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Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Politics (Selected Issues Related to Political Market)

Abstract

Information and communication technologies impact many aspects of the contemporary political life. A consequence of the use of ICT in politics is undoubtedly the evolution of democratic institutions and procedures. Modern technologies find their application as tools for exercising democratic power. This is why their importance is constantly increasing. The changes that follow application of ICT and their consequences are especially interesting subject to study and research. This article aims at answering the question how modern technologies (mainly the Internet) affect the processes of contemporary democracy and what might be the consequences of such changes. The deliberations shall concern the context of political market, where three processes between three main actors (politicians/political institutions, electorate, and the media) occur: informing, communicating, and voting. ICT influence these processes by quickening supplementing, and facilitating three various types of activities: sharing information, involvement in the political debate, and participation in the political decision-making processes. In the article, the author also pays attention to election silence as a phenomena functioning in the background of elections (which are a very

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significant element of the political market). Examples provided in the article come mainly from the practises and experiences of the Polish political life.

Key words

information and communication technologies, Internet, politics, political market, communication, e-voting, election silence

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICT) constitute a crucial element of the processes of globalisation and computerization. Application of modern technologies is noticeable virtually in all domains of contemporary people's lives. In the past few decades, one could observe a revolution in computing and communications, and without any doubt we may assert that "technological development and use of information technology will continue at a rapid pace. Accompanying and supporting the dramatic increases in the power and use of new information technologies has been the declining cost of communications as a result of both technological improvements and increased competition"[2].

Recent worldwide convergence of telecommunication and information technologies and dynamic development of mass media lead to noticeable changes in the functioning of contemporary countries and societies. Currently, modern information and telecommunication technologies begin to play a greater role and filter down to almost every field of contemporary human life becoming a very popular subject of researches. Information revolution, that is a rapid technological development within the scope of computers, communication processes, and software (involving a substantial decrease in the costs of processing and sharing information[3]), is the driving force behind globalisation. As a result, many social spheres of men remain greatly influenced by ICT.

Modern technologies significantly affect the transformation of states, their institutions and societies. An endless number of people all over the world use various electronic devices based on ICT. The application of modern technologies influences work, education, trade, services, and social relations on the professional,

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[2] R.L. Konsbruck, *Impacts of Information Technology on Society in the new Century*, Lausanne-Vidy, p. 1, http://www.zurich.ibm.com/pdf/news/Konsbruck.pdf [access: 10.06.2014].

[3] R.O. Keohane, J. Nye jr, *Power and Interdependence in the Information Age* [in:] *Democracy.com? Governence in a Networked World*, E.C. Kamarck, J.S. Nye (eds.), Hollis 1999. p. 200.

public, and private space. The progress of modern technologies has dramatically changed the world, and most, if not all, fields of people's lives[4].

Next to business, education, banking or communication, new technologies find their application as tools for exercising democratic power. This is why their importance is constantly increasing. The advances relating to ICT present many significant opportunities but also pose major challenges. The changes that follow application of ICT and their consequences are an especially interesting subject to study and research. This article aims at answering the question how modern technologies (mainly the Internet) change the processes of contemporary democracy and what might be the consequences of such changes. The deliberations shall concern the context of political market, where three processes between three main actors (politicians/political institutions, electorate/society, and the media) occur: informing, communicating, and voting. ICT influence these processes by quickening supplementing and facilitating three various types of activities: sharing information, involvement in the political debate (communication between politicians and citizens), and participation in the decision-making political processes. The author shall also pay her attention to election silence as a phenomena functioning in the background of elections (which are a very significant element of the political market). Examples provided in the article come mainly from the practises and experiences of several European countries' political life. The author does not aim at analysing all aspects of changes in the political space, which seems to be a task too complex and too complicated as for a scientific article. The deliberations shall concern the context of the political market, which includes three main processes: informing, communicating, and voting. From the methodological perspective, considerations are founded on the concept of political market by Marzena Cichosz[5]. Basing on it, a model of three political processes was elaborated, which served as a basis for further consideration and drawing conclusions. Examples provided here come from the practises and experiences of the Polish political life. Firstly, because Poland is a young democracy and, in comparison to Western Europe – the use of ICTs in politics seems to be relatively small. Secondly, because of the fact that availability of broadband internet connection is largely limited in this country, despite a considerable improvement in the recent years[6].

