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**The Feasibility of Introducing Internet Voting in
Romania.
Case Study: Cluj-Napoca**

- PhD Thesis Summary-

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INTRODUCTION

A large part of the literature shows that the average rate of electoral participation, at the global level, including democracies with compulsory voting, is approximately 64 per cent (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance). Thus, it can be stated that, although based on values of participation, democracies face the risk of a low representation.

The puzzle of the research is defined by two sets of literature that, at some level, are inconsistent. On one hand, a part of the literature argues that, although only at a very limited extent, electronic voting produces higher levels of electoral participation (Berinsky *et al.* 2001, 194). On the other hand, skeptics argue that the Internet in general can create inequalities between those who know and can afford to use technology and those who do not have the knowledge and the resources to acquire this technology (DiMaggio *et al.* 2001). The concept of *digital divide* arises in this context. This, while the Internet may increase electoral turnout in respect of certain social groups (for instance, young people, individuals with high financial or educational level), it could be an explanatory factor for the level of absenteeism among other groups (for instance, elderly people who do not know how to use technology, less financially privileged people). Therefore, it is expected that the evolution of voting mechanism to increase the number of young people to the polls and thereby change the political class representation.

Electronic voting (e-voting) refers to the use of electronic tools to exercise the act of voting. More specifically, electronic voting can mean both the use of voting machines not connected to the Internet and placed at the polling stations and the use of Internet as a mechanism to transmit votes. In the first case, electronic machines can be both touch screen devices and devices that scan the ballot and record the vote. However, in most of the cases, electronic voting is perceived as Internet related mechanisms (Administration and Cost of Elections).

Internet voting is defined by the literature as an electronic system for online ballots transmission (Oostveen and Besselaar 2004, 2). This implies that the ballot is electronic and the communication medium is the Internet (Oppliger *et al.* 2008, 223). According to the experiments on the use of Internet voting, there are three voting options involving the Internet, in terms of the location of vote: the option of using Internet at the polling places (*poll site Internet*), so that voters may vote on the Internet from any polling place; the so-called kiosks option (*kiosks voting*), kiosks placed in the highly accessible areas (e.g. libraries, grocery stores, train stations); and the

option of voting from any computer with Internet connection (*remote Internet voting*), an option that does not geographically compel voters (Oostveen and Besselaar 2004, 3).

The research deals exclusively with Internet voting, more specifically, with remote Internet voting. It is important to note that the entire analysis is built considering the fact that, in the light of Internet voting introduction, it will be used, at least on the medium run, in parallel with classic paper voting mechanism. In this context, this research is based on two general research questions: To what extent the introduction of Internet voting, along with traditional paper voting mechanism is a feasible measure in Romania in general and in Cluj-Napoca in particular? and Whether Internet voting could lead to an increase of electoral turnout?

On one hand, as a new mechanism of voting, Internet voting presents the risk of reluctance, especially among social groups to which technology is an intangible and incomprehensible dimension of life. On the other hand, Internet voting can be both an element of attraction and curiosity, and an element that facilitates the act of voting itself. The electoral turnout in Romania, as it can be seen in the table below, is in a continuous decrease in both presidential and the parliamentary elections. In this context, it is important to note that by 2008, the presidential and parliamentary elections were taking place simultaneously, which was not a guarantee that citizens had expressed the voting option for both Parliament and President.

Table no. 1 – The electoral turnout in presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania

The year of elections	Presidential elections (%)	Parliamentary elections (%)
1990	86	86
1992	76,3	76,3
1996	75,9	76,0
2000	56,6	65,3
2004	54,8	58,5
2008	-	39,3
2009	53,52	-

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and Election Results Archive

Based on the general questions mentioned above, the paper calls for three sets of more specific research questions. The three sets of questions refer to the way electronic voting issue is discussed in mass media, to specialists' opinions regarding Internet voting and to the way citizens of Cluj-Napoca perceive this voting mechanism.

1. To what extent the issue of Internet voting is present in the Romanian mass media?
 - a. What are the contexts in which the issue of Internet voting is discussed?
 - b. To what extent the possible introduction of Internet voting is related mainly to the needs of the Diaspora?
2. What is the opinion of IT specialists and representatives of local government in terms of Internet voting introduction in Cluj-Napoca?
 - a. Are there differences between views of these groups regarding the feasibility of using Internet voting?
 - b. Which are the main reasons why experts consider that Internet voting is a viable solution to improve the electoral act?
 - c. How different is the opinion of an elections observer practitioner in contrast to IT specialists and representatives of local government?
3. What is the potential profile of Internet voter?
 - a. To what extent the citizens of Cluj-Napoca perceive the introduction of Internet voting as a feasible and efficient opportunity?
 - b. To what extent the Internet voting introduction can increase electoral turnout?
 - c. What are the main reasons why people would use such a voting mechanisms?

The paper focuses on Cluj-Napoca case study. The main reasons for selecting this case are multiple. First, the city recorded a constantly evolving market in terms of economic development, in which individuals get used with a high degree of regional development. In this regard, Cluj-Napoca can be, unlike other municipalities, an area in which the need for development is one of the most valuable factors for most citizens. Second, being an academic town, with a large number of students, Cluj-Napoca has a less aging population. Thus, a favorable average age is created in favor of technological development of daily life. Finally, selecting this city is a result of personal interest.

From the methodological point of view, the paper will combine qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, the research design includes a content analysis, a set of semi-structured interviews and a survey. The main reason for this combination of methods is that of capturing both the validity and generality of the research, its authenticity and credibility. While

the survey role is to provide some explanations regarding Internet voting preference, the content analysis and the semi-structured interview raises both the debate on electronic voting and the question on the feasibility of introducing it.

Using both a content analysis of national press, a set of semi-structured interviews with experts and a survey at the Cluj-Napoca level, the paper attempts to create a complex picture of the context regarding Internet voting introduction. First, the research tries to highlight a variety of options that can help analyzing the feasibility of introducing Internet voting. Second, the analysis tries to explain some options regarding the voting mechanism and their effects on the outcome of the vote, mainly in terms of changing the electorate composition and of increasing turnout.

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first part is a foray into the specialized literature, the main topics discussed being *voting* in general, with the factors that influence electoral participation and voter typology, the *Internet* with its benefits and challenges, and the *Internet as a political and electoral tool*. The second part of the paper represents the methodological framework that empirically attempts to draw conclusions regarding the possibility of Internet voting introduction in Cluj-Napoca based on both expert opinion and on citizens' views.

PART I – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This part of the paper aims to develop a theoretical framework designed to introduce the main concepts of the research: electoral participation and the Internet as a political instrument. Moreover, based on the former researches, this study intends to connect concepts and introduce them in the phrase “Internet voting”. The purposes of this theoretical illustration are both to get familiar with the used language and to get aware of the level of international research on Internet as a political instrument.

