

# ELECTRONIC CIVIL REGISTRIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Information and Communication Technology is, in many ways, a unique technology. It has the characteristics of the “treshold” technology, with the potential to rapidly change the complete social structure and to transform the entire state structure. This technology has radically changed the way of living, learning, working and entertaining in a single human generation, and it has been profoundly transforming the way people, companies and public institutions interact.

Both the citizens and companies have shown a particular interest in the development of e-government which provides them with a faster, easier and cheaper way to take care of their duties before the authorities of different government levels. Everywhere in the world the concept of e-government provides interactive electronic services integrated into all levels of the public sector and adjusted to the needs of the citizens and businesses. Therefore, the Republic of Serbia is currently giving special attention to this segment. The development of e-government is directed towards ensuring that citizens can benefit from this kind of doing business, reducing the administrative burden of both businesses and citizens, increasing the efficiency of administrative authorities and holders of public powers through the use of information and communication technologies, enhancing the citizen participation in democratic decision-making, and protecting people's privacy and safety rights.

Aiming to accomplish both technical and technological modernization of public administration by applying the latest achievements of information and communication technologies, the Public Administration Reform Strategy in the Republic of Serbia established the basic principles of public administration reform, one of them being *the principle of public administration modernisation*.

The aim of this principle of public administration reform is, on one hand, to provide the citizens with an electronic access to various services by implementing the information technologies into the work of public authorities at the central and local level, and on the other hand, to enable the citizens to publicly display their own opinions on the functioning of public administration and public services in general.

In fact, the reform and modernisation of public administration based on the extensive use of information and communication technology is nowadays representing one of the key elements of an overall transition into the modern information society, since the implementation of advanced information systems increases the quality of services and improves the effectiveness, transparency, accountability and efficiency of public administration. An advanced telecommunication structure allows for a free flow of information among administrative authorities and it can provide the citizens and businesses with an enhanced access to services at lower costs.

Modernizing public administration radically changes the traditional manner in which the administrative processes are carried out. This change means that the citizens will no longer be required to be physically present and go from one

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to the other authority, as they are usually required to do, and waste their time and money collecting the documents needed to submit their requests. Instead, thanks to the information and communication technology which enables a complete automation of administrative procedures and integration of geographically distributed authorities, the citizens can meet their needs by submitting their requests at only one location, regardless of the number of different authorities involved in processing citizen requests. In addition, the citizens can always check the current status of their submitted requests. In this way, the e-government provides more efficient, transparent and accountable public services that are tailored to the needs of the citizens and businesses.

In this sense, the actions undertaken to develop the e-government in the Republic of Serbia are more and more strategically and operationally directed towards providing an extensive application of information and communication technologies by state administration authorities and holders of public powers, and implementing electronic documents, signatures and identities into the public sector services.

As one of the most important actions towards the establishment of e-government which should enable the public administration modernisation and an easier and faster exercise of citizens' rights, without any cumbersome procedures and unnecessary costs, is certainly the creation of electronic civil registry – basic official records of a personal status of each citizen of the Republic of Serbia.

## **1. The concept and characteristics of civil registries**

Civil registries are kept in one of their forms from the ancient times (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, Rome), so the first definitions of the term *civil registry* date back to this period when human civilization was developing. They were basically vital records of birth and they represented the statistics on taxpayers and conscripts. At that time, the civil registry was “a small piece of paper that actually confirmed your identity and provided you with an access to your rights, privileges and obligations.”

In modern society, civil registries are defined as public documents, i.e. the documents issued on the basis of data entered into the civil registries and having the status of public documents.<sup>2</sup>

Civil registry is also defined as an official written document where the public authority determines the credibility of basic events which significantly influence both personal and family status of a natural person: birth, marriage, and death, and all the events that change the status of that natural person.<sup>3</sup>

According to the current legislation of the Republic of Serbia, civil registries are defined as primary official records of the personal status of citizens containing the facts on birth, marriage, and death, and all the other facts provided by law and all the changes related to them.

Given the structure of the data entered into civil registries, it is certain that they contain the personal data of citizens. These personal data are subject to a special personal data protection regime owing to the fact that the implementation of advanced information technologies and creation of databases, in this and any other area, is significantly threatening data security, besides having many beneficial effects.

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<sup>2</sup> Milan Počuča, Nebojša Šarkić, Family law and family legal protection, Belgrade, 2011, p.84.

