The Public Management Reform in Romania

**Sergiu-Vlad STAN¹,
Marius-Anton STUPAR²**

¹ “Valahia” University of Târgoviște,
Romania, sergiu_stan14@yahoo.com

² “Valahia” University of Târgoviște,
Romania, stupar_marius@yahoo.com

Abstract: Romania's accession to the EU depended largely on the ability of Romanian public authorities to implement reforms among public organizations in the country. Globally, however, a successful public administration has become a key factor in determining a nation's competitive advantage. The purpose of this article is to emphasize the efforts of the Romanian public administration to submit to the process of administrative reform and as a consequence to contribute to the creation of an administrative reform strategy based on which Romanian public organizations can be reformed.

Keywords: *administrative reform, public management, decentralization.*

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1. Introduction

The new administrative realities provided by the context of EU integration (Sandache, 2016) have helped Romania to progress in terms of public management. Specifically, the reform of the public system involved bringing the public administration closer to the citizen, decentralizing public services and consolidating the local public administration by promoting its administrative and fiscal autonomy. In addition, the reform in the Romanian public management also effectively involved the increasing of the efficiency of the public administration and the professionalization of the public function.

The Romanian political system suffered profound changes since the beginning of the reform process in 1990. Since then, the birth of a modern and efficient public administration system was a priority for the Romanian Government. However, the necessary resources for a legislative and institutional framework necessary for local and central public governance could not be mobilized, especially for an effective way of implementing reform measures. The causes which determined the unworkable application of a real reform in administration were (Gallagher, 2010):

- Severe financial constraints;
- Lack of political determination;
- Little experience in regards to alternative administration structures;
- Lack of training for politicians and civil servants to respond to the demands of a rapid environmental change;
- Absence of some clear regulations towards personal and administrative structures, poor wages but also inadequate definitions of functions (meaning roles and responsibilities, as many times civil servants had no precise rights and obligations)

2. The context of reforms from public administration in Romania

Usually, Romanian governments were focused on the matter of economic reform and only later they realized that the application and the results of such reform are almost impossible without a public administration reform. (Paşa, 2018)

So in regards to historic reform in public administration in Romania, things are very clear, and the same can be said about the necessity of the reform in public administration that follows these historical facts.

The development of democracy in Romania (and not only) implies the development of a new relationship in between citizens and

administration, a growth and strength of the local authorities as well as their role and a reconsideration of the partnership with the civil society. All these things impose as a priority for the Romanian Government, the reform of public administration.

In the context of the integration in the EU, the improvement of public administration standards and the implementation of reforms in all sectors are very important and helped Romania in taking big steps in regards to the birth of a modern public administration such as:

- Creation of a legal framework for ensuring decisional transparency in public administration;
- Guarantee of the free access to general public information.

However, in the evolution of the public administration reform, from a macroeconomic perspective (macroeconomic stability, deficit control and stimulating private sector) there were some gaps/stages covered differently by the state in comparison with other states which joined the EU. ()

The public administration reform happened in the Western states also because of the citizens and market pressure towards the public sector (mainly, it was due to the lack of trust those had within some public institutions).

In Romania, the influence of those two factors was reduced as the market does not work accordingly (at mechanisms level) and people do not fully realize their role in the community.

Romanian reforms happened at the pressure of the external factors, such as the EU, IMF, World Bank, NATO etc.

EU's pressure exerted through the implementation of some mandatory measures in Romania before and after being a member state, especially due to the Community acquis.

This factor created some negative effects in Romania, one of the main negative effects being the slowdown of the reform process once the country became a member state.

Besides the multitude of reasons for the necessity of a reform (economic reasons, technological, sociological, institutional), the existent conditions in the Romanian society impose that from a public management perspective, the administration must be involved in a four-plan changing process:

1. **Strategic**, through which it needed to redefine the role of the state, in the sense of dividing such role from a private organization;
2. **Legal**, towards a general amendment of legislation, in the sense of decreasing the legal acts and a larger utilization of the framework laws, thus offering increased possibilities for executive authorities;

3. **Organizational**, towards decreasing public hierarchy;
4. **Cultural**, towards a change in values and practices of choosing politicians, officials, users, groups of interest and citizens

3. The new circumstances in the reform process framework in public administration from Romania

The new conditions for success of the reform process in public administration in Romania, must have a starting point in a clear and measurable formulation of objectives, increasing strategic capability of optioning for different projects and defining priorities for all its phases of implementation. So, the management must be done throughout a much better representation of citizens in the decision-making process and through infrastructure and objectives. In regards to the objectives of the reform in public administration from a public management perspective, the strategy should contain three objectives (Hințea, 2011):

1. **Basic public services reform and public utilities of local interest** – In this sense the Government will focus towards the organization of services and public utilities in relation with the demand of the population and will realize an action plan which will contain, among other things, the following measures: continuity of a decentralisation basic public services (education, health, social work and public order), inclusion of quality standards through which the competent public authority to monitor and evaluate the activity of civil servants, free market for public utilities, regulation of some simple and transparent models of privatisation of public utilities, subsidy system for public utilities and development of charging system etc.
2. **Consolidation of the fiscal decentralisation and administrative process** – will target the recovery of the decentralisation process started in 1998 and will consider limiting the scope of Government intervention at local level only for some cases (in which certain projects cannot be done with local resources). The decentralisation process will take place after the principle of effectiveness, economy, efficiency and the measurable results on three lanes: 1) *Strengthening the local autonomy*; 2. *Administrative decentralisation*; 3. *Fiscal decentralisation*
3. **Strengthening institutional capabilities of structures from central public and local administration** – stated that this represents the key for the reform. It can be done through the programme that follows institutional capacity of central public

administration bodies. Strengthening institutional capacity will have as target the whole system of public administration and will focus on the following measures: 1) *organizational development*; 2) *human resources management*; 3) *strengthening inter-institutional connections*; 4) *e-Government (development of informational system)*