CHAPTER I – The vote and the electoral participation

The first chapter represents a brief insight into voting and electoral participation. More specifically, based on the definition of political participation, the emphasis is on the factors that

affect turnout. Thus, the literature classifies the factors that may influence participation in two levels: macro and micro level.

The macro level refers to those factors related to how the system is created, organized and modeled. Dalton provides a set of external factors that may foster an increase or a decrease of the electoral turnout: the electoral system, the party system and the general political system (Dalton 1996). Thus, while the latter two categories refer to the intensity of cleavages, the intensity of competition among parties, structural incentives to influence the tendency of individuals to participate in the electoral life (Dalton 1996), the first category of factors, the electoral rules, can determine an individual to vote. The way elections are organized is perceived by Rallings, Thrasher and Borisjuk as a possible solution for political absenteeism. From their perspective, even seasonal factors may constitute sufficient reason for someone not to vote. At various times of the year, the cost of voting is perceived differently (Rallings, Thrasher and Borisjuk 2003, 67). In addition, one must consider the fatigue arisen from repeated polls, particularly in the case of United States, but not only. The more extended the time between two elections is, the higher is the electoral turnout (Rallings, Thrasher and Borisjuk 2003, 77). Moreover, if the election day is scheduled for the weekend, when people have more free time, or if the distribution of polling places for individuals is based on the minimum distance they must travel in order to vote, it is more likely that more individuals consider the act of voting less costly. The literature shows that the proportion of people staying home is lower if people are not forced to travel long distances to the voting station in a given day (Alvarez and Nagler 2001, 1126).

The micro level includes those factors that characterize an individual and determine him or her to carry out a particular action. At this level, the personal characteristics of individuals in terms of socio-demographic and economic factors, the group effects, and the political and the technical aspects can be considered. From the socio-demographic perspective, Teixeira believes that turnout may be influenced by the following factors: socio-economic factors (education, occupation, and income), demographics (age, marital status, residential mobility, race, region, gender) and sociopolitical elements (partisanship, political interest, and political efficacy) (Bădescu 2001, 258). Regarding the group effects' perspective, in a joint paper, Brady, Verba and Schlozman claim that, in addition to the resources of time, money and civic skills, one should focus on past activities and participatory potential, on the probability to positively respond to the request for participation coming from someone else. They believe that there is a parallel

relationship between the process by which someone is called to vote and the process by which the individual participate on his or her own initiative. Their conclusion is that the recruitment of prospective voters tends to increase participation stratification (Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1999, 153-168). In addition, political issues are extremely important in influencing the discussion on electoral participation. Thus, the literature considers attitudinal factors such as political affiliation, political efficacy and political interest (Tolbert, McNeal 2003, 175). In the same vein, Campbell emphasizes the sense of civic duty, partisan identification and involvement, factors that are related to how the electoral turnout fluctuates (Cassel and Hill 1981, 182). A final category of variables that can be controlled in the relationship between Internet voting and electoral turnout refers to the technological component of research. Electoral reform is perceived as a potential way to increase the electoral participation rate and to eliminate the socio-economic disparities in terms of voting (Berinsky 2005, 473). However, a part of the literature argues that if technology in general, and Internet voting in particular, have the ability to increase turnout among certain social groups, this does not mean that they will increase electoral participation as a whole (Kenski 2005, 296). In the same vein, one can argue that there are at least two groups of individuals who will be left aside in the process of using Internet voting. It is about communities without access to technology and individuals without access to Internet (Dictson and Ray 2000, 14).

In conclusion, whether it is about factors strictly related to the political system, or it is about individual factors taken separately, the decision to participate to vote is a complex decision. Moreover, this decision appears to exceptionally depend on how individuals perceive the environment they live in and on the level of resources and knowledge available.

CHAPTER II – The Internet. Benefits and challenges

The second chapter focuses on the concept of Internet and the specific benefits and challenges of this technology. Thus, this chapter aims to achieve an insight into the main features of the Internet. Born as a tool for scientific communication between universities, the Internet, with all its characteristics, is an important resource of information. Moreover, the online environment allows both horizontal communication between individuals with the same status, and vertical communication between individuals characterized by different hierarchy. Considering that the researches on the Internet emphasize at least five perspectives of analysis

(*inequality* - the digital divide, community and social capital, political participation, economic organizations and institutions and participation and cultural diversity), new media comes rather to complete traditional means of communication than to replace them (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001).

The literature has grouped the benefits of Internet in three categories: political, economic and social. Regarding the political perspective, based on the reality that both the electoral turnout and the level of civic involvement are decreasing, the Internet owns inexpensive mechanisms that can facilitate the contact among individuals and between individuals and government actors (Litani in 2001). In the context of democracies in which political interest is decreasing and the cost of voting is considered too high, the Internet comes to adjust this problem by proposing a measure of efficiency within this act. Thus, perhaps one of the most important benefits of the Internet, from the political point of view, is the possibility of voting online (Litani in 2001). Economic benefits of the Internet come to complement the political ones. Specialists consider that the technological development determines a rapid increase of productivity (Litani in 2001). Moreover, the Internet facilitates the way transactions take place by adding the online opportunity, and by reducing the overall cost of transaction. The economic benefits of the Internet are not related only to financial aspects, but also to the temporal and environmental ones. Thus, an online transaction, whether it is an exchange of information or an exchange of money or goods, it can be done in real time. In addition, ecologically, it eliminates the need for documents in their classic form (for example, paper). The last set of Internet's benefits is the social one. Thus, the Internet can be perceived as a new form of socialization, of communities' creation. Meetings, especially between friends, do not occur only physically anymore, but also virtually, through forums, social networks etc.. The so-called "electronic town meetings" may further inspire the way elections are held, particularly by facilitating the entry of citizens in the public sphere (Litani in 2001).

Based on the perspective that the Internet is perceived as a natural and indispensable good, it is necessary to highlight the challenges the society is subject for. The degree to which a community adopts innovation depends primarily on the level of compatibility (existing values, past experiences, needs of the candidates especially related to the adoption of new forms of media - talk shows - through which the message degree of control increases) and on the relative advantages of that technology (Rogers (1995) in D'Alessio 2000). It is understood that, as any new technology requires new challenges, the Internet bring up concerns or problems that require

being resolved. One of the most prominent problems that Internet users are facing is privacy or rather the lack of it (Litani 2001). Besides the privacy issue, inequality is another aspect that the technological development brings into the debate. The inequality, in the digital sense, refers to digital divide. It means an unequal access to Internet, inequality in terms of knowledge, of connection quality or of the ability to assess the quality of information (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001). Besides the concerns about the fact that the Internet, as an infinite source of information, can determine the decrease of attention on a particular subject, the domain concerns are also related to the fact that the Internet may erode the social capital by allowing the consumers to withdraw themselves in an artificial world and to alleviate human relationships (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson 2001).

In conclusion, it can be said that the Internet, as any other technological development, can be perceived with skepticism. Thus, this online environment becomes a hostile environment by emphasizing the inequalities between those who know and have and those who do not know and do not have the knowledge and resources. Moreover, the Internet creates virtual worlds that allow the individual to escape everyday life and to have less contact with it. However, the way Internet is used depends on how individuals understand this environment and the needs it can satisfy.