<sup>3</sup> Marko Mladenović, Stanka Stjepanović, Milorad Živanović, Family law, Banjaluka, 2003. p.50.

Civil registries are managed by a registrar, who may have a deputy. Civil registries, civil registration certificates and documents issued on the basis of civil registries are public documents. The data entered in civil registries and the facts supported by them are considered valid unless lawfully proven otherwise.

Based on the legal nature of civil registries, as basic official records of the personal status of citizens, the fundamental principles underpinning their management in the Republic of Serbia can be derived and include:

- 1) *principle of officiality* – civil registries are primary official records of the personal status of citizens managed by competent authorities;
- 2) *principle of uniformity* – facts on birth, marriage and death are uniformly entered into civil registries, and all the other facts provided by law and the changes related to them;
- 3) *principle of publicity* – civil registries, civil registration certificates and documents issued on the basis of civil registries represent public documents, and
- 4) *principle of authenticity* – data entered into civil registries and the facts supported by them are considered valid unless lawfully proven otherwise.

Civil registries are managed by the Ministry of Public Administration, which is determined by the Law on Ministries<sup>4</sup>.

In accordance with the principle of decentralization, which is expressed through the government delegation model, the tasks related to civil registries (managing civil registries and performing the tasks pertaining to first-instance administrative procedures related to civil registries) are delegated to local governments (municipalities, towns, and the city of Belgrade).<sup>5</sup>

Local governments, being the holders of public powers, have the same rights and duties while performing the delegated tasks related to civil registries as the government authority under whose purview these tasks are. While performing the delegated tasks related to civil registries, the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration has all the general and specific powers of the supervisory authority provided by law.<sup>6</sup>

Civil registries are kept for registration areas, and each registration area has its own seat. A registration area includes one or more populated places which, by the Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Serbia<sup>7</sup>, constitute a municipality, town, or the city of Belgrade.

## **2. The concept and characteristics of electronic civil registries**

Electronic civil registry, or e-civil registry, is a record prescribed by the Law on Civil Registration,<sup>8</sup> managed by competent public authorities by means of electronic data processing. The e-civil registry contains only the data prescribed by this law.

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<sup>4</sup> In accordance with Article 10, Law on Ministries (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 72/12), state administration tasks related to civil registries are within the purview of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration.

<sup>5</sup> Article 6, Law on Civil Registration.

<sup>6</sup> Law on Public Administration (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 79/05, 101/07 and 95/10)

<sup>7</sup> Article 16 and 20, Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Serbia (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 129/07).

<sup>8</sup> Law on Civil Registration was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 20 of 19 March 2009.

According to the regulations on civil registries of the Republic of Serbia, an e-civil registry is actually a transcript of the original copy – the original civil registry, managed by means of electronic processing and storage of data.

In addition, the second copy of civil registry – e-civil registry has the same legal force as the first copy – the original civil registry; therefore, it is prescribed by the law<sup>9</sup> that civil registration certificates can be issued based on the data from the second copy of civil registry managed by means of electronic processing and storage of data. Moreover, if civil registration certificates are issued on the basis of the second copy of civil registry managed by means of electronic processing and storage of data, the registrar of a particular registration area of a particular municipality, town or the city of Belgrade may issue the certificates from a civil registry kept for other registration areas of that particular municipality or other municipalities, towns or the city of Belgrade, which is both legally and practically impossible when it comes to the issuance of certificates from the first copy - original civil registry.

Currently, according to applicable laws, the e-civil registry contains the data entered into the second copies of civil registries (of births, marriages and deaths) managed for all registration areas of all the municipalities and towns in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of the moment of their creation.

Owing to the fact that it contains basic official records of citizens, this database represents an information system being developed to include the databases from other related areas, such as information subsystems of the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries.<sup>10</sup>

E-civil registry is managed in a manner that provides connectivity, compatibility, exchange and use of data and information, ensuring the protection of citizens' personal data it contains.

The authorities that perform the delegated tasks of civil registration management are connected through the information and communication network within the information system of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. They provide data logging at the spot of their creation, accuracy, quality, and protection of data processing and transmission, data availability to authorized users under the same conditions, the application of uniform standards and the exchange of data and documents (civil registration certificates).

The stipulated facts, data, and changes associated with them that are entered into civil registries, data on municipalities and towns and their registration areas, as well as the code lists and classifications needed for their use constitute a single database of the e-civil registry.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, it is worth noting that the facts and data and the changes associated with them entered into the first copy – the original civil registry are also entered into the e-civil registry. In fact, the e-civil registry is being managed along with the first copy – the original civil registry, where the registrar simultaneously enters the data into both copies, both paper and electronic.

