

Good Governance in Public Administration from the Perspective of the Political Factor

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Abstract: In its process of adhesion to the European Union, Romania was absolutely compelled to follow a wide process of local and central public administration reform that would correspond to the adhesion criteria established by the Union in view of acquiring the membership status. In Romania, the preexistent elements that made the reform process be more difficult and slow and sometimes even stopped it, aimed at the strategic, structural and behavioral factors. Thus, the stage of the Romanian administration in 2001 imposed that the changes in the Romanian society were radical, reason for which the targets of these strategic reforms aimed at key issues, such as the strategic component, the legal component, the organizational component and the cultural component. Having a dominant political culture is essential in a state that seeks to reform its public administration. Without the support of the political power, any administrative reform risks failing. In the same time, the issue of separating the political from the administration constituted one of the central points within the national public administration reforms in the last years.

Keywords: public administration reforms; good governance

In its process of adhesion to the European Union, Romania was absolutely compelled to follow a wide process of local and central public administration reform that would correspond to the adhesion criteria established by the Union in view of acquiring the membership status. This process has materialized by harmonizing the legislative and institutional frame with the EU regulations.

In Romania, the preexistent elements that have made the reformation process be a little slow and sometimes even prevented it from happening, aimed the strategic,

structural, cultural and behavioral factors.¹ Thus, the stage of the Romanian administration in 2001 imposed that the changes in the Romanian society were radical, reason for which the targets of these strategic reforms aimed at key issues, such as *the strategic component, the legal component, the organizational component and the cultural component*.

When the cultural component is regarded in relation to *the administrative reform*, it is regarded more as *a context* than as *a cause*. But if we regard it from the perspective of the public administration reform, we are more interested in finding a model in which the culture is regarded both as a context as well as a cause. (Killian & Elkund, 2008, p. 45, p. 62)

In general, the cultural component is analyzed from three different perspectives: *societal, political and administrative*. B. Peters (2001, p. 36) indicated that both the social culture, the political culture as well as the administrative culture influence the public administrative conduct. Leslie Holmes (2004, p. 40, pp. 535-536) defined "the political culture" as being a category that included multiple sub variables, among which "*the experiences in pre communism, communism and post communism; religious traditions; traditional attitudes towards authority and democracy; the level and type of external influences; the ethnical diversity; the closure towards the West or other models*".

The author underlines the fact that it is impossible to determine which one of these variables can become in certain conditions principal, reason for which they are analyzed post factum.

Thus, according to Holmes, the pre communist societies are still fighting the inheritance of the past. They have left the citizens a certain perspective regarding the state institutions and regarding some concepts, to what the *Political Party, Parliament, Government, Justice or Democracy* should represent.

The term "political culture" has acquired many definitions along time, resuming in general at analyzing the *psychological dimension* (Peters 2001, p. 34) of politics. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1996, p. 33) defined the political culture as being the "attitudes towards the political system and its different parts, as well as the role of good in the system". They have identified three types of *political culture*: *parochial*, corresponding to the traditional system; *dependent political*

¹ Ministry of Public Administration, *Strategy on accelerating the reform in public administration*, 15.01.2001.

culture, characterizing the centralized authoritarian systems and the *participative political culture*, attributed to democratic systems.

In Aristotelian vision¹, the political individual has to fulfill a series of criteria that are not very far from the modern political model: it has to have a sincere patriotism, have a “good knowledge of business” as well as a “knowledge and honesty according to each type of government”. Or the actual political people, especially after changing an authoritarian regime² have found themselves helpless in the roles of “president”, “prime minister” or simple “mayor” in a commune in the circumstances in which they had to subordinate to modern government principles, on one side, due to the mentality acquired and the lack of professional preparation on the other side. An ideal political class would be comprised of representatives of the academic elite. Unfortunately, this is an ideal thing in practice. Ideal would be that a politician has, before being nominated for an office, especially high public servant, a certain experience in the domain he will activate in.

