

UDC

**Popovici Angela**

Associate Prof., Ph.D.

Academy of Public Administration, Republic of Moldova

**Popovici Corneliu**

Associate Prof., Ph.D.

Republic of Moldova

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

**Abstract.** *The article analyzes the public administration reform process in the Republic of Moldova. Starting from the fact that the issue of public administration efficiency is a global concern, a series of national policy documents, starting with 2005, have announced the need to improve the performance of public administration. At present, the Moldovan public administration faces a high degree of politicization, the exaggerated importance of procedures to the detriment of content, insufficient administrative capacity, lack of prioritization and outdated control systems for human resource management and public finances.*

**Keywords:** *public administration, efficiency, reform, public policies, administrative capacity, depoliticization.*

An overview of public administration reform shows that despite certain developments in the last 20 years, transitioning from a post-Soviet society to a democratic system of government, the Republic of Moldova has serious shortcomings in terms of public administration efficiency and lack of vision, bureaucracy or excessive politicization at the expense of a meritocratic approach remain issues constantly criticized by experts and development partners.

The launch of central government reform at the end of 2005, with the adoption of the Central Government Reform Strategy [1], came to meet a pressing need of society

in the context of a major structural crisis. This reform was considered a major priority for the Government of the Republic of Moldova, the key element for the democratization of the country, and will contribute to building civil society, meeting the needs of society, including raising the standard of living of citizens. The reform strategy set out its basic principles: transparency, predictability, accountability and efficiency. The need for reform was dictated both by internal factors (insufficient quality of management in the public service, social and economic problems) and by external ones (globalization, rapid development of information technologies, European integration). The central public administration reform strategy aimed to identify measures to ensure the modernization of the central public administration based on the reorganization of ministries, other central administrative authorities, including autonomous administrative bodies and institutions, optimizing decision-making, improving human resource management and public finances.

The document initially established the period of implementation of the 2006-2008 reform. However, at the end of 2008 it was considered necessary to continue the reform actions, although a new implementation action plan was not approved and the old one was not updated. The reform of the central public administration was continued in 2009, being determined as a distinct objective in the Program of activity of the new Government. At the same time, the approaches regarding the content and implementation of the central public administration reform were largely different from the previous ones, being determined by the objectives of the political parties that formed the governing alliance in autumn 2009, as well as their visions on the system. of central public administration. Thus, the Central Public Administration Reform Strategy was no longer a strategic reference document for central public administration reform. Through normative acts, most of the objectives of the reform have been modified, substantially reformulated or replaced with others, being, in some cases, more ambitious than those in the Central Public Administration Reform Strategy.

In 2010, an independent group of experts launched the report “Evaluating the performance of the implementation of the Central Public Administration Reform Strategy

in the Republic of Moldova”, highlighting the results, successes and failures of central public administration reform in 2006-2008 and partly in 2009. The report concluded that "the objectives of the Strategy have been partially achieved and the impact of the actions taken on the central public administration has been moderate" [2, p.10]. The report evaluating the performance of the central government reform between October 2009 and November 2010 found that the objectives of the reform set for the analysis period were "partially" achieved, and the impact of the actions taken on the organization and functioning of central government authorities can be assessed. with the qualifier "satisfactory". At the same time, the approaches regarding the content and implementation of the central public administration reform were largely different from the previous ones, being determined by the objectives of the political parties that formed the governing alliance in autumn 2009, as well as their visions on the system. of central public administration.

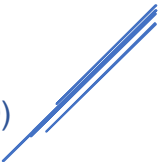
In 2016, the public administration reform returns to the political class, so a new policy document is adopted, the Strategy on public administration reform for 2016-2020 [3], in order to implement the commitments assumed by the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and European Union, Sustainable Development Goals, National Development Strategy "Moldova 2020", National Decentralization Strategy. The strategy on public administration reform for 2016-2020, qualified the effects of the previous cycle of public administration reform (2005-2016) as insignificant, specifying that only some aspects related to the reorganization of the Government structure, public service reform, financial management and process efficiency decisional were made. The need to relaunch public administration reform was determined by the fact that until 2010 the modernization of public administration was almost exclusively related to the internal mechanisms of the Government at the central level. The new policy paper aimed to extend the components of the reform to local public administration, whose capacity in the field needed to be strengthened. Compared to the previous reform cycle, the Strategy wanted to focus more on the citizen (the reforms are no longer focused exclusively on the internal functioning of the bureaucracy, but aim to streamline the way the administration provides services to citizens, including location

issues). , cost, speed and customer satisfaction, more comprehensive (not only limited to central public authorities, but also targeting local public authorities), more coordinated (central monitoring and supervision process focuses on priorities and synergy between areas and involves deadlines stricter and verifiable indicators) [3].