CHAPTER III – The Internet as a political tool

The third chapter focuses on the topic of the Internet as a political tool. Treating the Internet as a political tool is twofold. First, the Internet can be a tool for politicians, a campaign and a post-campaign tool. Second, the Internet can be a voting instrument, thus a tool for voters. In the attempt to highlight the importance of technological development, this part of the paper deals with both perspectives stated above.

Democracy requires a dual process of communication: from the Government to the citizens and from the citizens to the Government representatives. Thus, based on the online communication development, the concept of *e-government* needs to be taken into discussion. This concept is an umbrella concept that involves using all the specific applications for the information and communication technology (ICT), or, as defined by the United Nations, involves “using the Internet to transmit information and services to citizens” (Torres, Pina and Acerete 2006, 277). Another concept embedded within modern means of communication is *e-*

democracy or digitized democracy. While focusing on e-government the information and services from those who govern are submitted online, e-democracy refers to the reverse process by which a citizen may respond to the information provided by using the Internet. Thus, one can stress that e-democracy refers to a set of activities that increase citizens' involvement in the democratic process of governance (Torres, Pina and Acerete 2006, 287).

Perceiving the Internet as a voting tool, the paper highlights the most relevant examples of states that have used, use or test Internet voting. Building on this insight, the focus is on the main arguments and counterarguments of this voting mechanism. Based on the example of Estonia, the first country where Internet voting has been used nationwide in parliamentary elections, one can say that even if Internet voting is not yet an option in the Romanian electoral system, the Permanent Electoral Authority has taken this aspect into account, launching in 2005 a research project designed to analyze Internet suffrage in Romania (Permanent Electoral Authority, 1-2). Thus, there are at least two aspects that deserve to be emphasized. First, the internet voting is already on the political, administrative and electoral agenda of many states, some of them doing some pilot tests or even using large-scale online voting. Second, even if Romania does not have as a main concern the introduction of Internet voting in the near future, there is a relevant attention degree in this respect. Moreover, the use of online voting is a certainty. Each country has developed its own Internet voting system either by inventing new mechanisms, or be inspiring themselves from the practices of other states. Both situations have shown that this kind of vote, provided that meets the security and privacy requirements, can be improved particularly in the context in which the Internet becomes an exponent of everyday life.

Considering the benefits and challenges of the Internet in general, this part also deals with analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet voting. Like any other voting system that can have significant consequences in terms of voter participation and representation, the Internet voting has both its supporters and critics. While on the one hand, the Internet voting, due to its advantages in terms of voting costs, represents an argument in favor of this new voting mechanism, on the other hand, given its technical basis, the Internet voting triggers the skepticism of technology specialists in terms of the online environment capacity to increase turnout.

Among the most important positive aspects associated with Internet voting, the following can be noted in the specialized literature: it decreases non-material cost of voting for certain individuals (people with disabilities, individuals who are abroad, etc.) in the sense that

there is no need to travel to the voting station; one can vote from any location where there is Internet connection; the election period is higher and it eliminates the dependence on a particular voting station; on the long run, it reduces the financial cost for organizing elections; it may increase the electoral turnout; it offers the opportunity of a better information level on candidates by using the online environment; it is a natural evolution of technology; the votes are transmitted in real time and the election results are immediately communicated after electronic polls are closed. As negative aspects that may be associated with Internet voting, the most important are the following: it involves high financial costs, especially on short to medium run (acquisition of the required technology, the creation of specific soft, the production of informative and promotional materials etc.); it increases turnout only partially and it rather mobilizes the individuals that vote anyway; it produces inequality both in terms of access (only a part of the electorate has Internet access and knows how to use it) and in terms of the understanding level (only a part of the voters will understand the specific online voting instructions); it involves a high degree of novelty for those who do not have the knowledge and the access to this technology; the ordered election process is disturbed and the sense of tradition of electoral act is diminished; it involves safety, security, secrecy, anonymity and privacy issues; it implies issues related to the certainty that the vote is transmitted and counted, to the possible fraud or viruses entered the system; it involves a permanent dependence on specialist and it cannot be supervised in the same way as the traditional paper voting.

In this context, there are a large number of researches analyzing the impact of Internet voting. Based on some research conducted in the United States, in the states of Michigan and Arizona, it is concluded that the introduction of alternative voting methods in general (voting by mail, early voting, etc..) and of Internet voting encourage the vote of individuals that vote anyway but who are not comfortable to travel to the voting section (Prevost 2008, 63-64). Among the control variables used (gender, age, education, income, partisan identification, ideology, Internet access), education, Internet access and income variables are strongly and positively associated with Internet voting assessment (Kenski 2005, 294). While the most important reasons given by the supporters of Internet voting are that it is convenient and has the ability to increase turnout, the most common cons are lack of security and possibility of fraud. Thus, the main concern of voters proved to be the security system and the possibility of fraud (Kenski 2005, 294). In addition, the 2000 elections confirmed that the opportunity to vote on Internet as well, has contributed to the increase of electoral turnout. Moreover, the speculation is

that participation rates would have been even greater if the technical problems were solved (Solop 2001, 292).

A recent study is undertaken in Estonia, during parliamentary elections in 2007, the first election in which Internet voting was possible at national level, 5.4% of voters voting online (Trechsel 2007, 3). Most of those who chose to vote online have voted from their own residence or workplace, few are those who voted online from other places such as Internet cafes. Moreover, as expected, younger voters and, in general, males were those who mostly used the Internet as a voting tool (Trechsel 2007, 4). One of the most interesting findings of the research in Estonia is that one, out of ten respondents, although not being a significant outcome (participation rates without the possibility of Internet voting being only 0.5% lower), said that would be likely not to vote if there was no Internet voting opportunity (Trechsel 2007, 4-5).

Another similar study investigating the users view (risks and opportunities) about Internet voting is done in several countries: Finland, France, Italy and Britain (Oostveen and Van der Besselaar 2004, 2). The participants in the group interview considered that the Internet voting has the ability to increase electoral participation only temporary, until the disappearance of curiosity, even in the case of young people who are more likely to use this technology. Moreover, Internet voting is perceived as a tool to improve local democracy, but only when it is related to a participatory political culture, with a high level of information and an ongoing deliberative process (Oostveen and Van der Besselaar 2004, 6-13).

Based on this insight in the empirical research already carried out on Internet voting issue, it can be concluded that, although overall research results are similar, they differ in some respects depending on the characteristics of the analyzed context and on the methods used.