The way in which the economic structures are presented, the government functioning and the bureaucracy represent the image of political choices made by the citizens.³

Having a dominant political culture is essential in a state seeking to reform its public administration. Without the support of the political power, any administrative reform fails. In general, the reforms face *resistance from the bureaucratic structures* in applying the reforms or from the citizens through the electoral vote. This is why “*in order to be successful, the opposition has to be eliminated and the resistance has to be surpassed and the reformers have to prove*

¹ Quoted by Virginia Vedinaş (2007). *Deontology of public life*. Bucharest: Universul Juridic, p. 46.

² Christopher Clauge asserted that the democracy in the states immediately after the wars or the communist regime “is strongly affected by the characteristics of the states that reflect the cultural and institutional features”. See for details Christopher K. Clauge, Shoshana Grossbard - Schechtman (2001). *Culture and development: international perspectives*. American Academy of Political and Social Science. SAGE Publications, quoted by T. Vanhanen (2001). *Democratization. A comparative analysis of 170 countries*. Ed. Routledge, pp. 13-14.

³ The citizens are the ones who “chose the elite that govern them and from time to time, are constitutionally authorized to collectively change their opinion. They insist on the fact that no matter how limited it is this is the most democratic order we can obtain, on a large scale in the modern societies. Even those who believe that a more significant democracy is possible, would agree with the fact that what we have until now is more valuable than the absence of any constitutional constraint on the state activity”. See for details Pierson, Christopher (2004). *The modern state*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, p. 21.

moral strength, energy, tenacity, capacity of organization and political aptitudes. Unfortunately, many times the success of the reforms was determined by the personal qualities, intentions, plans, support and report of progress and not by their real success in surpassing the inertia and resistance and the demonstrated improvement of administrative performance". (Caiden, 1991, p. 42)

Many times there appears a spirit "of tolerance towards bad administration" (Caiden, 1991, p. 41) as the citizens get used to not answer back and this form is more dangerous as is getting stronger and it defines the political and administrative culture of a state.

The politicization finds its reason from the perspective of the political responsibility of the governors. Their responsibility towards the electorate and the Parliament imposes an enhanced control within the structures run with the purpose of holding power.

The politicization of public administration has determined the growth of its power, together with the diminishing of the "control of the state politics (parliament) on the public administration". A new phenomena was born, named the empowerment of administration, through the "politicians intervene in the administration" and on the other side "*the ones being part of the administration are going towards cultivating relations with the politicians*". (Alexandru, 2007, p. 440)

What is defining for the political culture is the fact that through "defining what is good or bad in the government, the culture can facilitate actions and can interdict other actions" meaning that the governments "have to do certain things in order to be considered to be good and adequate and also has to be stopped from involving in certain types of activities". For example, the public administration had, in the last decades, to re orientate itself by reforms towards the citizens, but the surveys in this domain have indicated that "the public rarely agrees in what concerns the actions of the public servants". (Peters & Pierre, 2004, pp. 2-11, p. 284)

On the other side, the issue of separating the public from the administration has represented one of the central points within the national public administration reforms in the last decades. Thus, after the fall of the communist regime, in Romania there was a separation between the political sphere and the administration. This happened in the first place because of the fact that any major transformation of the administrative system implies the politicians, as well as the high public servants. Within the reforms, the confirmed necessity of depoliticizing

the public administration represented the very “recognition of the political feature of the public services” (Popescu, 2006, p. 181).

What has to be underlines is the degree in which the contact between the public function and the political one is established. If the public function and the political career are integrated, then the access to public functions is accomplished thorough politics.¹

The major implication of politics in administration has been catalogued in general as being a negative phenomenon as “*a politicized administrative system is considered to be less efficient than the neutral competence associated with the merit system*”. The politicization system is mentioned especially in the domain of public sector employees. A form of politicization is manifested when, for the purpose of holding control over public bureaucracy, those people will be named, over whom this political control will be able to influence the public policies. Another form appears when it is exerted on the public service. But even in the case in which the public service or its employees couldn't have been changed according to the political games, the politicians found the solution of “*duplicating or supplementing the service with a frame of officials with significant political affiliation*”.²

The paradox with the political nominations is the one that they are always “very little understood, controlled from the beginning, less circumscribed (they intervene together with the mandate of a new president) and less lucrative (bringing a series of loss in the incomes of both parties)”. (Chevalier, 2007, p. 357)

Any program of electoral campaign aiming at depoliticizing the public function has failed. And this happens in other countries as well. In France for example, after 1988 as well as during the presidential campaign in 2007, the necessity of depoliticizing the nominations was intensely sustained, in favor of its professionalization, program that couldn't be respected. (Chevalier, 2007, p. 357)

¹ This happened in France. Worrying is the politicization of the functions at the level of the inferior hierarchy. See in this context Luminița G. Popescu, *ed. cit.*, p. 181.

