



# How the Projects Implemented by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration Have Impacted on the Strategies to Reform Public Administration

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## ABSTRACT

In Romania, the process to reform the administration is a mere mirage, similar to a Morgana, endlessly debated upon but little attained, especially through the perspective of the aims set by all the actors entrusted with revolutionizing the public system, be them related to politics or not. In its attempt to join and later to become an integral part of the European Union, Romania has experienced several social and political stages that were characterized by the attempt, through various procedures, to bring to a common denominator our administration with the European ones which are obviously more efficient and closer to the real needs of citizens as well as to the process to bringing public interest to high standards by means of quality public services. The paper herein introduces the aims of two projects that have recently been carried out by The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration in its attempt to collaborated with all the other authorities and public institutions in order to reform administration, namely POCA and The Development of tools and territorial planning models for the support of the subsequent period of programmes post 2013, both aimed to adjust a part of those deep problems that affect to efficient operation of the public institutions.

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## 1. Introduction

„As long as a nation does not set its financial and economic institutions into order, no help will lead it to progress”. (Bovard, 1986, p.1), (Șandor, Creța, 2014, p.115).

The final aim of governance and public policies is to ensure prosperity and competition in such a way that is sustainable from the point of view of economy, social welfare, order and public safety as well as the protection of the environment. In such a context, the local public administration needs to develop the capacity necessary to carry on all these activities ([http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat\\_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf](http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf))

The decision-making process refers to a series of stages that are completed in order to express decisions that are presented as administrative and managerial documents that generate changes or are the embodiment of some strategic directions or actions initiated by the issuing public authorities and that affect the citizens from their jurisdiction ([http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat\\_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf](http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf))

Management performance refers to the ability to reach the management goals set at the level of an organization leadership. Management performance may be attained by making use of various management instruments such as strategic planning. The results of monitoring and evaluating managerial performance need not be mistaken for the performance of public policies that represents the products of a public institution belonging to the public administration ([http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat\\_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf](http://www.mai.gov.ro/documente/aparat_central/Strategia%20dezvoltarea%20politicilor%20publice%202011-2016.pdf), page 4.)

Our human society is characterized by certain general needs: the need of peace and quiet, the need of medical assistance, the need of culture etc. All these needs, if there were not to be satisfied, all social life will suffer and lose its balance. They have to be satisfied regularly and continuously, so that the state has to intervene and organize these activities in order to maintain the social equilibrium. (Tarangul, 1944, p.14).

The public administration is precisely aimed to satisfy the general interest, its determination being dictated by the public institutions. Therefore, the public authorities are responsible for achieving the political values regulated by the decision-making class within the limits of the statutory documents. (Coman-Kund, Ciobanu, 2009, p.12).

Considerable efforts had been made previously to Romania joining the European Union so that the rhythm of reforms from various fields of activities would speed up and they were also supported by all

political parties since everyone wanted to attain certain criteria that would allow our country to join the Union in 2007. The public administration was put to the centre of this process, thus benefiting from important investments destined to enhancing own capacity, its effort having been distributed coherently by the closing of the negotiation chapters.

In this context, the Government of Romania adopted two successive strategies regarding the reform of the public administration: The Strategy On the Acceleration of Public Administration Reform 2001- 2003 and the updated Strategy of the Romanian Government On the Acceleration of Public Administration 2004 – 2006, that were the foundation for implementing several key reforms such as: *public policies, decentralization and public office*. ([www.mai.gov.ro](http://www.mai.gov.ro)).

Since 2007 there has been no integrative strategy related to the field of public administration although institutions of the central public administration had several initiatives that were directed to its reformation but they were so fragmented that they were not able to highlight the deep causes which, despite the presence of clear and satisfactory procedures and regulations, affect the efficient functioning of the public institutions.

In the absence of a strategic vision that should address the growth of the public sector's ability to issue public policies and to efficiently manage its services in the period of 2007 – 2013, the only documents that have had a visible impact on the field under discussion were represented by the Romania's National Strategic Framework of Development, with the main role of assisting the process of financial programming, and The National Program of Reforms ([www.mdrt.ro](http://www.mdrt.ro)).

## **2. Pre- and Post – Accession Strategies to Modernise Romanian Public Administration**

On 14 March 2012, the European Council endorsed the priorities for ensuring financial stability, fiscal consolidation and action to foster growth. The European Council underscored the need to pursue differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation, to restore normal lending conditions to the economy, to promote growth and competitiveness, to tackle unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis, and to modernise public administration. (The European Council Recommendation, from the 9th of July 2013 on Romania's National Reform Programme for 2013 that includes a Council opinion on Romania's convergence program for 2012-2016, *The Official Journal of the European Union*, C 217/67, 30.7.2013).