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[4] M. Simuforosa, *The Impact of Modern Technology on the Educational Attainment of Adolescents*, "International Journal of Education and Research" September 2013, Vol. 1, No. 9, p. 1–2.

[5] M. Cichosz, *(Auto) Kreacja wizerunku polityka na przykładzie wyborów prezydenckich w III RP*, Toruń 2007.

[6] *Report on the Relative Effectiveness of the Regulatory Frameworks for Electronic Communications in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany,*

Finally, because in Poland more and more often, discussions about the use of the Internet (for example in voting in elections) are conducted. Thus, analysis how the Internet impacts the political market in this country seems to be an issue that is worth researching scientifically. Additionally, the increase in the number of ways the Internet is used in Polish politics (resulting in greater importance of this tool in political life) is perhaps one of the most significant reasons for conducting a research on the problem.

2. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND DEMOCRACY

The new media (i.e. other than the press, television, and the radio), sometimes referred to as non-traditional media, consolidated their permanent presence in social life. Communication technology is seen to have a direct impact not only on economy, culture, education, but also on political life. Large interest in ICT is present among politicians. Modern technologies find their application as tools for exercising democratic power. Therefore, application of ICT is a more and more popular subject and it draws an increasing attention of lawyers and political scientists. Politicians themselves are curious about the application of modern technologies and they have already appreciated benefits of the new techniques that facilitate their political duties, responsibilities, and relations with voters. What is more, political institutions (parliament, government, the president) and subordinate offices have changed and are still changing the way they function by informing the society and communicating with people through new channels. Also, the politicians use new ways of informing the citizens about various activities, decisions, etc., and more and more often decide to focus their election campaigns on the Internet-users as one of the electorate group important to convince to vote for a certain candidate or political party. Finally, the electorate seems to be taking greater notice of the benefits drawn from the application of ICT – particularly during the election campaigns and elections, which might be extremely important when considering the assumed crisis in democracy (the effect of which is, for example low level of interest in politics, decreasing level of elections' turnout, and the lack of trust in politicians).

Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Turkey, http://www.telepolis.pl/grafika/newsy/2010–06/ecta_regulatory_scorecard_report_2009.pdf, p. 3 [access: 15.02.2013].

One of the most noticeable consequences of using information and communication technologies in political life is the emergence of the term *electronic democracy*, which directly refers to evolution of the paradigm of democracy, which is connected with the so-called the new media. The role of ICT is so important, that even some democracy theorists, such as Barry N. Hague or Brian Loader[7], while introducing the term *electronic democracy* (*e-democracy*), speak about the change in understanding the way democratic system is today perceived and defined. The existence of the above definition of the new form of democracy or talking about the new quality of political life suggests a significant and inevitable shift in how democratic forms of exercising power in the modern world are distinguished. One of the oft-cited definitions of e-democracy was formulated by researchers Ken Hacker and Jan van Dijk. They state that *e-democracy* represents the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and computer mediated communication (CMC) in all kinds of media (e.g. the Internet, interactive broadcasting, and digital telephony) for purposes of enhancing political democracy or participation of citizens in democratic communication[8]. Lori Weber also states that *e-democracy* is based on ICT and it has yet to take full advantage of the Internet technologies[9]. Citizens are able to get most of the information they need from the Internet, which is a new situation when compared to previous methods in history[10]. ICTs and the Internet now open up many possibilities for citizen participation. Tony Corrizales gives a very useful definition by Andrew and Nada Korac-Kakabadse, who wrote that electronic democracy is "the capacity for ICTs to enhance the degree and quality of public participation in government and highlight the possibility for direct-democracy on a large scale"[11]. Basing on considerations of Tony Corrizales, one may say that "e-Democracy also allows for greater government transparency and openness, which leads to a better-informed citizenry"[12].

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[7] B.N. Hague, B. Loader, *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision-making in the Information Age*, New York 1999.

[8] *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, K.L. Hacker., J. van Dijk (eds.), London 2000, p. 1.

