to be of added value and could mean a positive contribution in the public consultation period. E-democracy sub-portal also allows the public to gain additional information regarding a certain regulation in drafting by publishing statuses, that are refreshed automatically, as a regulation draft makes its' way through its' phases. It also offers users the chance to subscribe to any news regarding regulation from areas that might interest them. The users then regularly receive e-mails with information regarding what regulation and which area are to be a subject of change and additional information on changes as/when they occur.

Picture 4: E-democracy sub-portal: Purple circle shows information regarding the status of a particular regulation draft, green circle shows the "Subscribe to news" button, red circle shows the "Post your comments here" button.



Picture 5: "Post your comment" window that opens when a user decides to sent a comment, suggestion or opinion to the propounder of the regulation



Every document that is published on the E-democracy portal is presented in .doc as well as in .pdf format. PDF format is independent from the user computers' own operational system, which allows for untroubled and simple access to documents. The only condition the user has to satisfy is to set up the Acrobat Reader application, which is cost free and available to anyone with web access. The IPP system uses the PDF-A format, which is a file format for the long-term archiving of electronic documents. It also enables the embedding of electronic signatures.

In the process of preparing for the production date of the IPP, we have already prepared an up-grade of the comment service system the users will use to convey their opinions during the participation phases of regulation drafting. The user will have the option of disclosing his/her e-mail address while sending his/her comment (allowing the propounder of the regulation to reply, if necessary), or he/she will be able to send comments and opinions anonymously. The comment service system will include a special "Captcha" field, designed to minimize the possibility of receiving e-mails, which wouldn't contain additional value for the propounder, such as constructive remarks and proposals. The user will have the option of uploading files in MS Word, PDF and Excel format (.doc, .pdf, .xls). Thus, the user will have greater freedom while structuring his/her text and will also be able to enclose tables and graphs, which will inevitably help to make the comment better and will add additional value to its' content.

Every user will be able to browse through published drafts of regulations as well as use search parameters to facilitate his/her search.

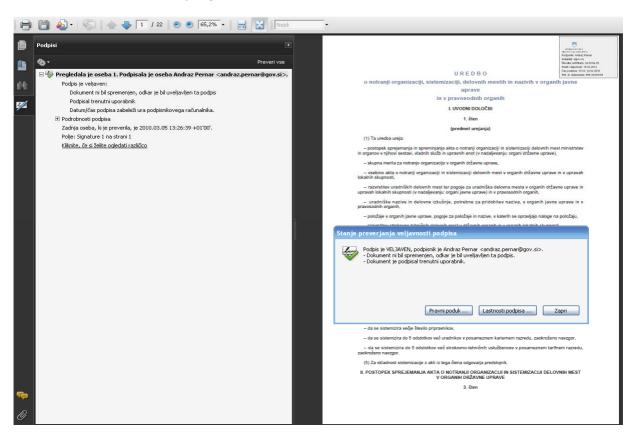
In the closing phase, we should mention the electronic signature service that is available in all modules of the IPP system. The electronic signature assures authorization of content, which in turn provides the information that a highest representative of a state institution (minister, director of a government office, prime minister) approved the

contents of a document. Electronic signature also prevents any kind of changing of the document after it has been signed. A document can be electronically signed exclusively by using a qualified digital certificate, issued by one of the certified digital certificate publishers. There are currently 5 certified digital certificate publishers in the Republic of Slovenia:

- POŠTArCA (Post of Slovenia),
- HALCOM (Halcom Informatics),
- NLB certificate (Nova Ljubljanska Banka),
- SIGOV-CA and SIGEN-CA (published by the Ministry of public administration)

It is expected, that the civil servants using IPP within the state administration will mostly use the SIGOV-CA certificates. However, should the principle of electronic document signing spread to public users (electronically signing documents in the process of E-participation during the drafting of a regulation), the use of certificates issued by multiple listed certified digital certificate publishers is expected.

Picture 6: An electronically signed document in PDF-A standard



Conclusion

The start of the operational phase of the IPP project presents an important technological and organizational shift in the working of the state administration, as it enables simplification and standardization of work for every user. The central storage system (the central module) also enables easier revision and possible analytical studies of past procedures of drafting regulation, which presents an excellent foundation for eventual improvement of the said procedures.

For citizens, the most important component of the system has to be the availability to cooperate and be actively involved in the process of regulation drafting, because only direct inclusion in the processes of regulation drafting can assure an influence on the content of said regulation. Users, who are not accustomed to using a computer, will receive help from the call centre "Hello Administration", where information regarding access to web-published draft regulation as well as published regulation already in force will be offered. In this way, the call centre "Hello Administration" will also help fulfil its' role to minimize the so called "digital divide", which prevents users who have troubles using informational technology from being qualitatively integrated in social activities, available via internet

The Government is very much aware of the significance of informational technology and the advantages this technology brings to facilitate the communication between the citizens and the state. For that reason it adopted two respective documents, the eGovernment Strategy of Republic of Slovenia for the period 2006 to 2010 (SEP-2010) and the eGovernment Action Plan (2007-2010) in which it actively supports the concept of electronic participation of the public. The new IPP project therefore presents an important part of this mosaic. With the introduction of the IT supported decision making procedure project, Slovenia will become one of the few countries that encompass the processes of regulation drafting in a unified and integral manner including citizen participation.