



Development Gains Momentum at ISSS 2013, the Czech Republic's Largest IT-in-Government Forum

PERSPECTIVE

#CEMA19715

Jan Petruj

Mark Yates

IN THIS PERSPECTIVE

If 2012 was the year of major announcements for IT in government in the Czech Republic, 2013 is the year of incremental advancement.

At the 16th annual *Internet ve statni sprave a samosprave* (ISSS) IT-in-government event, representatives from government bodies and IT suppliers met to review policy, reexamine priorities, and showcase and discuss the "next steps" in both back-end systems and citizen-facing services. Rather than announce major IT initiatives, government entities showcased and planned for system developments. They also laid out how platforms might be used for the expansion of eservices, particularly at local and regional levels.

So-called classic themes were in evidence: cost control, improving administration, bandwidth, and security. Ministries and municipalities highlighted how they have made IT administration more effective. Better document management (e.g., at the Ministry of Justice) and the refinement of citizen-facing services (e.g., Data Boxes and Czech Point) continued to improve G2G, G2B, and G2C communications. The Ministry of the Interior outlined a program for next-generation networks. And multiple presentations addressed how to keep things safe, with the Czech National Security Agency outlining law and how the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) can tackle incidences.

While 3rd platform technologies were more prominent than in the prior year, this was largely due to IT suppliers presenting about the possibilities that these technologies offer. Yes, this reflects the conservative nature of government entities during hard economic times. But it also reflects a lack of centralized leadership to help break down silos and create a larger base for inter-agency cooperation beyond Data Boxes and other tools that do not require architecture realignment and the active sharing of resources.

Still, the overall impression was of solid forward momentum for government in the Czech Republic. If entities would embrace 3rd platform technologies and do even more to share resources, they could accelerate the process considerably.

The Main Event

Held on April 8 and 9, this year's ISSS again brought in talent. CIOs, directors, managers, and specialists from all levels of government descended on the Aldis Congress Center, in Hradec Kralove. More than 2,000 people representing scores of government entities and dozens of private sector IT suppliers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and other countries gave nearly 200 presentations. Breakout and discussion sessions provided ample opportunity to examine digitization, administration and IT, ehealth, etourism, and core egovernment projects (e.g., Czech Point, the eprocurement tool, the Basic Registries project, and datacenters).

The event also drew a wide range of top officials. The opening set of presentations and the panel discussion included Senate Deputy Chairman Premysl Sobotka, Minister of the Interior Jan Kubica, Hradec Kralove Governor Lubomir Franc, Vysocina Governor Jiri Behounek, Hradec Kralove Mayor Zdenek Fink, ICT Union President Svatoslav Novak, and additional high-ranking officials from the ministries of finance, education, youth, and sport, environment, transport, justice, regional development, and health, as well as business leaders from IBM, VMware, Ceska sporitelna, and ISSS itself.

Without a major announcement to hold audience attention, the opening panel of top officials emphasized the importance of IT effectiveness. They spoke about the recent criticism of agencies that spent money on ICT simply for the sake of spending – digitizing rather than changing processes, duplicating existing systems, and not shutting down projects that are clearly misguided. To address these issues, ministers and directors proposed greater transparency, a stronger legal framework around ICT, and tighter procurement rules (which might include a blacklist of disreputable companies). One member of the Chamber of Deputies argued for a central ICT authority to coordinate projects, find opportunities for shared services, and provide means tests to prevent profligate spending. (Sharing resources and services appeared in a couple of key strategy presentations. Details were thin, but the concept was clearly represented.) All the panelists agreed that security and data protection needed to be front of mind at all times.

Despite worries over whether government entities are getting their money's worth in terms of ICT, incremental ICT improvements were apparent throughout the event. They coincided with several themes:

Mobility Rising

While the 3rd platform of IT development – the 1st platform was based on mainframes and the 2nd platform on LAN, WAN, and in-house servers – incorporates solutions built on mobility, cloud, big data analytics, and social media applications, mobility is often the driving force. Smartphones now outsell PCs globally, regionally, and in the Czech Republic. People increasingly access email, social media profiles, and the Internet from tablets and smartphones rather than "traditional" PCs. The expectation has also emerged that places of

employment must adapt to the handsets their staff bring to work rather than place limitations on what is allowed.

This year, the ISSS agenda included seven presentations with a mobile focus. Given the total number of presentations, this may appear slight, on the surface. But it is more than three times the number from 2012. And while the presentations were delivered by IT suppliers, it is IT suppliers that often lay the informational groundwork for government development. Tourism and regionally oriented entities have already taken the first steps. For instance, the Ministry of Regional Development has made its tourism statistical yearbook available via smartphones and tablets. The Ministry of Tourism plans to launch mobile applications in the second half of this year. And the Association of Regional Governments has included mobile services, platforms, and geoinformatics among its strategic initiatives for 2014–2020.

Again, at first glance, this appears slight, and the discussion is not moving fast enough. But IDC feels the surge in smartphone penetration among citizens (and thus government workers) will put considerable pressure on entities to develop mobile services and access points. In other words, government entities will have little choice but to embrace mobile optimization for both staff and citizen services.

Scalability and development

As noted above, the focus this year was on what has already been put in place. While ICT and eservices may not be developing as rapidly as the technology itself, they are, nevertheless, moving forward.