[9] L. Weber, *A Survey of the Literature on the Internet and Democracy*, Paper Presented at the Prospects for Electronic Democracy Conference, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh 2002.

[10] G. Browning, *Electronic Democracy: Using the Internet to Transform American Politics*, Medford 2002.

[11] A. Korac-Kakabadse, N. Korac-Kakabadse, *Information Technology's Impact on the Quality of Democracy: Reinventing the 'Democratic Vessel'*. [in;] *Reinventing Government in the Information Age: International Practice in IT-Enabled Public Sector Reform*, R. Heeks (ed.), London 1999.

[12] T. Carrizales, *Critical Factors in an Electronic Democracy: a Study of Municipal Managers*, "The Electronic Journal of e-Government" 2008, Vol. 6 Issue 1, p. 23.

Taking into account the application of ICT in political life, the most popular instrument (perhaps of the second largest influence on politics, after television) is the Internet, which in simple words is defined as the global computer network. Unlike the radio, television or telephone, which are tools that operate on respectively few-to-many and few-to-few basis, the Internet is a communication channel that operates on many-to-many basis[13]. It is worth to notice that the Internet is considered a particularly important platform, which eliminates some disadvantages of physical distances. This asynchronous nature of communication via the Internet is especially valued, despite the rapid development of virtually commonly available mobile communication. The Internet enables people to perform many various activities in a really short time and – which is the most important for many – it does not require gathering simultaneously in one place, leaving home or workplace. Considering the above, one can state that the Internet displays much greater potential than traditional media for political communication, such as television, the radio, the press or telephone[14].

The Internet – as it is the most dynamic form of ICT – has become an important political tool in Western democracies and it seems that it has been gaining (or even has already gained) a substantial position in the so-called young democracies. The development of the Internet led not only to changes in implementation of democratic principles, but also caused changes in how a number of actors, institutions or procedures of democracy work.

3. HOW ICT AFFECT THE POLITICAL LIFE?

From the viewpoint of this article, it is important that *electronic democracy* (including one of its forms – the *Internet democracy)* can be examined in the context of *political market*. Political market is understood as a part of the social space, where relations are based on the competition between different political subjects[15]. Here are performed political transactions – the exchange of political goods takes place between the players (participants) of political life. By introducing some simplification in complex market relations, we can conclude that the political market consists of three main sets of actors: firstly – political parties, institutions,

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[13] P. Wimmer, *Elektroniczna demokracja,* 2004, http://www.ucze.pl/InternetDemocracy.htm [access: 10.05.2011].

[14] Ibidem.

[15] A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut, *Leksykon politologii*, Wrocław 1998, pp. 372–373.

and organizations of political nature (which are the most active subjects that mainly initiate market processes and try to sell their "products"), secondly – the voters – those eligible to vote (along with various associations and community groups which act as buyers of products offered by the first group), and thirdly – the mass media (which often play the role of intermediaries, distribution channels in the political transactions)[16]. Of course, the actors on political market operate in a certain reality – in given circumstances of diverse nature: political, economic, legal, social or demographic. These in turn influence the political subjects as well as processes, which occur on the political market.

There are three main processes that occur between given participants of a political market: informing, communicating, and voting – they are illustrated on graph 1. Besides traditional dimensions of these processes (illustrated with solid arrows), development of new technologies contributed to the emergence of new ways of their implementation (illustrated with dotted arrows). ICT, and most of all, the Internet, influence democratic processes by quickening supplementing and facilitating three various types of activities: sharing information, involvement in the political debate, and participation in the decision-making political processes[17].

The first process that happens on the political market is to inform – send information to the electorate. This one-way process is used by political parties, political institutions, and politicians to provide the electorate with information about their projects, activities, and the most important national affairs through the media. It should be remembered that several years ago the subjects were sending information to the public through the press, the radio or television. Nowadays, the Internet is one of the most important channels used to inform voters about current activities – besides television and the press[18].

It is worth emphasizing that political institutions and public administration bodies generate enormous amounts of information which can be quickly delivered to citizens through the Internet. From the citizens' perspective, enabling them to access information on politics online is a revolutionary progress. Before the prevalence of the Internet use, the electorate had to use traditional ways of obtaining information that often resulted in long bureaucratic procedures or getting information very late. Thanks to the Internet access, there is no need to leave home

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[16] M. Cichosz, *(Auto) Kreacja wizerunku polityka…*, op.cit., pp. 6.