PART II – INTERNET VOTING. AN EMPIRICAL INSIGHT

This part of the paper empirically deals the feasibility of introducing Internet voting in Romania, based on a case study conducted in Cluj-Napoca. Methodological foray begins with a content analysis aiming to highlight the extent to which Internet voting subject is visible in the Romanian press and how this issue is presented to the public opinion. The research is afterwards particularized to the case of Cluj-Napoca. The semi-structured interview is used in

order to obtain opinions and recommendations of both IT specialists, representatives of local authorities, and of an observer practitioner expert. Moreover, the electorate opinion about the perspective use of Internet voting is shaped by conducting a local survey.

The content analysis aims to emphasize the visibility and the knowledge on Internet voting issue in Romania. Furthermore, it is important to highlight to what extent this issue is debated at the level of public opinion. The object of the analysis is represented by a part of the written national press, namely the newspapers that have the highest circulation, based on the Romanian Audit Office of Circulation (Biroul Român de Audit al Tirajelor): Cotidianul, Adevărul, Jurnalul Național, and Evenimentul Zilei. In addition, due to the fact that the analysis focuses on the online form of the newspapers, the paper aims to observe the way citizens comment on the press articles. Thus, the readers' comments related to each article are analyzed. This foray is important mainly in order to get aware of the degree individuals read electronic voting related articles and are interested in this subject.

In order to have a specialized perspective on Internet voting *semi-structured interviews* with IT and communications specialists and representatives of local Public Administration who may be involved in the process of changing the voting system are conducted. Furthermore, an interview with a specialist practitioner is conducted as well. The importance of this interview lies in his opportunity to observe and coordinate the elections in several countries in Europe, United States or Asia. The purpose of these interviews is to supplement the current information held on Internet voting with a set of specialized information. The main issue to be discussed during these interviews is the technical feasibility of the perspective use of Internet voting. In addition, this foray tries to highlight the positive and negative aspects regarding the management capacity of a new voting system.

The opinion survey is conducted across the entire city of Cluj-Napoca. Subjects are chosen based on quota sampling. The reason for choosing this type of nonrandom sampling is precisely that of finding the reasons behind the choice or preference for a particular type of voting mechanism. In order to define the quotas, the following control the variables with their related categories are used: gender, age and education level. The most important issues to be addressed in the survey are: the perceived importance of the act of voting, the voting behavior, the use of computers and Internet, the awareness of Internet voting possibility, and the perception of efficiency of Internet voting mechanism. The reason these issues are emphasized is twofold. First, these issues may indicate the manner in which individuals perceive the importance of

voting in general. Second, they illustrate and evaluate the feasibility of introducing Internet voting.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, a descriptive-exploratory research is conducted. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the complementarities of the selected methods. Beyond the need to generalize the results, the research aims to capture the elements related to the in depth perceptions.

CHAPTER IV – Internet voting in the Romanian written press

The print Romanian media has recently started to increasingly address the hypothesis suffrage using Internet. This is particularly due to citizens that have left to work abroad and who are unable to get to the major cities of the respective countries in order to express their right to vote. Although, most of the times, the subject of Internet voting appears in the context of Diaspora's situation, this chapter aims to analyze the major newspapers in Romania in order to emphasize the general elements on this issue that can be poached and implemented at the national and local level. Moreover, it is important to highlight the extent to which electronic voting is mentioned and its adjacent elements.

According to the Romanian Audit Office of Circulation, the largest circulation newspapers are: Cotidianul, Adevărul, Jurnalul Național and Evenimentul Zilei. These newspapers are analyzed in their online format, all articles containing reference to electronic voting being considered, regardless of the year. It is important to note is that the analysis is carried out from June to July 2009, the articles analyzed being all the available online ones until then. The articles are presented in a summary form within each chapter, and they are analyzed in a chronological order. For each of the reviewed articles, the comments from readers that are directly related to the topic discussed are considered. These comments may be useful to highlight the way the complex issue of using electronic voting is perceived at the common sense level.

Even though the literature clearly distinguishes the specific of Internet voting, in ordinary and in journalistic language, the concept of “electronic voting” is mainly used. This concept can refer both to the Internet voting and to voting within voting stations by using machines. However, it is understood that, in the autochthon context, electronic voting refers

only to Internet voting, either it is about voting at the polling stations or voting by using the personal computer.

The main research question is to what extent the Internet voting issue is present in the Romanian press? The two secondary questions of this part are: What are the contexts in which the subject of Internet voting is discussed? and To what extent the possible introduction of Internet voting is related mainly to the needs of the Diaspora?

Thus, the present analysis primarily intends to observe which are the main topics discussed about electronic voting and how the involved actors relate themselves to this new concept. The main pursued issues are: pros and cons electronic voting, the existence of the technical elements related to electronic voting, electronic voting for Diaspora and for the citizens within the country, the illustration of other countries example in which Internet voting is being used.

The online version of **Cotidianul** contains ten articles on electronic voting. These articles are written from 2005 to 2009. Except for one item, the number of readers' views for each item goes above 500. It is interesting to note that the article with the highest number of views (1262) is written by Cristian Pîrvulescu, civil society's voice probably being considered very credible. Assuming that the title is the most visible part of an article and draws attention to a topic, it is important to stress that while the concept of "Internet" appears in the headlines only once, those of "electronic voting", "Diaspora", and "click" appear twice each. Gathering the explored issues, it can be stated that electronic voting is desired by some and less desired by others. While, on the one hand, civil society vigorously advocates for the introduction of this type of vote mainly for the Romanians abroad, the political class seems to deliberately prevent it. Moreover, even if there are given concrete examples of countries that operate this type of voting mechanisms, one of the most discussed being the case of Estonia, the readers do not exclusively support the electronic voting. While some believe that electoral reform is needed to lower the costs of the vote, others highlight the fact that such a reform is unnecessary given that the political class is the same. In this context, it is apparent that the discussions about electronic voting increase in intensity with the timeline progress of events. If, in the early years, the electronic voting issue is only mentioned as a measure amending the electoral system, the last items discuss and bring not only much more information about this topic but also a greater depth of arguments.

The **Adevărul** articles written on electronic voting occupies the largest period of time and the largest space. Written over a period of six years, the number of online articles about electronic voting is 26. The discussed topics are mainly related to the electronic voting used by the soldiers in armed conflict countries, to the use of electronic voting for the elections within political parties, and to online voting as an improvement of the electoral mechanism for the Diaspora. In this context, the headlines are relevant enough so that the reader can catch the meaning from the outset. Thus, while nine of the titles contain the concept of “electronic voting”, two titles for each include concepts like “computer”, “Diaspora vote”, and “vote by mail”, all of which being relevant for the topic under consideration. As the other newspapers examined, the issue of electronic voting is discussed at a high level as well. However, although it is constantly repeated since 2003 that the electronic voting is likely to be used in the next election, at least for the Romanians abroad, nothing practical is being established in this direction. Besides technical deficiencies Romania is facing, such as a low number of Internet users, politicians reject postal voting and are not at all enthusiastic about the electronic one, although the latter seems to be more secure than the paper mechanism. Furthermore, the bill related to electronic voting, submitted to public debate, is nonexistent or, at least, the approved committee members are not aware of data regarding this issue.