4. Creation of an administrative reform strategy

When creating an administrative reform strategy, public authorities need to take into account that there needs to be a structural change in the way they view things, which needs to include certain objectives stated from the beginning:

Step 1. Identifying certain development stages where some measures are imposed:

- (1) Legislative reform;
- (2) Reform at formal structural level, procedures;
- (3) Public policies reform;
- (4) Structural reforms;
- (5) Implementation of a managerial approach from an

occidental perspective, focused on one or more factors.

This step basically includes choosing the starting point of a reform, each of the stages mentioned above being the stepping stone towards an advanced public management model, with the legislative reform being the first step that each public authority takes into any kind of reform.

Step 2. Identifying of the development stage in which the certain sector finds itself (or the organization finds itself)

This step means that there needs to be a pre-evaluation stage where the sector is being measured in terms of development. The same principle applies to the reform of a public organization as well. For example, a public organization might have a legislative basis on which it functions (1), it might even have its internal procedures laid down (2), but it lacks the help of public policies (3).

Step 3. What needs to be done within the certain sector? (What development / managerial model do we choose?)

This means that there is more than one managerial model which can refer to the organizational effectiveness, leadership, behavior (autocratic, custodial, supportive, collegial) etc.

Step 4. How do we implement such model?

This refers to the customization if necessary, depending on organizational culture of the sector, or of the organization itself. If the first step is taken into consideration, then we can future ask the question: ***What will the future steps mean?***

Step 5. How do we evaluate the results?

This step means stating some short, medium and long-term objectives and reaching performance with limited resources.

Figure 1. An ideal administrative reform strategy
(source: self-processed)

It is obviously that the target groups of the strategy are central public and local authorities. In such context, for the reform to be successful, it is necessary that those target groups express their support and commitment in recognizing the need for change and its implementation. (Radu, 2015)

This fact can be put into practice through an elaboration of a plan regarding each actor involved and strategies that are necessary and useful in improving internal and external institutional activities.

For the success of the modernization-process it is important that every civil servant understands the necessity of the implementation of the modern strategies within the institution or public authority they work in.

The application of the basic reform principles implies both public management methods and institutional changes need to be applied. As stated above there needs to be attention towards institutional changes, and especially in underlining their necessity through legal framework amendment. In regards to public management it is important to see the public manager's role. The role of the public manager is essential as we are talking about complex structures and processes which imply changing a whole thought process.

The role of the public manager within each institution/public authority becomes overwhelming in this situation as his responsibility is determinant, targeting and motivating the staff towards the sustainability of the modernization strategy for the administration while considering the fact that staff policies do not stimulate enough civil servants. (Păunescu, 2008)

They (civil servants) are tempted to do an acceptable job and this approach often leads to lowering of public services standards. This is why power is divided and often mandated within public authorities, in order to ensure a certain quality level of the public services provided.

Based on the integrated organizational model, we can identify a series of barriers that create obstacles in implementing the reform, and such factors are (Mureșan, 2012):

- a) **Strategic factors** – given by decision making complexity, debate towards legitimacy itself etc.
- b) **Structural factors** – given by the slowdown in bureaucracy, authority system, legal restrictions, limited means, dimension and complexity etc.
- c) **Cultural factors** – given by the need of contesting arbitral ruling, fear of risks, tradition of „continuity”, existence of taboos etc.
- d) **Behavioral factors** – such as lack of individual stimulation, lack of final objectives, decrease in motivation, frustrations, waiting etc.
- e) **Fragility in strategic terms** – such as lack of perspective, lack of balances and evaluations, incomplete diagnosis, focus on content detrimental to the process etc.
- f) **Fragility in structural terms** – such as compartmentalization of services, framework mobility, parallel power centers etc.
- g) **Fragility in cultural terms** – given by the reflex use of a hierarchy, tendencies towards concentration;
- h) **Fragility in behavioral terms** – given by powerful customization of projects, confusion, caution towards crisis, lack of leadership, non-involvement of actors

5. Conclusions

Many times, in Romania there was confusion in between two notions: public administration reform and administrative capabilities development. Thus, the administration refers to the way in which the coordination of public sector activities is authorized, ordered and organized, and administrative capacity is an assessment of the functioning of the hierarchical structure of public service staff, being therefore the only one of the elements of public administration reform.

Public administration reform is just a piece of a complex Romanian reform plan, like the ones targeting areas such as: macroeconomic policy, agriculture, defense, culture, environment, communications, budget, education, external policy, finances, industry, trade and competitiveness, justice, internal, workforce, health, youth and sport and tourism.

Beyond putting strategies on paper, their implementation and success depends on the people put in charge of administrative reform projects and how society is willing to support such an effort.

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