Following a request by Romania on 17 February 2011, the Commission and the IMF negotiated a precautionary economic adjustment programme with the Romanian authorities. In the context of the Union's precautionary assistance, Romania undertook to implement a comprehensive economic-policy programme with a particular focus on structural reform measures to improve the functioning of labour and product markets and increase the resilience and growth potential of the Romanian economy. (European Council Recommendation, from the 9th of July 2013, *The Official Journal of the European Union*, C 217/67, 30.7.2013).

Due to the fact that Romania has been obviously facing a number of challenges in economic competitiveness with productivity in industry and services remaining low, the major challenges are a weak business environment and low support for research and development (R&D) (European Council Recommendation, from the 9th of July 2013, *The Official Journal of the European Union*, C 217/67, 30.7.2013). In the period 2007-2013, the Romanian Government approved decisions or, as case may be, normative acts of the regulatory authorities, all in all, over 40 sectorial strategies. Other public policies documents were added (proposals of public policies, strategies or strategic programs) and adopted as such, without having included them among normative acts, issued by competent authorities or drafted during the period and currently under notice/adoption procedure. (Kassim, 2003, p 9-10), (Călinoiu, 2015, p. 18).

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration carried out the project "*The Development of tools and territorial planning models for the support of the subsequent period of programmes post 2013*" whose aim was to improve the process of territorial planning at a national level by undertaking sectorial studies, developing the planning framework, setting new planning, monitoring and implementing mechanisms.

Starting from territorial realities, *The strategy of territorial planning of Romania*, one of the current strategies, intends to have positive effects at an administrative level and represents the planning exercise for the development of the national territory for the 2035 time horizon by giving answers to the following key questions:

~ *What are the measures and the projects that contribute to enhancing the ability of the national territory to generate economic growth and implicitly to maintain and attract innovative labour force?*

~ *What are the areas at territorial level that require specific interventions in order to capitalize and protect the natural and constructed capital?*

~ *How can we ensure the balance between the economic, environmental and cultural policies, in order to coherently plan the development process as well as to preserve the identity of the national territory?* (<http://www.mdrap.ro/dezvoltare-teritoriala/-2979>).

The link between objectives- goals best represent the current concept on strategies envisaged by the public authorities. This assertion is easy to argument since, after the objectives that are to be fulfilled have

been clearly evidenced by applying certain strategies, the vital means to implement proposed goals unequivocally need to be recognized.

A series of factors that are laid at the basis of this relation, offered support and helped to defining the correct path that needs to be taken in order to reach the climax of evolution in and organisation.

Among all these, the following have proven to be remarkably important: *the human, material and financial factors*. The first category cannot be excluded from the picture because the human factors were the ones that the goals could not have been reached without. The second category comprising of material factors was influenced by the first and had the obligation to adopt the form of services and products in order to serve on consumer's market while the financial factors were *recognised for their trade function and would later intervene in order to transform the human resources, through work, into products and services.*" (Filip, 2007, p.223-224).

*„Thus, by defining strategy, there results that the relationship objectives- goals targets at obtaining competitive advantage, specific to the competition market, which, once assimilated, ensures the perennality of the producer on the market before the consumer who, indeed, seeks for high quality products and services at as low as possible prices".* (Filip, 2007, p.223).

This definition although limited to defining the role of strategy only through the perspective of the relationship objective-goal, contains a series of key terms that are also valid in the universe of local public administration.

Among these, we would like to point out to: competitive advantage, the quality of delivered goods and services, as well as their obtained result, which is preferably obtained with a minimum of resources and a maximum of benefits. The strategy is deemed to be necessary for the local communities all over Europe where our country lies as well. The arguments are of legal, political and public nature and may be presented as follows:

- the first category, the legal one, is regulated in the organic law of public administration and according to its provisions the authorities are *"compelled to draft the strategy for the social and economic development of each administrative-territorial unit";* (Art. 38,alin (2), Law no. 215/2001 regarding Romanian local public administration).

- the political arguments address aspects such as the mayor's campaign programme which may be applied by making use of the social and economic development strategies;

- the last category, referring to requirements of public (community) nature is explained by the fact that: *"financial resources belong to the entire community, while the administrators are liable for the reliability of this consumption of resources."* (Filip, 2007, p.226).