Unlike the above presented newspapers, **Jurnalul Național** does not enjoy a broad overview of the topic on Internet voting. The online version of the newspaper comprises only five articles that refer to this subject. Moreover, the number of views from the readers is relatively small compared to the previous situations. The articles mainly relate to the change of the electoral law in general or to the problems that occurred in the United States, during 2008 presidential elections, with voting machines. Only one of the reviewed articles mentions the idea of electronic voting in the headline. Although the number of articles on Internet voting is low, there are extremely important issues that are mentioned within. While on the one hand, the perspective of introducing the electronic voting is a positive one especially for the Romanians abroad that often have been discouraged to express their electoral choice, on the other hand, the citizens within the borders must wait longer for such a voting system. This is mainly due to a few technical problems that need to be resolved, such as, for example, the need for electronic identification of individuals, namely the change of present identity cards with electronic cards. Moreover, even if it was discussed in the case of the United States’ elections, the subject of an appropriate information and education, both at the voter and at the organizers levels, fits

perfectly in the context of future use of Internet voting in Romania, the novelty of such a system being a complex one.

The online edition of **Evenimentul Zilei** contains 12 articles that refer to electronic voting. There also have been included in the analysis two articles that refer to digital signature, this topic being extremely important in the context of electronic voting. The most important topics discussed in the analyzed articles, besides the digital signature, are the electronic voting system used in the preliminary elections of PSD and during Estonia's elections. Although there are not provided information on the number of views for each article, the headlines offer a variety of interesting phrases. The concept of "electronic voting" or derived concepts are used twice, as well as the concept of "digital signature". In addition, relevant concepts are: Internet, election, computer, or vote. All themes in these articles show that electronic voting involves a high degree of responsibility. While the example of Estonia shows that this type of vote is possible, from the example of the preliminary elections in the PSD one can note that there are many organizational shortcomings and aspects that still need to be corrected, particularly related to voter education, to the improvement of the used technology, and also to disposal of voting choice influences.

This part of the paper aims at highlighting how the issue of electronic voting in general and of Internet voting in particular is treated in the Romanian press. It is interesting to note that, while the public opinion is not familiar with the concept of online voting, the media do not provide a clear definition. However, there is a relatively high number of views of the articles, especially in cases in which Cristian Pîrvulescu, the President of Pro Democrația Association, expresses his opinion. The most debated topic within the examined articles is the introduction of electronic voting for the Romanians abroad. The initial issues in this debate are linked to the reduced number of polling stations and extremely high costs in terms of time and financial resources, cost that foreign citizens are obliged to pay if they want to express their vote. Even if, since 2004, the promises of the political class have been numerous, the electronic voting system has not been yet implemented and the prospects are not necessarily optimistic.

Regarding the issue of introducing Internet voting in the country, the politicians emphasized that this is a near future issue but is not a priority. This step firstly involves the modification of the existing identity cards with electronic ones. In the same vein, the example of Estonia highlights some of the critical technical aspects related to this type of vote. First, an almost full coverage in terms of Internet usage is needed, which is not yet the case of Romania.

Second, an early relatively high investment in the specialized technique is required: software, electronic cards, or card readers. Although there are different opinions regarding the security of electronic voting, its introduction, at a certain point in time, is perceived as irreversible. Moreover, with the help of specialists in order to improve the security systems, the Internet voting can become even more secure than the paper vote. In addition, it can be exercised from the personal computer and it can simplify the bureaucratic procedure of voting by the rapidity with which the results are finalized.

CHAPTER V – Internet voting in specialists’ opinion

This chapter, based on the case study of Cluj-Napoca, aims to achieve an analysis of the opinions of IT specialists, local Public Administration representatives and practitioners on the feasibility of introducing internet voting. The analysis also aims both to emphasize if there are differences between these groups’ opinions and to state the reasons why the experts consider that Internet voting is a viable solution to improve the electoral act. The interviews are applied during January-May 2010.

Two different guidelines are formulated but that also contain common questions. The common problems that are addressed to the specialists are mainly concern the following issues: the possible advantages and disadvantages of the alternative online voting method, the resources needed for the introduction of Internet voting, the possibility of introducing Internet voting in Romania, the possibility of increasing the electoral turnout in the context of parallel use of both methods of voting (both classical method on paper and online voting), the profile of the most inclined to use Internet voting electorate, and the personal behavior of the interviewee in the case of having different voting methods. The differences between the two interview guides are developed in the context of more specific issues. Thus, while IT professionals are asked about online transactions, about the security of online voting process, on matters relating to authentication, confidentiality, integrity, privacy, accuracy, digital signature, the Public Administration representatives respond to questions about the legal implications of the electoral system modification.

In addition to the interviews with the IT specialists and the representatives of Local Public Administration, an interview with a specialist practitioner is conducted. The purpose of this singular interview is to in-depth explore how a person who has observed and coordinated

election in many countries on different continents (Europe, U.S., Asia) perceive the idea of voting over the Internet in general and may associate it with the context of Romania in particular.

Regarding the interviews with the **IT specialists**, there are conducted four such interviews. The respondents are from both public academia (Technical University of Cluj-Napoca) and private environment. Thus, their specialized areas are: Electrical engineering, Computer science and Information technology; Information systems security (cryptography and steganography); Computer science and Anti-virus technologies. As noted during the interviews' analysis, although sometimes there are different views, some issues are unanimously accepted. Although, on the long run and in parallel with the traditional paper voting mechanism, the online voting seems to be extremely beneficial, a detailed focus on security is needed. Although the Internet voting has many advantages that pertain specifically to the ease and speed with which the vote can be exercised and the results can be measured, this type of vote raises a set of technical issues that may underpin the possibility of election fraud.

In conducting the interviews with the **representatives of the local government** the paper aims to select both the appropriate persons in order to provide consistent answers regarding the issue of Internet voting, and people from various government institutions. In this respect, three interviews are conducted: an interview with one of the Vice-mayors of Cluj-Napoca, an interview with a representative of the Local Council and an interview with a representative of the County Council. The purpose of these choices is that of observing differences of opinion, especially considering the fact that the age ranges of the interviewee are different (the Vice-mayor - 25 to 30 years, the representative of the County Council - 30-35 years, and the representative of the Local Council - 40-55 years old). Many of the questions are similar as in the case of IT specialists, the reason being that of comparing the sets of answers. The legislative part on the Internet voting is stressed more. The purpose of conducting interviews with representatives of Local Public Administration is that of observing their view on the feasibility of introducing Internet voting in general and in Cluj-Napoca in particular. Although the responses are largely different, there are some general valid conclusions. First, the Internet vote is perceived as a quick and easy voting option that may encourage young people to participate in the electoral act. At the same time, in the context of new technology, the question of knowledge and resources differences and of security arises. Second, legally speaking, the feasibility of introducing Internet voting at the national and local level is at least unlikely on the

short to medium run, political will being required. Finally, and despite all the improbabilities, Internet voting is perceived as a way that can increase the electoral turnout especially among young people who are more receptive to new technologies, and among the undecided voters or among individuals that have had less pleasant experiences in election day.