The authorities entrusted to perform the management of the e-civil registry are determined by the law governing this area. According to the Law on Civil Registration<sup>12</sup>, the e-civil registry is managed by the authorities entrusted to

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<sup>9</sup> Article 81 paragraph 2, Law on Civil Registration.

<sup>10</sup> Article 92, Law on Civil Registration.

<sup>11</sup> Directive amending the Directive concerning the management of civil registries and civil registry forms (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 5/13) determined the Single methodology for managing the second copy of civil registries by means of electronic processing and storage of data within the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries.

<sup>12</sup> Article 6, Law on Civil Registration.

conduct public administration tasks related to civil registration management, and it is kept at the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. The competent authorities are requested to submit to the Ministry the contents of the second copy of civil registries in its electronic form aligned to the original for the previous year by 31 January of the current year at the latest. Before the second copy of civil registries is submitted to the Ministry, a registrar is obliged to enter any subsequent note or correction into both the original civil registry and its second copy. A transcript of any subsequent note or correction entered into the original civil registry whose second copy has already been submitted to the Ministry for safekeeping, should be immediately, or no later than the next business day, submitted to the Ministry by the registrar so that the subsequent notes or corrections could be entered into the second copy of the civil registry.

### **3. Civil Registration Management Systems**

Before the adoption of a new Law on Civil Registration<sup>13</sup>, the second copy of civil registries was being kept as a transcript or a certified copy of the first copy – the original civil registry, or by means of automatic data processing (which is the basis of the current e-civil registry).

The competent authorities who performed the delegated tasks related to civil registries could decide whether the second copy should be kept in its paper or electronic form, and the competent state administration authority in whose purview these public administration tasks were (the Ministry of Administration), had no significant impact on these decisions.

This resulted in keeping the second copy of civil registries in its paper form, while keeping it by means of automatic data processing was not provided for all the registration areas of a particular municipality or town, but only for the registration area located at the seat of its municipal or city government.

Although the previously applicable Directive concerning the management of civil registries and civil registry forms<sup>14</sup> governed that the competent state administration authorities are obliged to prescribe a single methodology for managing the second copy of civil registries by means of automatic data processing, it had never happened, and the administrative authorities who were managing the civil registries developed their own applicative solutions for managing the civil registries in their electronic forms. Consequently, there were many applicative solutions for managing e-civil registries of different manufacturers, from the solutions of leading software companies and educational institutions, to the ones which came as products of individual efforts.

These solutions included various operating systems and computing platforms (DOS, Linux, Microsoft, and even certain unfamiliar operating systems), as well as various databases in the mentioned applicative solutions (MS SQL Server, Oracle, Access, MySQL, Fox, Progress & MySQL, Progress, etc.).

The data collected to assess the situation before adopting the new law, pointed to an urgent need to develop an electronic management of civil registries, first on a normative, and then operational level, because it had been observed that the entire process of digitization of civil registries was not systematically organized, i.e. not established according to predetermined and prescribed measures and actions, and also without any interconnectedness or

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<sup>13</sup> 18 March 2009.

<sup>14</sup> (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 48/90 and “Official Gazette of RS”, No. 22/91).

coordination, which resulted primarily in preventing the development of one of the most important segments in civil registries' organization and functioning. At the same time, it prevented the modernisation of public administration, as one of the three goals related to the e-administration development and set by the Strategy for Information Society Development of the Republic of Serbia<sup>15</sup>. It should also be noted that managing the civil registries in their electronic forms is a precondition to conduct a similar form of management for all the other records within the entire public administration, and it includes the reduction of cumbersome procedures and unnecessary costs of the delivery of services to citizens.

Looking at the Civil Registration Management System which preceded the adoption of the current Law on Civil Registration, there was a question posed whether its inadequate normative frame was the only reason for the underutilization of electronic data processing in civil registration management or perhaps some other objective and subjective reasons prevented the modernization of this part of public administration and the occurrence of radical changes in traditional ways of performing administrative procedures.

Therefore, while preparing the text of the applicable Law on Civil Registration, the Ministry of Administration started a research aiming to examine the extent to which computers and information technologies were being used in civil registration management in the Republic of Serbia, and to suggest the measures for improving the system of information and communication technology, according to customer requirements and expectations.