The Central Registries system stands as a case in point. Launched last year, it essentially created what might be called an access layer through which government workers retrieve and enter data from disparate locations. Partially funded by the European Development Fund, it has reduced the complexity of contacting multiple offices when more than one form or piece of information is required. Additional databases (such as the insolvency database) are being added and fields and interfaces refined to increase query options and make data retrieval faster and clearer.

At the local level, cities such as Prague and Most operate geoinformatics portals that provide a foundation for further development. The detailed maps draw data from a variety of sources, not just to show the location of streets and houses but to highlight business zones and development areas. Perhaps more important, they serve as a platform for connecting real-time information to a location. This might include traffic cameras, parking availability, real estate auctions or foreclosures, emergency activity or warnings, and any other information that may be relevant to drivers, pedestrians, police, city planners, and citizens. (It should be noted that the Surveying Office is also expanding its geoinformatics services.)

All this development depends on a reliable network. The Ministry of the Interior announced a long-term goal for laying a next-generation

network that would effectively lift availability to 99.9%. Regional networks will be connected to the backbone of the integrated emergency system. Redundant cables will be put in place. The result should be the assured connection of around 400 government entities.

In other words, both hardware and software systems will be further expanded to connect and integrate entity systems and systems utilized by multiple agencies. While a laudable goal, it largely leaves current IT silos intact. Shared services plans remain very general, while shared tools (such as the Data Boxes) do little to encourage the actual sharing of back-end software and hardware. (Some municipal and regional governments are exceptions, as they have made efforts to pool resources to reduce costs and improve administrative efficiency.)

Where Were Social Media and Big Data?

A quick survey of Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter suggests that many government entities in the Czech Republic have been given the same social media checklist. They have Twitter feeds and profiles on key social media sites. Entities as diverse as Prague 9 and the Ministry of Defense are filling their feeds with announcements, articles, video, and other content. Yet no government agency presented on how it had used these online channels for citizen outreach. Yes, content per se is often thought of as belonging to PR and marketing. But the nature of the different media and the potential for analyzing hits, clicks, re-tweets, likes, usage levels, and unstructured data in comments and forums make this as much an IT issue as a communications issue.

While a couple presentations mentioned data analysis, analytics was also largely missing. Even within the boundaries of privacy laws, ample opportunities exist to cross-reference citizen data (in aggregate), housing data, public safety data, rent and payment data, geographic data, transportation information, and unstructured data found in comments and forums. The results can be used to do everything from improving the quality of customer service, scheduling workers for peak times, and scaling up and down IT hardware and software (something easily done with onsite or offsite cloud services) to allocating emergency fleets, making better use of budgets, and connecting policy decisions to expressed citizen needs and interests. The promise is enormous and already on display in cities in North America and Western Europe. Given that the Czech Republic has plenty of accessible data, using analytics to understand how citizens and governments can exchange information via social media, and how this might impact back-office processes, seems worthy of the attention of lead administrators.

Access, Analytics, Ambition: Bring in a Bigger Vision

The promise of the 3rd platform is really the promise of access and analytics. For access, mobile devices and social media provide two-way communication channels that create the possibility of citizen-

directed government. It also leaves multiple data trails that can be used for in-depth scrutiny of what services are most needed, when they are most needed, and how best to deliver the services.

To create a large vision of what government might look like in ten years, government officials would do well to pay attention to ehealth initiatives. While most in the Czech Republic are still underdeveloped compared to those in Western European countries, the needs to improve patient care and control costs carry an urgency that helps push things forward. The Ministry of Health presented a comprehensive and ambitious plan for information sharing that would involve records exchange systems, an information management system, a portal, and a registry for radiation exposure. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs addressed the problems of discordant data sources. And vendors and experts talked about mHealth, records management, data analysis, and the possibilities of geoinformatics to improve medical and emergency monitoring. Granted, cloud and big data were still absent, but the vision was present (though a little fragmented).

This year's cloud streams and mobility presentations point to the potential of ISSS as a platform for pushing a vision of the future. IT suppliers and gurus all have their own versions of intelligent, or 360°, government (and IDC has one, too). ISSS organizers could feature them in a panel discussion, set up a debate between politicians and another between leading firms, and draw on examples from other countries (e.g., Denmark, Singapore, and Australia). They could also solicit presentations on social media, both as a communications channel and as a data source for sentiment analysis. The challenge will be to integrate a bold egovernment vision across a program that must consider scores of agencies and hundreds of IT systems. Even if limited to the opening sessions and a couple of workshop streams, such a vision would, nevertheless, make future ISSS events all the more exciting.

LEARN MORE

- *Central and Eastern Europe Government Sector Top 10 Predictions, 2013* (IDC Government Insights #EGI01V, February 2013)
- *Years of Discussion Paying off at ISSS, the Czech Republic's Largest IT-in-Government Event* (IDC Government Insights #CEMA18524, April 2012)

Copyright Notice

Copyright 2013 IDC Government Insights. Reproduction without written permission is completely forbidden. External Publication of IDC Government Insights Information and Data: Any IDC Government Insights information that is to be used in advertising, press releases, or promotional materials requires prior written approval from the appropriate IDC Government Insights Vice President. A draft of the proposed document should accompany any such request. IDC Government Insights reserves the right to deny approval of external usage for any reason.