The above presented interviews are completed with the perception of a **practitioner** regarding the Internet voting. This practitioner has had the opportunity to observe and coordinate elections in several countries like Switzerland, USA, Kosovo, Iraq, Portugal or Romania. This experience gives him a legitimate position in order to express a valid opinion on the future possibility to use Internet voting in Romania and on its implications. In this regard, this interview is treated as a step in learning best practices that other countries use in the voting process. The interview begins with questions common to both interview guides already described. However, during the discussion, new topics have emerged.

The information received during this interview is multiple, the respondent bringing into question some particularly relevant aspects in the context of Internet voting. First, one of the issues is related to the low confidence level of the individuals in the electoral system in general and in the results. However, the use of an online voting system requires a high degree of confidence in the organizers and in the system managers. Second, based on respondents' opinion that there are no perfect elections, it is emphasized the need to know in detail how elections are carried out in other states. In this respect, poaching and adapting best practices to the Romanian system are needed. Moreover, the recommendations made by Romanian elections' observers need to be taken into account. Third, it is repeatedly raised the need for a national register of voters in order to remove suspicions related to election fraud. In addition, at the same time with the creation of the national register, an information infrastructure based on which individuals can exercise informed vote is needed as well. In this respect, before being used as a voting support, the Internet should be used as an information tool. Fourth, before discussing the actual introduction of Internet voting, the implementation of pilot projects that can help both to quantify the resources involved and to highlight technical issues and voter reaction is required. Finally, the respondent's proposal is that of first testing Internet voting for the Romanians abroad. Although a project related to mail voting is being discussed at the national level, the subject thinks that, due to a poor postal system, the Internet vote would be a more appropriate option.

Based on the analysis of three sets of interviews, it can be concluded that the views of those interviewed are not necessarily uniform. Besides that there are differences of opinions even within the same group of specialists, these differences are apparent between groups. Regarding the similar views of the interviewee, they were related mainly to the advantages and disadvantages of Internet voting, to the ability of the online voting system to increase the electoral turnout, and to the profile of the electorate that would mostly use Internet voting. Thus, one can say that Internet voting, compared to the traditional paper vote, is perceived as being faster, both in terms of exercising the vote and in terms of quantifying the results, as not implying the need to travel to a certain station, as implying less human errors and long-term lower costs. Furthermore, online voting can become a cause of turnout increase, particularly for certain categories of voters, especially young people or individuals for whom it is harder to travel. Regarding the disadvantages, the main problem is the security of an Internet voting system. This problem is particularly concerned with the fact that the vote is not transmitted or that the voting option may be associated with the voter. In this regard, it is pointed out the lack of a high level of confidence in such a voting system. Moreover, another detected problem is related to differences in resources and knowledge between different categories of individuals. Thus, those who have computer and Internet access and know how to use this technology are automatically in advantage comparing to those who do not have these resources. Finally, a voting system that offers the opportunity for home voting may lead to the loss of social perspective of the act of voting. All the surveyed groups claimed that Internet voting may increase turnout. In the context in which young people are increasingly participating less in the electoral act, the profile of the individual that would use online voting is comprise of the following characteristics: young, highly educated, urban resident, and avid Internet user, keen on the new possibilities of the virtual environment.

As expected, the differences between the three interviewed groups have been based on individual specialization. While IT specialists have been focused on matters of voting system security and related aspects, the representatives of Public Administration have focused on legislation and the practitioner have emphasized his experience and the best practices that can be applied in the case of Romania. Although most of the respondents cited online voting security problems, the IT professionals have treated this issue more in depth. They claim that even though it is possible to control an online voting system, it requires a high number of risks that can be countered by creating and managing a highly complex infrastructure. From the

administrative point of view, since this is a central electoral system, skepticism is bound to the unlikelihood of modifying the legislation on the short or medium run. Moreover, practical experience highlights that if more developed countries did not have similar initiatives, it is highly unlikely that the Internet voting system is a viable solution for the Romanian context in which Internet coverage is poor. At best, this system can be tested for the Romanians living abroad. In the context of advantages and disadvantages of Internet voting, one limit of this paper is that the risks of the online voting, mainly those related to security, have been subsumed to the disadvantages, although they could have been constituted in a distinctive category.

In conclusion, although it is considered an ambitious but long-term sustainable project, and even though it has some impossible to ignore advantages, the Internet voting mechanism remains a topic that needs to be further discussed by IT specialists, local and central Public Administration representatives and international practitioners. However, this approach of conducting interviews was able to raise certain issues related to Internet voting, to emphasize experts' views on the issue and to trace future prospects of debate.

CHAPTER VI – Internet voting in Cluj-Napoca citizens' opinion

Complementing the views of specialists on the use of online voting, this part of the paper seeks to emphasize the voters' view on this issue. The main purpose of this analysis is to see whether individuals have knowledge about Internet voting, which are its perceived implications and to examine to what extent they would be willing to use the new voting system.

The main research question of this methodological part of the paper is to what extent people from Cluj-Napoca perceive the suffrage using Internet as a feasible and effective opportunity? Moreover, the paper aims to examine both the extent to which the introduction of Internet voting may increase electoral turnout and which are the main reasons why people would use such a voting system. Furthermore, the research aims to portray the Internet voter in terms of socio-demographic and standard of living characteristics, the interest in politics and the Internet use. Thus, the emphasis is on the openness for a future Internet voting system, on the respondents' level of trust on this online mechanism, and the level of agreement regarding the introduction of this voting system in parallel with the classical one.

In this context, the survey research hypotheses are the following:

H1. Young people with higher education levels declare themselves more open regarding the introduction and use of Internet voting.

H2. Men, more than women, are more open to the introduction and use of Internet voting.

H3. The participation in the last elections brings greater openness to the future use of Internet voting.

H4. The more intense Internet use is, the more open the individuals are to the introduction and use of Internet voting.

H5. The main reason for a future uses of Internet voting is the lack of need to travel to the voting station.

H5.1 The security and safety issues, specific to the online voting process, are grounds for a skeptical approach.

H5.2 The introduction of Internet voting is perceived as having the capacity to increase the electoral turnout.

In order to provide answers to the research questions and to verify the above mentioned assumptions, an opinion survey is conducted. Data were collected during October-November 2009. The sample is composed exclusively of individuals who live in Cluj-Napoca. The sample consists of 776 individuals. The type of sampling is based on quotas, the sample being approximately structured following the population it has been extracted from (National Statistics Institute). The main quotas used are: gender, age and education level. The main reason these variables are chosen in order to bound the sample is that they are considered in the literature as relevant factors that determines the perception on Internet voting mechanism.