For the purpose of research, the presence and use of computers by all administrative authorities in civil registration management in the Republic of Serbia was obligatory; applicative solutions and technological platforms (operating systems and databases, presence and use); the problems faced by authorities (in terms of regulations and Information technology used) and their proposals for improving the electronic management of civil registries.

This research included each administrative authority of the Republic of Serbia which conducted civil registration management, and the data were collected through both written and field surveys. Based on these parameters, a report and an analysis of the situation were made under the title "Application of Information Technologies in Civil Registration Management."

In this research, the following was determined: the number of registration areas in the Republic of Serbia where the civil registration management is conducted – 2,645 registration areas, the number of registrars and deputy registrars who conduct civil registration management - 2,062 persons, the number of registration entries in one calendar year - 288,168 entries of births, marriages and deaths, and the number of issued civil registration certificates in one calendar year - 2,770,464 certificates.

The extent to which computer equipment is used in civil registration management was also determined. When asked whether they use computers in civil registration management, 117 authorities gave a positive response, 21 gave a negative response, and 7 authorities said they were in the process of implementing computers into civil registration management. This part of the research provided the data which gave a distorted picture of the situation concerning the usage of computers in the management of civil registries, because it was reported that 81% of the authorities conducted the electronic management of civil registries. However, if taken into account that at that moment most of the authorities conducted an electronic management of civil registries only for the registration area at the seat of its

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<sup>15</sup> Strategy for Information Society Development of the Republic of Serbia ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 87/06 and 51/10)

municipal or city government (and there are 145 of them), and not for the other registration areas (and there are 2,500 of them), it was obvious that a very small number out of a total number of civil registries was electronically managed – 20 authorities from a total of 145 authorities conducted an electronic management of civil registries by the year of 1945, 24 authorities from 1946 to 1970, 19 authorities from 1971 to 2000, 17 authorities from 2001 to 2007, and 37 authorities reported there were no records of the transition to electronic management.

The fact that a significantly smaller number of civil registries was converted into electronic forms than reported by the authorities who conducted civil registration management, is supported by another fact found during the course of the research that most of the authorities began to use computers to electronically manage the second copy of civil registries in the period from 2003 to 2005 (46 authorities or 31.7%) and from 2006 to 2008 (35 authorities or 24.1%). The research results in this area objectively showed that there was no standardized solution for electronic management of civil registries, that the quality of solutions for the electronic management of civil registries was different, and sometimes inadequate; that the solutions for the electronic management of civil registries are not interrelated nor compatible, and that the integration of such non-standardized solutions for the electronic management of civil registries was a very difficult and time-consuming task.

Due to the perceived problems in the electronic management of the second copy of civil registries, the employees of administrative authorities who manage the civil registries (heads of municipal or city governments, registrars and deputy registrars and ICT experts) made a number of proposals for the improvement of civil registration management. The most important was the proposal to enact a new law that will regulate the management of civil registries as basic official records of the personal status of citizens, to integrate the existing solutions into the Global Information System of the Republic of Serbia, to ensure that the whole process is conducted by the competent ministry, to provide the funds for the authorities who are not able to finance such a large project by themselves (purchase of computer equipment and software) and to provide appropriate training courses for registrars and their deputies during the preparation and implementation of the new information system.

At the same time, it was proposed that the issuance of civil registration certificates be legally allowed at any of the authorities entrusted with civil registration management, and not only at the authority keeping the civil registry that contains the certificates requested to be issued. This proposal was then incorporated into the Draft Law on Civil Registration. During the public discussion on this paper, the Ministry of Administration implemented the Pilot project which permitted the issuance of certificates from the civil registries kept at the registration area of Savski Venac at all the other registration areas of the city of Belgrade (Novi Beograd, Čukarica, Zvezdara, Voždovac, Palilula, and Zemun). This project aimed to check not only if the issuance was legally feasible connected to other related regulations, but also the technical capabilities of the authorities, as well as to inform the citizens on the method of certificate issuance which should enable an easier and faster exercise of civil rights in this area. This Pilot project and the practice which was then established have fully justified the solutions contained in the Draft Law. During this Pilot project implementation, a large number of citizens exercised their rights at the “counter” of an authority which did not keep the civil registry which contained their birth or marriage certificates.

The results of this research significantly helped define the solutions contained in the current Law on Civil Registration which govern the method of e-civil registration management.