[17] R. Tsagarousianou, *Electronic democracy: Rhetoric and Reality. Communications*, "The European Journal of Communication Research" 1999, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 189–208.

[18] M. Musiał-Karg, *Elektroniczne referendum w Szwajcarii. Wybrane kierunki zmian helweckiej demokracji bezpośredniej*, Poznań 2012, p. 67–69.
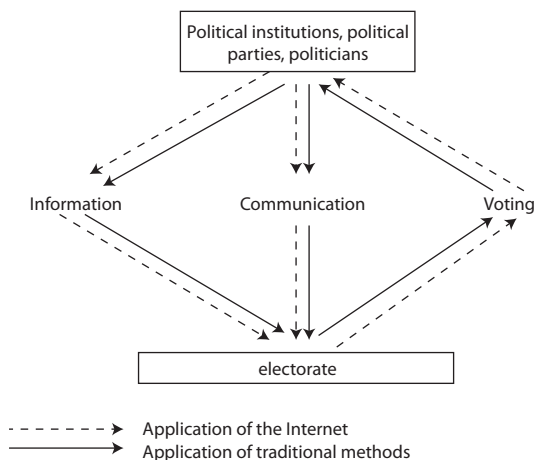
Source: the current author's study; M. Musiał-Karg, *Elektroniczne referendum w Szwajcarii. Wybrane kierunki zmian helweckiej demokracji bezpośredniej,* Poznań 2012, p. 67.

and travel to a given institution, the citizens do not need to wait in queues. Web pages of the government, political parties, various political organizations or online news services allow the society to gain necessary data about the government and its activities – just after any occurrence happens. Thus, one may say that the World Wide Web is a kind of bridge that connects a given institution with a citizen. The beginning of 21st century is marked with a considerable increase in the application of the newest technological achievements into political bodies at all levels of territorial administration. It is worth mentioning that a significant role in this scope is displayed by the Internet web sites of national parliaments. The web sites have usually several significant functions: firstly, an informational and educational function (they include information concerning the way legislative processes function, current affairs, and detailed stenographic records of the parliamentary session)[19], secondly, they provide "services" that support democracy (information concerning the possibility to order parliamentary publications, apprenticeship, job vacancies, etc.) and, finally, they stimulate active involvement of citizens

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[19] L. Porębski, *Elektroniczne oblicze polityki. Demokracja, państwo, instytucje polityczne w okresie rewolucji informacyjne*j, Kraków 2004, pp. 117–119; J. Taylor, E. Burt, *Parliaments on the Web: Learning through Innovation* [in:] *Parliament in the Age of Internet*, S. Coleman et al. (eds.), Oxford 1999.

(informing about e.g. parliamentary session schedules. Additionally, the function is used to gain access to complete records of parliamentary session, laws and acts or other official documents). Except for information concerning a given parliament, online connection more and more often allows to view a parliamentary session or even to "tour around" the parliament's building (for example the official web site of the chambers of the Polish Parliament: Sejm and Senate – www.sejm.gov.pl or www.senat,gov.pl).

One should remember that politicians and political parties also widely use the Internet in the process of informing the electorate about their activities. In addition to the informative function, websites of political groups turn out to be an extremely useful tool for conducting campaigns and mobilizing members or supporters of the party. Websites enable quick access to the election resources of a particular politician or information about a political party's programme. Websites are also an important tool to create and shape the image of both the whole political party and its individual members.

Politicians themselves are using the Internet more and more often to inform voters about their activities. Besides the fact that information about the members of parliament is displayed e.g. in the offices of legislative bodies, on the government's website or on the websites of relevant ministries, the websites of political parties inform also about the activities of particular politicians. In addition, we can notice that the latter group try to gain a higher electorate by creating their own official websites, which are updated on regular basis and look aesthetically and professional[20].