² In this context, some functions have been supplemented (for example the function of deputy minister in a state) or has been tried to create *analog cabinets* (the case in France and Belgium) which allowed the politicians to acquire a larger freedom in finding the public servants who are dedicated to these systems (Westminster type). At the EU level, the political interests of the states are analyzed now at the Brussels level, reason for which the coalition of certain groups of politicians and bureaucrats leads to the growth in the chances to succeed of the political interests. See for details Peters & Pierre, *ed. cit.*, p. 4, 8, 285.

In many of the states that have gone through the process of reforming the public administration or even in the states in which there is a tradition in merit based promotions, in the present we can observe a tendency towards eliminating the control of the bureaucratic activity and replace it with the political control. The *politicization of the public service* consists in “replacing the criteria of selection, maintaining, promotion, rewarding and discipline the members of the public service with political criteria”. Thus, many of the public services have been taken from the direct coordination and control of the government and even so, the citizens are still manifesting their dissatisfaction in case of failure, towards the ministry the specific case belongs to. (Peters & Pierre, 2004, pp. 2-11, p. 284)

Taking over the control by the politicians had brought many paradoxes because of the fact that the more the reformers have tried to diminish the role of the political leaders, the more they intervened in the daily management of government and a weakening of the depoliticized and professionalized managers within the public sector. This happened in powerfully industrialized states as Germany, France, Great Britain, Denmark and Sweden.

J. Chevalier indicated the fact that the politicization phenomenon of the public function indicated different features (Chevalier, 2007, p. 357), namely: the administration presents *different degrees of politicization* according to the sector it aims at: sectors of administration that are very affected by the political changes (internal, education, justice) and sectors that enjoy a greater stability (equipment, external affairs, social affairs); politicization is plural, namely: *missionary politicization* or *conquering* politicization that determines the dismissal of officials in high positions as they no longer present trust in view of applying new policies, the *retaliation politicization* by which politicians avoid certain responsibilities that the former governments have taken, patronage politicization that implies the satisfaction of both ambitions and interests of the known ones; *politicization can be relative*, taking many forms: *activist commitment*, the most rare form but implying the adherence to a political party, participating at an electoral campaign, running for national or local election, *the felt commitment*, by which the public servants participate to meetings or debates together with certain parts directly implicated from a political perspective, offering coordinates for the public servants' activities and *manifestation of discreet sympathies* towards the high officials that have a positive neutral state and the absence of exerting some important responsibilities in the former government; *politicization can fluctuate*, because it differs from a government to another.

The administration and the politics cannot exist in a separate manner. If we consider the fact that all the decisions on policies are taken considering the implementation premises, no government will take a realistic decision until all the implementation means are known. This entails the fact that there is a “network of policies and administration” so that “it cannot be exactly determined where the politics ends and where the administration begins”. Even if these were very well delimited, we couldn’t make a clear separation between the role of the politicians (that has to determine the policies) and the role of the public servants (that would apply the policies). (Greenwood & Wilson, 1989, pp. 3-4)

Between the state and the individual, the administration is only “an instrument at the disposition of the elected power (the parliament) being different of that part of the administration subordinated to the executive power. If we look at this from the perspective of the mechanism of executive government, in view of the elaboration of policies and their implementation, where the activities of the political power and administration, through the public servants are related and escape from a detailed analysis, we will observe that between the two institutions there is no clear demarcation between the activities.

On the other hand, the administration “can be tempted to become the center of a distinct power from the government power due to the permanence of the administration, of its continuity, not being just a function anymore, so that the executive power tends to explode between the two powers: the government power and the administrative power”.¹

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¹ I. Alexandru, *The emancipation of the public administration’s power in public power*, paper presented at the *International conference on Public Administration at the beginning of the third millennium. Dissemination of the best Japanese practices in Romania*, November 21-22 2005, Bucharest, p. 28.

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