The instrument used in the survey is the questionnaire. This survey is composed of 51 questions, respectively 113 variables. The main issues addressed in the questionnaire are the following: the satisfaction level of living standard, the interest in politics, the perceived importance of the electoral act, the level of trust, the main information sources, the computer use in general and the Internet use in particular, the perception of Internet voting and socio-demographic variables. In order to analyze data, SPSS statistical program is used (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Starting from an overview of the obtained data, the paper focuses on the relationship between the quotas variables and other specific variable. In this respect, the approach is divided into two major lines of analysis. The first part emphasizes the differences between groups of

respondents based on the quotas (gender, age and educational level). The second part highlights the most significant relationships between specific variables related to the use and perception of Internet voting.

Considering the three variables chosen to delimit the sample, namely gender, age and education level, this part emphasizes the main features specific to different groups of respondents. The statistically significant relationships are especially considered. First, regarding the gender of the respondents, the main idea that can be detected is that differences between men and women are minimal in all the examined respects. However, there are some differences that need to be stressed. Although both women and men have low interest in politics, voting is considered to be very important by more women than men. In addition, more women claim they would participate to the vote if elections take place next Sunday. However, when it comes to technology, men are the majority in terms of level of confidence in it. Moreover, more men than women use the Internet and know better the Internet specific commands. In this context, it is interesting to notice that more women than men say they would vote using the Internet, although not all of them have heard of this alternative mechanism of voting. In addition, women are the ones that declare more often than men do that there were situations in which it would have been beneficial to have the possibility to use Internet voting. In this respect, more women than men say that they would agree with Internet voting introduction in parallel with the traditional paper voting mechanism. Second, in the context of respondents' age, the data show that, overall, age groups up to 54 years are the most open to the prospect of Internet voting. However, there is a significant percentage of respondents over 55 and even over 65 years that, although has not heard of the Internet voting mechanism, declares that they would at least try to use it if it were possible. Despite that the introduction of a new voting system requires a high degree of information, it is likely that the level of curiosity to overtake it. Third, considering that individuals with higher education are those who are mostly familiar with the Internet and its functions, it can be concluded that these individuals are those who would use the online vote if would be possible. Moreover, having the infrastructure and the knowledge, it is likely that they may highly understand the specific of Internet voting and use it constantly.

Building on the previous analysis, the paper also tries to find relationships between the most important variables exclusively related to the electoral behavior and to the opinion on Internet voting. Thus, the opinion on Internet voting has been linked in particular with the opinion on vote, with voting behavior in general and with Internet skills. One of the

relationships that need to be highlighted refers to the fact that a large number of the respondents that have not participated in past elections have a high level of confidence in technology. Furthermore, the majority of those who did not participate in the recent elections knows very well and well the Internet specific commands. Moreover, while more than half of those who did not vote in the last election say that they would use the online voting system if possible, a similar percentage of those who would vote next Sunday, say they would choose this voting mechanism. In this context, the introduction of Internet voting seems a useful solution for both conserving and increasing the interest in the electoral process in general and for increasing voter turnout.

Based on the two major lines of analysis, the conclusions are multiple. Regarding the age of the respondents, although individuals over 45 years are most interested in politics, young people are most optimistic in terms of living prospective over a year and have the highest level of trust in technology. Furthermore, although young people are those who declare in the greatest extent that they did not participate in past elections, they are the ones who know best and use the Internet more often. In this context, individuals up to 54 years old are those who are more likely to use Internet voting. However, there are people over 54 who, although they do not know the specific commands of the Internet, claim that they would try the online voting mechanism. Moreover, it is interesting to emphasize that young people up to 24 years states that they could have only a low degree of confidence in the online voting mechanism. In terms of education level, the results indicate that individuals with higher education are the most interested in politics. The individuals who believe that voting is very important have graduated at least the high school. Regarding the knowledge and use of the Internet, the respondents with higher education are those who know best and use more this technology. In this context, those who claim to use Internet voting in the upcoming elections are especially individuals with graduate and postgraduate studies. Thus, one can say that the first hypothesis is valid in the sense that young individuals with a higher education level are those who feel more open to the online voting system.

Despite the fact that men are most interested in the political field in general, women consider in a higher degree that participation in elections is very important. In addition, even though men are those who have a higher level of trust in technology and even though they use Internet more often, there are more women who feel more open to the introduction and use of Internet voting. In the same vein, there are more women than men that say that, in the past, there have been situations in which it would have been beneficial to be able to vote online.

Given these data, the second research hypothesis is not validated, women being more open than men to the introduction and use of Internet voting.

In a context in which there are more respondents who claim they have not voted in the last election but who know very well the specific commands of the Internet, more than half of those who voted in the last elections states that they would use online voting if this would be possible. In the same vein, it is interesting to note that a high level of Internet knowledge implies a greater openness to the use of Internet voting in perspective and a greater level of confidence in it. The majority of individuals that stress that they are daily Internet users would vote online. Thus, both the third and the fourth hypothesis are validated. An important idea that still needs to be clarified refers to the fact that almost half of those who say that have never heard of Internet voting would try this mechanism.

Regarding the perception of Internet voting characteristics, the data show that Internet voting is highly preferred due to lack of need to travel to the voting station and to the comfort it gives. At the same time, if security and safety issues are mentioned mainly by persons with higher education, the issues related to the novelty of the online voting system have been highlighted by the rest of the respondents. Moreover, the inequality that Internet voting can produce between those who have the knowledge and the access to the Internet and those without these resources is a problem observed by most of the respondents, regardless of their characteristics.

Based on the obtained data, Internet voting, to some extent, has the ability to increase voter turnout. This topic can be treated from two perspectives. First, asked to what extent online voting is able to bring more people to vote, individuals favorably incline the conclusions toward democracy, namely to a larger participation. Second, there are a significant number of individuals, especially young people, who, although have said they did not participate in the last elections, they would use Internet voting. Thus, it can be argued that Internet voting, used in parallel with the traditional paper mechanism, is perceived as a mechanism that can both diversify the electoral process and bring benefits for voters and for the democratic system itself.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is based on the reality that the electorate turnout is declining in most of the democracies. In this context, the question that needs to be addressed is whether there exists a mechanism by which citizens to be encouraged to express their option to vote more than before. One of the possible answers to this question, respectively one of the solutions to this problem, may be the introduction of alternative voting methods that facilitate the act of voting and encourage voter curiosity. In this respect, the present research aims to examine how Internet voting, as an alternative voting method, is perceived by both specialists and ordinary citizens. It is important to note that this paper treats online voting as a voting mechanism that operates in parallel with the traditional paper voting. The case study of this research is Cluj-Napoca.