The second process that occurs on the political market concerns communicating. Generally speaking, "communication is a two-way process that results in a shared meaning or common understanding between the sender and the receiver"[21]. When it comes to communication in the political space, the sender is represented by "political actors" – political parties, politicians, public administration officers etc., and the receiver is the society, electorate (or receivers – citizens, those eligible to vote). In practice, political parties and institutions send electorate a message and wait for the response. It seems that both representatives of political bodies and politicians themselves, in recent years, recognized the Internet as a way to exchange

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[20] M. Musiał-Karg, *Demokracja a Internet – doświadczenia Szwajcarii i Polski* [in:] *Jednostka-społeczeństwo-państwo wobec megatrendów współczesnego świata. Polska Pięć lat w Unii Europejskiej*, G. Piwnicki, S. Mrozowska (eds.), Gdańsk 2009, p. 456.

[21] *Communication Handbook*, pp. 1–2, http://aslect.eu/documents/case1_Doing2learn/Doing2learn_Communication_Handbook.pdf [Access: 10.06.2014].

information and views with the electorate – to communicate. They are aware of the fact that the Internet has potential to be a tool of showing electorate's distrust to politicians. It means that when a politician did something what met the citizens dislike, he or she may be prone to the online manifestation of the views of the electorate (for example on the Internet forums or in the social networks), which is likely to have a negative effect on his/her image and to move to the other-traditional media. The same mechanism works when politicians' activities are supported by certain groups of electorate (in this particular case – Internet-users). With this function, the Internet has become an important tool that reduces the gap between citizens and the political environment. We can say without any doubts that, as time goes by and technological development progresses, politicians realize they should reach the public and exchange views with voters via the Internet. This manifests itself primarily in the fact that political institutions and public authorities include on-line forms on their websites, which are intended for citizens who are seeking possibilities to send electronic mail (e-mail) to comment on a given matter.

Recent years prove that both politicians and voters are particularly interested in blogs that are specific diaries with personal opinions, comments, thoughts, and feelings written and arranged chronologically. These kinds of websites, where authors place dated entries, are more and more often written by politicians and sometimes largely contribute to a debate conducted in the media. Blogs allow placing comments, thus a voter has a possibility to exchange views with a politician who runs the blog. There are many examples in Poland of politicians who conduct their political blogs, where readers can find politicians' thoughts and commentaries about current political events. I think that very interesting examples of such political acting could be observed during the 2007 parliamentary campaign. One of the most commented blog was Ludwik Dorn's, who was the then Speaker of the Sejm. The politician declared that he created his blog "for the upcoming parliamentary election" and published there three open letters of his own authorship: *Open Letter to the Polish Egghead before the Elections of 2007, Open Letter to the Voter Endowed with Common Sense before the Election of 2007* and *Open Letter to Polish Thief and Swindler before the Election of 2007.* Besides many commentaries on television, in the radio and in the press, the letters were widely commented on the Internet[22]. One should mention also one of the most famous blogs by Janusz Palikot – Mr. P plot, Journal of Janusz Palikot – which was also very popular platform of Palikot's communication with the society. It was probably the most commented and visited political blog in Poland at the time.

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[22]   Ludwik Dorn's blog (Blog Ludwika Dorna), http://dorn.blog.onet.pl [access: 15.04.2008].

It should be noted here that blogs are not the only place of political activity and communication on the Internet. Fierce political debates are conducted in social groups, as well as on discussion forums. A very important role is also played by the so-called social media, which rely on social interaction. These media are particularly important when it comes to discussion about the election silence (this issue will be explained in the latter part of this text).

The third process that occurs between the subjects of political market is voting. One of the biggest benefits of the Internet is that electronic democracy has the potential to break down barriers, which hinder or restrict eligible voters from direct participation in the decision making processes. Internet electronic voting is interesting to many public institutions, political parties, and politicians. It is a subject of researches, pilot programmes, as well as commercial offers.

Electronic voting (described also as e-voting) is one of the so-called alternative means of voting. It generally refers to voting with the use of electronic means. Electronic technologies applied during voting processes include the Internet, phone, television, and digital platforms. Information and communication technologies are applied on various stages of the voting process. They are useful for collecting cast votes, their counting, during the so-called remote voting as well as on the stage of developing and presenting final voting results received from electoral committees[23]. The term "e-voting" is usually understood as voting which allows voters to cast a vote safely and discretely via the Internet or Intranet (in the case of internal elections or decisions). However, we can list several types of e-voting. We can list here e.g. elections through electronic voting machines, computer voting, or finally the Internet voting, which is the most popular.