#### **4. The Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries**

The new Law on Civil Registration governs the management of the second copy of civil registries on completely different bases, and it states that the management must be conducted exclusively by using electronic means for the processing and storage of data. At the same time, the Law provides that the Ministry of Administration is obliged to create the conditions for the establishment of the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries, i.e. the e-civil registries (until 28 December 2011), and that the authorities that perform the delegated tasks of civil registration management are required to convert all the civil registries into their electronic forms (no later than 28 December 2014).

The Central system, which has been established in due course, represents the first production centralized registry of the citizens in the Republic of Serbia. Due to its functionality, it meets all the local technical, IT and security standards, and the standards of the European Union in this field. This means that the Central system is housed in completely redundant IT systems, located in specialized data centers provided with a total technical and physical security. An additional redundancy is provided by forming a backup location to which the real-time data are copied from the primary location.

In order for the users (employees of the Ministry and the authorities that perform the entrusted tasks connected to civil registration management – city and municipal government) to be able to access the Central system, a special wired internet connection is needed. The connection type and quality can be different, from a direct access via optical fibers or leased lines, cable networks and ADSL. But, for security reasons, any kind of wireless internet connection has not been enabled. To connect the cities and municipalities to the Central system, the latest IP/MPLS network is used. This network enables a high throughput and it provides the network traffic security. In order to meet the needs of the Central system, the following functionalities of the IP/MPLS network are used: booking a flow with quality services, creating an IP tunnel from one point to the next, and implementing virtual private networks (VPN). Such a network is safe and secure, because it is logically separated from other virtual private networks that use the same physical resources, and the data transported through this network are protected.

Concerning the use of the Central system, a special attention is dedicated to system security, from the connection and access rights to data protection. Each segment of the Central system is protected from unauthorized users. The Central system has been provided with a physical protection at both locations – the primary and the backup, while the data center building and facilities where the system's equipment is located is physically secured with 24\7 video surveillance and strict access control. At the applicative level, the protection of the Central system is provided by the MS ISA servers that perform the function of a firewall and VPN concentrate with an implemented SSL protocol which provides a secure, encrypted Web connection. The authentication is done at the level of Internet Information Server (IIS), where a user's identity is verified and the authorization is done at the level of the Active Directory. For both of these functions, it is obligatory to use qualified electronic certificates of one of the three authorized certification bodies in the Republic of Serbia – Public Enterprise of PTT Communications “Srbija”.

Authorized users have the right to work in the Central system, and the rights are defined by the type of the work they perform and they are strictly controlled. This means that the registrars have the right to read and print the certificates



from civil registries, IT administrators from city and municipal governments have the right only to transfer the data stored in the local and Central system on a daily basis, and the employees at the Ministry have the right to supervise the operations of the Central system.

Moreover, under this system there was also a module designed for entering the data from the first copy - the original civil registries into the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries by the end users of the Central application (registrar or deputy registrar). This module helped overcome the problem of incompatibility of different software applications used by the local governments, i.e. the standards-based solutions have been established that are both good and adequate in terms of the application of regulations on civil registries, and the technical components they contain. The implementation of this kind of data entry in the second copy of civil registries (e-civil registry) directly into the Central system, and not in the local application and then (at the end of the day) into the Central system, ensures legality, accuracy, uniformity and promptness related to all the processes of e-civil registration management, and it allows the supervisory authority to determine at any time which local authorities meet their legal obligations and to what extent.

In order to establish a system complex as this one, which is not only the most important citizen service of the Republic of Serbia, but also the largest network of public authorities, has undoubtedly required, and still requires a lot of effort in terms of organization, personnel and finances.

In fact, the Ministry of Administration based the establishment of the Central system on the Project for the creation and phased implementation of the Central system for the management of the second copy of civil registries in their electronic forms.<sup>16</sup> In the first phase, a prototype for the Central application for retrieving the data from the civil registries was made. First, the data from civil registries of five cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Užice, Leskovac and Kragujevac) were retrieved. Then came the development and construction of the network infrastructure and the networking of registration areas of the mentioned five cities for the purpose of retrieving the data from civil registries. Finally, the application was tested for functionality in order to be put into operation. The issuance of civil registration certificates from the cities whose data have been retrieved regardless of where their issuance is requested is now allowed. During the second phase, the network infrastructure was being developed for the purpose of networking the registration areas of local self-governments and retrieving the data from the first copy of civil registries and sending them to the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries. Then, the Central application was created based on the Prototype for Central application - installed, tested, and put into operation, as well as the Central application module for entering the data from the first copy - the original civil registry into the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries by the end users of the Central Application. The end users of the Central system were awarded the licenses (valid digital certificates) and the hardware platform housing was provided as well, with fulfilling all the technical and other requirements for the issuance of civil registration certificates at the seats of all the city and municipal governments in the Republic of Serbia based on the data of the Central system for electronic processing and storage and keeping the second copy of civil registries. Each citizen can have their civil