The decisions regarding public policies have a strong impact at a territorial level and implicitly upon people's lives no matter if they are sectorial policies about the environment, transportation, agriculture, education, health or related to other fields of activity. The effects of the policies will only become convergent after the political decisions have considered territory and have transformed to local regional particularities in policies that are integrated within the territory. All these, because the territory generates the global image that may significantly contribute to fundament the decisions related to public policies. (*Draft statement of reasons for Spatial Development Strategy of Romania*, consulted in 1.09.2018, 12.00 a.m., <http://www.sdtr.ro/52/Consultare>).

Romania's accessibility towards the developed area in Central Europe is quite low due to an increased physical distance but also to geographic barriers (The Carpathian Mountains) and the weekly developed infrastructure (the insufficient number of highways and high speed rails). At a national level, there are still profound disparities caused by the natural barriers, low accessibility towards the rural or mountain areas but also a reduced access to public services of general interest. These disparities lead to a reduced degree of cohesion and citizen participation in public life, such as the impossibility to capitalize the potential of the entire national territory. (<http://www.sdtr.ro/52/Consultare>).

### **3. Romania's strategy of territorial development and AMPOCA-Romanian Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity". Desiderata and possible effects**

According to art. 3 of the *Draft Project for Romanian Territorial Development*, the strategy for the territorial development of Romania is the long term programme document that sets the guiding lines for the territorial development of Romania, based upon a strategic concept, as well as the implementation guidelines for a period of time of 20 years, on a regional, interregional and national scale with integrating aspects that are relevant at trans-border and trans-national level. The development strategy (territorial development included) of Romania is aimed at promoting territorial cohesion and competitive, sustainable development and the access of the communities to development opportunities, in compliance with the fundamental values of human rights and European Union Policies. (<http://www.mdrap.ro/proiectul-de-lege-privind-strategia-de-dezvoltare-teritoriala-a-romaniei>).

*Romania's territorial development strategy* is a strategic instrument that strives to ensure the territorial development strategies established through The Partnership Agreement with the European Union: (1) improving the quality of life for the local and regional communities so that the regions from Romania become more attractive for living, for spending free time, for investments and labour, (2) promoting rural-

urban partnerships, (3) consolidating the urban network by polycentric development and territorial specialization, (4) increasing accessibility and connectivity, (5) equal access to services of a general interest (<http://www.sdtr.ro/52/Consultare>).

Starting with 1993, public administration reform focused on changing the relationship between public administration and society, meaning that public administration must serve the society and not subordinate the society, as well as on the separation between the state and the civil society. It also emphasized the support for increasing the civil society's auto-regulation capacity and for local individual initiatives, a new relationship between citizens and administration, strengthening the role of the local public authorities and developing a partnership with the civil society. Other drivers for increasing the pace of public administration's reform were the need for structural and functional (*Profiroiu, Profiroiu, Mina, Lica, 2011*) (*Mihăilescu, 2015, p.70-71*). The period subsequent to the establishment of the European Economic Community, at mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a landmark for Europe, which triggered an ample political-economic integration movement for the European states, subject to the same fundamental values, has also meant the establishment of an administrative model, able to reflect the new realities from the national administrations of these state entities (*Manda, 2014, p.53*).

Essentially, the role of the public administration, with reference to this accession criterion, focuses mainly on the activity of preparation, elaboration and promotion of the entire legislation which presupposes the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, and thus revealing an increased task in the legislative field. Second, the administration has to create, based also on the law, or, if necessary, to develop, the pre-existent administrative structures, imposed by the *acquis* and meant to implement effectively the national harmonised legislation, with identical effects, similar to those of the other national EU administrations and in accordance with the European objectives and policies. (*Manda, 2014, p.56*).

The barometer of such a public administration reform, as amplitude and efficiency, must be represented by the answer offered by the public administration to the following question: the national administration of the candidate country will be able to apply in due time the entire European law aggregate? However, it is necessary to outline that this relationship between the integration process and the administrative reform, although strong, it is not a direct but rather an indirect one, given the fact that there is no question to address in the European integration area a general *acquis communautaire* regarding the public administration (*Manda, 2014, p.56*).

In so far as regionalization is concerned, the conclusion is that it indeed represents a necessity for Romania, an integral part of a general European tendency, a concept that is necessary to efficiently govern any country, a motor for our country's integration into the European structures with all the inherent tasks and the scepticism that such a decision may cause and for the mere fact that alongside with the accession to the European Union, the community norms referring to regionalization have become part of the domestic law (*Păiș, 2016, p.23*).