Undoubtedly, the world leader in implementation of electronic voting methods is the United States where special voting machines are commonly used. However, the first general elections based on internet voting (i.e. *Internet-based elections*) took place in 2005 in Estonia during election to local self-governments[24]. In Poland,

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[23] *The Statement of the Internet Society Poland (ISOC) Concerning E-Voting in General Elections, Adopted by the ISOC Management Board on 10th January 2007 (Resolution of the ISOC Poland Management Board No. 2/2007)*, January 1st, 2007, Internet Society Poland, http://www.isoc.org.pl/200701/wybory [access: 13.04.2014].

[24] Ü. Madise, T. Martens, E-*voting in Estonia 2005. The First Practice of Country-Wide Binding Internet Voting in the World* [in:] *Electronic Voting*, 2006. 2nd International Workshop Co-organized by Council of Europe, ESF TED, IFIP WG 8.5 and E-Voting.CC, August, 2nd – 4th, 2006 in Castle Hofen, Bregenz, Austria, R. Krimmer (ed.), Bonn 2006, p. 15; M. Musiał-Karg, *The Theory and Practice of Online Voting. The Case of Estonia (selected issue*s*)*, "Athenaeum. Polish Political Science Studies" 2011, No. 29, pp. 180–198; M. Musiał-Karg, *Internetowe głosowanie w E-stonii na przykładzie wyborów w latach 2005–2009*, „Przegląd Politologiczny" 2011, nr 3, p. 99–118.

there were initiated several attempts to change the Electoral Code and introduce electronic voting, but all of them failed[25].

Hence, it is worth listing the most important reasons (inclinations) for implementing electronic voting. According to Robert Krimmer they may be divided into three groups (Table 1).

Table 1. **Advantages of introducing e-voting: for voters, public administration and politicians**

Voters	Administration	Politicians
Increased mobility of eligible voters	better pace and accuracy od counting votes	Quicker information about the results
Supporting voter at balloting (convenience)	More precise registers	Innovativeness
Greater accessibility for disabled voters	Cost reduction in a long-term perspective	Change in the number of voters (change of the

Source: R. Krimmer, *E-Voting in Austria, Current Status in and around Austria,* 11th March 2010, Conference, Belek, Turkey.

From the perspective of the voters, the greatest advantage of electronic voting is the improvement of mobility because electronic system of voting allows casting a vote at any place, even if the voter stays outside his/her place of permanent residence. What is more, modern technologies increase the comfort of voting – it is possible to vote at any time and from any place using a personal computer or the so-called public voting kiosk. However, electronic voting (particularly the Internet voting) is most advantageous for disabled people who often have difficulties with getting to a polling station.

As far as the public administration is concerned, electronic voting can increase the pace and improve the accuracy of counting votes cast during a referendum or an election. This is particularly important because the probability of a mistake made by election clerks is eliminated[26]. E-voting based on the central electronic register of voters can contribute to reduction of costs related to organisation of elections and referenda (in long term perspective). This argument can be substantiated with the fact that e-voting does not require participation of a large number of election clerks who are indispensable in case of traditional elections taking place at ballot boxes.

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[25]   One of the last was the proposal of Parliamentary Group "Polska 2.0" from November 2011.

[26]   A. Rakowska, M. Rulka, *Centralny elektroniczny rejestr wyborców podstawą reform prawa wyborczego*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2011, p. 14.

Politicians notice the advantages of e-voting systems as well. It is all about changing an image of particular politicians or political parties. Those politicians who support technological progress and introduction of novelties aimed at making various procedures simpler for the citizens are often regarded as more open, friendly, and innovative. In such a way, political parties are able to direct their activities in order to expand the electorate, e.g. with the youngest voters. Apart from that, politicians perfectly know that electronic voting systems translate into quicker access to information about election winners and, consequently, into chances for making a coalition, etc. What is more, politicians suppose that e-voting can increase voting turnouts which directly impact distribution of seats in a parliament. Greater turnout may improve a result of one party (e.g. in Poland, greater turnout during snap election of 2007 favoured the Civic Platform party), and it can be disadvantageous for the other (according to political analyses of 2007, lower turnout favoured the Law and Justice party).