In this context, the research questions refer to the following aspects. First, in order to have an overview on the level of discussions on alternative voting methods in Romania, the paper analyzes the extent to which the Internet is currently the subject of the suffrage in national newspapers. Moreover, using the online versions of four of the most read newspapers, the research aims to highlight the links that these discussions have rather with citizens abroad than with citizens within the borders. Second, given that the possible introduction of Internet voting involves technical and legal discussions that may be considered sensitive, the research implies three sets of semi-structured interviews with IT professionals, with representatives of local Public Administration and with an observer practitioner. This approach aims at outlining some expert opinion on the feasibility of introducing Internet voting in Romania in general and in Cluj-Napoca in particular, and on the main advantages and disadvantages of such a particular voting system. Third, the introduction of a new voting method being a topic that directly concerns the voter, a survey is conducted in Cluj-Napoca. The main analyzed problems are related to the availability and motivation of voters to choose to vote online, to the outlining of an online user profile and to measuring the potential level of trust that individuals might have in the online voting mechanism. The research methods used for obtaining data are content analysis, semi-structured interview and survey.

Depending on the pursued issues, the main obtained results are highlighted. In terms of the content analysis on newspapers, the concept of “electronic voting” is prominent used unlike the concept of “Internet voting”, although, based on the context, they are identical in meaning.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that this concept is not clearly defined in the print media, the need of such a definition being vital in the perspective of introducing the online voting. However, it is interesting that the highest number of views is noted in articles in which the opinion of the President of Pro Democrația Association is presented. Based on this conclusion, one can emphasize that there is an association between the initiatives of this association and the legitimacy of its opinion regarding Internet voting. As expected, the subject of electronic voting is mostly present in the context of Diaspora election issues. Thus, the introduction of an alternative voting system is mainly considered for citizens living abroad. The main reasons for this are related to the limited number of polling stations and the high costs that voters have to pay to be able to exercise their right to vote (for example, large distances they are forced to travel to get to a voting station). Although Diaspora's vote is a widely debated issue, articles appeared in the press point out the existence of a political promise that has a pessimistic outlook. Regarding the possibility of introducing Internet voting within the country, political figures that have publicly expressed their opinion, believes that this approach is possible and even irreversible, but it is not yet a priority. The grounds relied primarily on the costs that such an action would involve: changing the existing identity cards with electronic ones or creating the necessary infrastructure and educating and informing the public.

The interviews with experts led the discussions on the Internet vote to a more detailed level. Whether it was about IT specialists or representatives of Public Administration, all of them have heard of this method of voting and primarily characterize it as being facile. In the same vein, the main advantages of the online voting reported by the respondents are related to the convenience of voting process by having the possibility to exercise the vote from any location with Internet connection, to the attraction that this voting system can have on young people and to the reduction of the necessary time in order to quantify the results.

Although Cluj-Napoca is perceived as having more specific characteristics in terms of people living in this city (a low average age, a high level of education etc.) and even though, at first glance, these features may be feasible for an online voting system, the possibility of introducing this mechanism is limited by the scars of the municipality's resources and by the legislation that needs to be nationally changed. Moreover, the main problem of online voting, perceived by both IT specialists and representatives of Local Public Administration, is the security that such a voting system offers. Although most security issues can be solved relatively easy, multiple applications and testing are required.

An important issue raised by the specialist practitioner is the lack of voter confidence in the system and in the results, technical problems not being so important in his view. In the same vein, the need to create a national registry in order to resolve the issues associated with election fraud is highlighted (for example, the deceased persons who still vote, the multiple votes etc.). The need to achieve some pilot projects that can give information on the costs implied and on the individuals' reaction is also stressed. Moreover, the priority seems to be the introduction of Internet voting for the Diaspora mainly due to very low turnout registered abroad and due to high voting costs involved.

In terms of the potential that online voting could have on increasing turnout, all the respondents agreed that the online voting mechanism can improve the quality of democracy. Young people, whose participation is generally low, with a higher education level, attracted by technical devices, and citizens who cannot travel to the polling stations are the socio-demographic categories that can raise participation rates.

As a natural complement to the results obtained from the analysis of print media and opinions of specialists, the survey is emphasizing the citizens' opinion about Internet voting. The survey results reveal different aspects. As expected, a small percentage of those surveyed have heard of Internet voting method. Moreover, few people, put in a position to imagine this kind of vote, declare that there have been situations in which the online mechanisms would have been beneficial. The research results emphasize some variables that can be used in designing the online voter profile. Thus, these individuals are young, know English, have a relatively high level of education and self-perceive as rather rich than poor. In addition, they have computers, Internet connection and they are familiar with activities that can happen online. In terms of political issues, these individuals are rightists rather than leftists, are not highly interested in politics and have not necessarily voted in the last general election.

Thus, by combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the research attempts both to create a broad insight on the perception of the Internet voting and to capture detail aspects regarding this mechanism. Moreover, this research can be perceived as the beginning of a more comprehensive analysis of how the electoral law should and could be changed and how security and trust issues could be solved.

Limits and research perspectives

Like any research, this paper presents several sets of shortcomings. These limits can be grouped into two categories: shortcomings related to the choice of the case study and shortcomings related to the choice and application of the research methods. Based on these limits, several research perspectives are emphasized.

The first set of shortcomings refers to the choice of a single case study, namely Cluj-Napoca. Being a more special context, characterized by a high level of economic, social and technological development, the data obtained cannot be generalized to other cities. Moreover, the present study only considers the idea of introducing Internet voting in the city and has not considered it at the level of Diaspora, an idea repeatedly discussed in politicians and specialists' statements.

The second set of shortcomings, and perhaps the most consistent one, refers to the research methods chosen and the way they are applied. First, in terms of the content analysis, the media monitoring has stopped in July 2009. Although all the articles published in the selected newspapers are considered, the question of introducing alternative voting methods, especially for Romanians abroad, has been debated in the media in the context of the November 2009 election as well. In addition, only four national newspapers are taken into account, a greater number may have been more appropriate in order to obtain more complex results. Second, although for the interviews representative persons for their areas are selected, the number of interviews is small compared to the importance of Internet voting issue. Finally, the survey is conducted using the quota sampling. Not having a probabilistic sample, the degree of data generalization is limited.

Based on these limitations, perspective researches can be outlined in order to obtain a more detailed picture of how Internet voting is perceived by experts and by the electorate. First, the research conducted in Cluj-Napoca can be a starting point towards a similar research at the national or Diaspora level. Apart from the results that have emerged from this research and that can be used to study in more detail the introduction of Internet voting, the instruments designed can be replicated. Furthermore, although only the subject of Internet voting is considered, the results of this research can be used in order to analyze the possibility of introducing other alternative voting methods, such as mail voting. Second, in the context in which the alternative voting methods are considered especially for the Diaspora, an analysis of media in the countries

where most of the Romanians abroad live would be beneficial. Thus, an analysis of international newspapers would provide extra information. Third, since this is a sensitive subject that raises many issues, further discussions with experts, both IT specialists and representatives of the Permanent Electoral Authority, are required. Moreover, based on examples such as Estonia, where Internet voting is successfully implemented, the analysis and application of several best practices is useful. Finally, considering the case of Romania, where the acceptance level of new technologies is quite low, pilot tests in which voters are faced with the reality of using alternative voting methods are needed. Based on these experiments, both the reactions of citizens regarding online voting and the technical issues presented during the tests can be emphasized.

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