One of the key terms frequently used in both the text of the Central Public Administration Reform Strategy and the Strategy on Public Administration Reform for 2016-2020 is “streamlining public administration”. However, we do not find a definition of this notion in the mentioned policy documents, apart from the specification, that it is necessary to streamline the activity of the public administration by correlating its costs with the capacity to produce qualitative results.

In the literature, the efficiency of public administration is defined as the correlation between the achievement of established social goals and the results obtained, and on the other hand, the correlation of results and public resources used. Efficient administration is the activity with the best possible results for satisfying the needs and social interests in the conditions of regulating the state resources. Thus, the category of "efficiency of public administration" is determined by the notions: "social goals", "results", "social needs and interests". Each of these notions reflects the specific characteristics of the political administration with a political aspect. "Social goals", ultimately, are political goals; "results" - services, processes, information related to meeting social needs and interests (expressed in state policy); "Public resources" - economic, social, political, ideological and informational capital regulated by the state [4, p.24].

The inefficiency of public administration generates corruption and the presence of the economy, darkness, poverty and underdevelopment. Countries with an inefficient public sector may resort to reform policies, which may lead to increased quality of public goods and services (eg by introducing competition in the provision of services, by conceding infrastructure development, partial privatization, allocating more funds to education, health, etc.). It is currently considered that a modern public sector is one that provides opportunities for innovative information and information technology, accelerates strategic and human resource performance, enabling the



administration to perform efficiently, to raise living standards.

The issue of public administration efficiency is a global concern. Thus, for more than two decades, the World Bank's "Worldwide governance indicators" study has indexed six dimensions of government for 212 countries: participatory democracy and freedom of expression, political stability and non-violence, efficiency of government, quality of regulations, rule of law and control of corruption. The Republic of Moldova ranks on the efficiency of government index, according to the 2019 report, worse than Ukraine, Romania, the Russian Federation, which have a better score in this category [8].

Therefore, the situation regarding the efficiency of the government in the Republic of Moldova is worrying, and the postponement of making clear decisions has deepened the problems. In this context, sustained efforts are needed to increase the efficiency of public administration. The indicator that measures the efficiency of the public administration captures various aspects of it, such as:

- ✓ quality of public services;
- ✓ the quality of the civil service and the degree of independence from political pressures;
- ✓ the quality of public policy formulation;
- ✓ the quality of financial management;
- ✓ the credibility of the government's commitment to implement the adopted policies [9, p.6].

In the Republic of Moldova, public administration has relatively low performance: low decision-making transparency and accountability, insufficient administrative capacity, low quality of public service delivery, inefficient management of public resources, these indicators being directly correlated with public policies. To this is added the negative perception that citizens have on the quality of public institutions, on the services provided and, in general, on public policies and the political factor.

Although a vision for public administration reform has been formulated, which provides that in 2020 the public administration of the Republic of Moldova will be efficient, effective and responsible at all levels, thus becoming an important catalyst

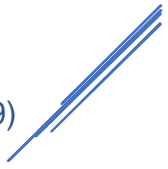
for the continuous and sustainable development of the country, the situation is far from this. desideratum. The public administration continues to face a high degree of politicization, circumstantial policy decisions and lack of public policy analysis, overemphasis on procedures to the detriment of content, lack of prioritization and allocated budgetary resources without outdated performance criteria or control systems. for managing human resources and budgets. Central government reform started in 2006 had a limited systemic impact. Thus, the component aimed at the decision-making process, namely the increase of the capacity to elaborate the sectoral policy documents, to analyze and monitor their implementation did not result in sustainable purposes, so it was resumed within the new Strategy on public administration reform [3] under name Development and coordination of public policies. In this regard, there is a preference for a legal approach to the detriment of public policy. The institutional and formal framework for the elaboration and coordination of public policies was created, but it did not work to the expected parameters. Public policy documents, concepts, strategies, programs, plans have not come to play the role of decision-making tool. At best, public policy documents served as a basis for decisions already taken. There was no real demand from policy makers for a structured analysis and substantiation of public interventions. In this sense, we consider that the main problems were determined by the fact that:

- The Directorate General for Policy Coordination, External Assistance and Central Public Administration Reform within the State Chancellery has monopolized the process of coordinating public policies, limiting the mandate of practical policy coordination for the Interministerial Committee for Strategic Planning;

- Legal approach to public administration with a negative impact on the use of policy documents and simplification of decision-making;

- Decisions based on current conditions affect the need and demand of senior civil servants for policy analysis;

- Limited cooperation between technically appointed and politically appointed staff (with a predominance of decisions dominated by strictly political considerations



to the detriment of technical ones, based on a public policy analysis).