The discussions referring to Romania's regionalization and the current territorial structure have lately been reinstated. Three or four alternatives for regionalization have been mentioned, amongst which "administrative regions created upon the structure of the current development regions and maintaining the intermediary level – the county councils, administrative regions created on the structures of current development regions with maintain at a county level only of a prefect's office and de-concentrated institutions – the county becomes a functional subunit of the region and smaller administrative regions (between 15 and 18) created by the merging of two-three counties based upon certain criteria such as the economic inter-county and labour-force flows, connections related to transportation, population and surface, cultural and historical affinities, the existence of certain cities that may function as poles of economic growth and that have a beneficial effect upon the entire region". (<http://cursdeguvernare.ro>), (*Păiș, 2016, p.23*).

According to the text of the Council Recommendation of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 on the National Reform Programme of 2013, which also includes an opinion on the National Convergence Programme for 2012-2016, it was concluded that the public administration from Romania is characterised by an inconsistent legal framework, frequent recourse to emergency ordinances, low levels of inter-ministerial cooperation and excessive bureaucracy. It is also undermined by a lack of skills, a lack of transparency in staff recruitment and high management turnover rates (*The European Council Recommendation, from the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2013 on Romania's National Reform Programme for 2013 that includes a Council opinion on Romania's convergence program for 2012-2016, in The Official Journal of the European Union , C 217/67, 30.7.2013*) our country was recommended to strengthen governance and the quality of institutions and public administration, in particular by improving the capacity for strategic and budgetary planning, by increasing the professionalism of the public service through improved human resource management and by strengthening the mechanisms for coordination between the different levels of government(*The European Council Recommendation, from the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2013 on Romania's National Reform Programme for 2013 that includes a Council opinion on Romania's convergence program for 2012-2016, The Official Journal of the European Union , C 217/67, 30.7.2013*).

In fact, one of the most recent relevant projects of MDRAP-AMPOCA- Romanian Operation Programme "Administrative Capacity" obviously intends to create modern public administration, capable to

facilitate the social and economic development by means of competitive public services, quality investments and regulations, thus contributing to reaching the objectives of Europe 2020 Strategy.

In order to carry out this role, public administration needs competent and well managed human resources, as well as efficient and transparent management of using the resources, an adequate institutional and administrative structure, as well as clear, simple and predictable functioning procedures. (<http://poca.ro/cadru-strategic/prezentare-poca-2014-2020/>).

POCA 2014-2020 addresses all the 8 development regions from Romania. The following types of beneficiaries will be able to obtain funds: central public institutions and authorities, autonomous administrative authorities, NGOs, social partners, accredited higher education and research institutions, the Romanian Academy, local authorities and public institutions at the level of the counties and cities, local authorities and public institutions ITI beneficiaries, institutions from the judiciary system. The financial allotment of the programme from the European Social Fund for 2014-2020 is of 553,19 million Euros. (<http://poca.ro/cadru-strategic/prezentare-poca-2014-2020/>).

Priority Axis 2: "Public Administration and Accessible and Transparent Judiciary" set the following specific objectives: the support of an efficient management at the level of local authorities and public institutions, increasing transparency, ethics and integrity at the level of authorities and public institutions, as well as improving access and the quality of the services that are provided by the judiciary, also by ensuring an increased transparency and integrity at its level.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is obvious that for Romania, the process of transforming the public administration gains new dimensions. Thus, they need to answer to new changes in the local world economy, but equally to the new requirements of the process of integration in the structures of the European Union. The reform of the public administration implies major changes in its major components, both at the level of the central public administration as well as the local public administration and public services in general. On the other hand, the development of democracy calls for new relationships between citizens and administration, increasing and strengthening the role of authorities and reconsidering the partnership with civil society and the electees (*Profiroi, Andrei, Dinca, Carp, p. 4*) ([http://beta.ier.ro/documente/studiideimpactPaisIII\\_ro/Pais3\\_studiu\\_3\\_ro.pdf](http://beta.ier.ro/documente/studiideimpactPaisIII_ro/Pais3_studiu_3_ro.pdf)).

The two projects that were mentioned herein obviously have the role of following all the suggestions given by the European Council through the Recommendation of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and of subsequently remove the deficiencies of 20<sup>th</sup> century- early 21<sup>st</sup> century Romanian administration, namely a problem of decisional transparency, shortcomings in the training of the public servant, the incoherence of the local administration generated by a political central incoherence, a weak development and subsidiarity of the principles of local autonomy, including through a weak absorption of the European funds.

We do hope that such projects and their effects will become a hallmark of the dynamics and reform of the Romanian administrative system and will have a say in the local development as well as the capacity of the authorities at a territorial level.

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