In Poland, although there is no system enabling voting in national elections via the Internet, there have been conducted some "experiments" with e-voting. One of it was in 2010 before the presidential election within the Civic Platform Party. After accepting Bronislaw Komorowski and Radoslaw Sikorski as candidates for this office, the national authorities of PO (the Civic Platform) decided that the person who would be the party's official candidate for the office is to be elected by the members of the party in primary election. There were two methods of voting available – via the Internet or by sending a special form via regular post. Turnout in presidential primary election in the PO was 47.47%. PO voters definitely preferred the Internet. Over 17 thousand votes were cast in this way. 4 thousand of the party's members sent their votes by post[27].

4. REMARKS ON THE SENSE OF ELECTION SILENCE

One of the examples of mechanisms affected by the use of ICT is the so-called election silence[28]. The idea of election silence is to provide voters with a peaceful, free from political agitation, conditions to consider and make a final decision during an election.

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[27] *Szczegółowe informacje dotyczące prawyborów*, 27.03.2010, http://www.prawybory. platforma.org/aktualnosci/art40,szczegolowe-informacje-dotyczace-prawyborow.html [access: 10.05.2011].

[28] M. Musiał-Karg, *Cisza wyborcza w dobie Internetu,* „Przegląd Sejmowy" 2013, nr 3, pp. 25–42.

Election silence functions in the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Singapore, and Spain. An election silence serves in some countries as a special time given to allow a "cooling-off" period for voters. As it was emphasized – during this time no active campaigning is allowed, and usually informing about the opinion polls is also banned. The silence is generally legally enforced, though in some countries it is just a "gentlemen's agreement". Indeed, it is very interesting that, due to the fact that the silence does not function in English-speaking countries, there does not exist any phrase commonly used in English to describe this silence[29]. However, in many countries, the election campaign does not last until the "last moment", that is, until the day of voting. In Poland during election silence (which starts 24 hours before the election day and ends when the polling stations are closed) it is prohibited to carry out any agitation in favor of competing political forces[30]. According to Article 115 of the *Election Code*, during electoral silence it is forbidden to give pre-election polls results on the predicted voting behavior and election results to the public and the results of election surveys carried out on the voting day (*exit polls*[31]). Any person who violates this injunction shall be subject to a fine from 500 thousand to 1 million PLN[32]. This regulation is enforced mainly due to the fact that pre-election polls published just before the voting can significantly influence the final outcome of the election. In the context of the subject matter of this text, that is, electoral silence, there appears a question relating to the legitimacy of the operation of silence in a situation where on the Internet, e.g. on the Polish-language web pages located on foreign servers, electoral campaigning can be carried out and foreign portals can announce election surveys results. Although such operations may be not an attempt to violate (only to avoid) election silence (because election silence is only valid on a certain state's territory), they are examples of the possibilities of impact of election information on the attitudes of the electorate and the final outcome of the vote. In connection with the more and more widespread access to the Internet by the Polish society, it is clear that the voters, provided that they express this desire, can easily find the information that should not be published during election silence. After all, the essence of election silence is to provide the

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[29]   *Campaign silence*, The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, http://aceproject.org/electoral--advice/archive/questions/replies/699408090 [access: 12.05.2012].

[30]   G. Kryszeń, *Standardy prawne wolnych wyborów parlamentarnych*, Białystok 2007, p. 185.

[31]   M. Szreder, *Emocje i prawda wieczoru wyborczego*, 27.09.2011, Rzeczpospolita.pl, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/9157,723522.html?p=1 [access: 2.06.2014].

[32]   *Ustawa z dnia 5 stycznia 2011 r. Kodeks wyborczy* - Dz.U. 2011, nr 21 poz. 112 - *Act of 5th January 2011 – The Election Code, Journal of Laws 31 January, 2011*, art. 500.

voter a quiet environment for decision-making, and this decision should not be burdened with the influence of any publication with election contents. In the era of the Internet, maintaining election silence seems to be impossible; in any case, it is certainly very difficult. It is, therefore, worth paying attention to any cases of circumvention of election silence on the websites.