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<sup>16</sup> The main project for the development of the Central system for the management of the second copy of civil registries in their electronic forms, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Belgrade, 2009.

registration certificates issued at any of the city or municipal governments in the Republic of Serbia, and not only at the one where their civil registration certificates are being entered, provided that their data have been entered into the Central system managed by the Ministry. In the third phase, the most important actions were related to the construction of the network infrastructure for the networking of registration areas and retrieving the data from civil registries and sending them to the Central system. These actions were continued through the fourth phase of the development of the Central system. In all the phases of the Central system's development, the registrars, deputy registrars and informaticians were being continuously trained to work in the Central system.

The Central System currently<sup>17</sup> contains the data from civil registries of births, marriages and deaths kept for 111 cities and municipalities, with a total of 11,621,832 entries. As stated above, all the cities and municipalities are requested to convert the civil registries into their electronic forms by the end of 2014, and to submit them to the Ministry for safekeeping, which will help create a single database of citizens' information entered in civil registries. In order to create the conditions for the fulfillment of this legal obligation, there is an ongoing activity that aims to improve the capacities of 43 municipalities that fall under the category of extremely under-developed local self-governments by procuring computer equipment for all the registration areas, providing internet access (ADSL), allocating the licenses and providing the trainings for registrars in order to be able to access the Central System and transfer the civil registries into their electronic forms.

## **Conclusion**

Civil registries, being the records that contain all the changes in personal status of any natural person from their birth and acquisition of legal capacity to their death or loss of legal capacity are indispensable evidence in any legal situation which prove the identity of any natural person and confirm the validity of their personal data. They confirm the authenticity of all the other official records of citizens or public documents issued to citizens; therefore, they rightfully take a central place in the system of official records of citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

In addition, when one takes into consideration that automated processes and electronic data interchange create the conditions for a faster and easier exercising of citizen rights, and a more efficient performance of public administrative bodies, it is undeniable that electronic civil registries are necessary to bring radical changes into the traditional ways of performing administrative procedures in the system of state administration and local self-governments in the Republic of Serbia, both en route from government to citizens and within the government itself.

All these are reasons why the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries is the most important citizen service in the Republic of Serbia, and the whole project of its creation and development represents the key element in the reform of public administration, particularly in the area of e-administration. It is also the largest network of public authorities in the Republic of Serbia, and thus it is perfectly clear it provides great potential.

The Central system and network infrastructure have been developed to connect all the registration areas of cities and municipalities in the Republic of Serbia. At this moment, they are providing a number of benefits. For example, they

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<sup>17</sup> By 1 February 2013

allow for the issuance of civil registration certificates, submitted to the Ministry in their electronic forms, regardless of the territorial jurisdiction of the authorities managing the civil registry, which practically means that the citizens can require and obtain their civil registration certificates at any local government unit, and not only at the unit where they have been registered. However, the ultimate goal is to abolish the practice by which the citizens are required to go from counter to counter to collect their records kept by the state administration authorities in order to exercise their rights, where the authorities are to obtain the electronic records instead *ex officio*.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the electronic records of citizens allow for further development of information systems of a range of state administration authorities and the implementation of new IT solutions into all the other forms of official records of citizens. Based on the electronic records of citizens which includes the electronic exchange of citizen information held by different public authorities, it is perfectly possible to develop an information system which would contain all the basic information on each citizen of the Republic of Serbia at single location (Civil Registry).

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<sup>18</sup> In this regard, a significant Pilot project “Electronic exchange of citizen information and the establishment of electronic records of citizens of the Republic of Serbia” is currently being implemented by the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and Public Enterprise of PTT Communications “Srbija”. The establishment of electronic records of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia as the information subsystem of the Central system for electronic processing and storage of data and keeping the second copy of civil registries will allow for the issuance of identity cards and passports to citizens without them having to submit their civil registration certificates or citizenship certificates.