Indeed, it is difficult to talk about election silence on the Internet, because it is the media that is virtually impossible to control. Examples of emerging opportunities to circumvent election silence on the Internet are many. One of the examples of tampering with election silence may be placing posts and comments on blogs post[33]. Politicians in many countries around the world appreciated this method of communication with voters and use their blogs to share their views (not only political ones) and comment on, e.g. current (not only) political events in the country and the world. Many of them comment on the election campaigns, pre--election polls, and the election itself. Another example of election silence violation are conversations in chat rooms or instant messaging such as MSN Messenger or Skype. This is not about online conversations on political preferences and political choices (even encouragement to vote for any particular candidate) among friends, it is about sending agitation materials to a broader group of the Internet users who are not friends. This first activity is not an act of election silence violation, but the latter has to be considered as violation of the electioneering ban. Interestingly, while it would be fairly easy to identify and call to account one person, who would induce to voting for a particular party or candidate, the identification and enforcement of penalties against, for example, several hundred or several thousand Internet users, perhaps would not be difficult, but definitely time consuming .

What's more, provisions on election silence in Poland – although biding for the Polish mass media, do not apply to the foreign media: televisions, radio stations, the press, etc. That is why it is very easy to find there information on the results of recent election polls, who is predicted to be a political winner and loser, or on electorate's preferences. If a voter is living abroad and has access to this information, they undoubtedly have an impact on his (or her) attitudes and his (or her) final political choices. Voters who reside outside the country and intend to vote abroad (but also those who are in Poland and browse foreign websites), cannot fully experience election silence, the aim of which is to provide reflection on whom to vote in during an election.

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[33] *Definicja i rodzaje blogów*, 25.03.2008, Dziennikarstwo internetowe, eredaktor.pl, http://eredaktor.pl/teoria/definicja-i-rodzaje-blogow/ [access: 3.11.2011].

In the context of discussion on ICT impact on citizens, it is worth to notice that also the social media are a great area where many examples of election silence violation can be found. It should be noted that the social media play an increasingly important role as a tool of political communication. What's more, the conduct of the election campaign is very difficult to control there. In particular, the election campaign conducted in the social media places responsibility on election staff for monitoring the content posted by visitors to the profile of the candidate, and above all, for the observance of election silence by supporters or opponents. Furthermore, "the mixed private-public nature of the social media space makes it difficult to assess whether an individual user's behavior can be classified as a violation of election silence"[34].

Considering the sense of functioning of electoral silence on the Internet, one should remember that also punishing Internet users for violating election silence seems to be very problematic. While it is fairly easy to identify individuals who violate electioneering ban just before the election or on election day, it would be more problematic (and definitely long lasting) to punish a bigger number of people. So, the arguments supporting the functioning of pre-election silence as a time to reflect in order to make a possibly most objective decision, become less meaningful, since, regardless of the legal restrictions campaign lasts permanently on the Internet (though much less intensely than during the campaign).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summing up considerations on the ICT impact on democracy and political space, one should admit that the new media – particularly the Internet – have became an enormously important tool of interaction of participants of political life. Undoubtedly, it is the consequence of the fact that the application of information and communication technologies allows to remove barriers connected with the distance between voters and those who govern or represent the governing. The results of application of the Internet in exercising democratic power is called a revolution, because of the extensive use of this tool in today's political space, resulting in changes in virtually every aspect of political life, both: from the perspective of political institutions, politicians or political parties, as well as from the perspective of the society. It should also be added that the rapid growth of the Internet affects modern civilization and changes the characteristics of interpersonal relations,

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[34] *Kampania w sieci*, J.M. Zając, D. Batorski (eds.), Warszawa 2011, pp. 71–72.

communication methods, the way of doing politics, and may contribute to the emergence of a new quality in the social life. The examples provided in this text confirm that the ICT tools have the potential to improve the people' involvement in politics, through, for example, the access to official websites of institutions, politicians or political parties, electronic citizens forums or electronic voting. Despite many drawbacks, many politicians and practitioners state that modern technologies will increasingly be applied in political communication and in the processes occurring on the political market. That requires a permanent education of citizens for participation in politics, which seems to be one of the most important challenges.

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