The low efficiency of the public administration in the Republic of Moldova is also generated by the chaotic measures to strengthen the administrative capacity that do not have a serious impact on the public administration system. In this sense, staff training interventions have limited success if they are not correlated with the development or improvement of management systems, processes and procedures. To meet current rigors, any civil servant must have knowledge, covering a range of topics, from professional ethics and transparency in public administration, strategic planning, public policy development and evaluation, project management, to conflict management, time management and negotiation. Public authorities must pay special attention to the training of their own staff and to adapt, from an institutional and human point of view, to the very rapid changes that are taking place in society. In this context, the continuous training of the personnel within the public administration authorities represents a defining element in strengthening the institutional capacity and streamlining the public administration. The development of professional skills and competencies of public administration officials significantly determines the performance of a public institution and its institutional capacity.

At the same time, one of the problems that directly affects the efficiency of public administration is the degree of politicization of the administration. Politicization is defined as “an action that gives political significance to a situation without this characteristic; it is an abusive practice to attribute a political character to phenomena that do not have such a character ”[10, p. 358]. The politicization of public administration is a sensitive issue in any modern administrative system. Thus, a certain level of political involvement in public administration is considered to be accepted, provided that the selection of civil servants is not compromised on the basis of merit and competence. Another view is that politicization can be achieved by selecting civil servants on political grounds due to loyalty to a particular political party, but there is a possibility that this issue may vary and the selection may be based on adherence to a particular policy, vision or program. A third view argues that the way in which political



criteria are employed can count for the performance of the administrative system [11, p.3], so if the merit system is supported and old, narrow-minded employees are removed from public administration, inflexible, to the detriment of politically affiliated people, this cannot be considered a detrimental issue to democracy or public administration. Politicization may also mean that civil servants take on certain tasks that could formally be considered political, or that the use of the political criterion may be more important for guaranteeing or ensuring democratic values in government than the use of the conventional criterion of merit [11, p .3].

There are some negative effects of the politicization of the civil service, thus, the competence is the first criticized and it is found that civil servants in management give special importance to the relationship with superiors, who are most often ministers or secretaries of state and do not look at the base of the hierarchy. [12, p. 161]. Another critique of the relationship between politics and public administration is partisanship, as civil servants support the policies of the rulers and do not support innovation and creativity, in the public administration always creating a caste of those who share the same philosophies and are promoted in public office and selected people who do not provoke conflicts and support the ruling party [12, p.163-164]. "The lack of transparency in the activity, the secrecy of the administration and especially of the top of the executive power" [12, p.164] is another criticism invoked in this context and could be mitigated by depoliticizing the civil service, as it goes without saying that this factor is an impediment to true democracy.

The notion of "politicization of public administration" has a bivalent meaning; it refers either to an ongoing phenomenon, of impregnating the structures of public administration with politically "vassalized" persons or of subordinating the administrative action to the will of a certain political party or a political alliance that has assumed the exercise of government [ 13].

The attempt to depoliticize the public administration in the Republic of Moldova cannot be made without the analysis of the political environment of the last 20 years. The parties' programs in this field have been and are blocked at the level of generalities





such as "the creation of a professional body of civil servants". The main pressure for change came from development partners. The depoliticization of the activity of the ministries, the technocratic character of the secretaries of state, the emphasis on their election through public competition were the basic leitmotif of the restructuring of the specialized central public administration. The emphasis on the political independence of future secretaries of state was the basis for promoting the need for government reorganization reform. The informative note to the draft Law on Government contains the idea of depoliticization - "clear delimitation of political functions from those of administration, exercised by ministers, with the subsequent transfer of administrative functions in the exclusive competence of state secretaries, thus strengthening the institution of secretaries of the state".

Excessive politicization leads to a weakening of the degree of competence in the administration, the degree of responsibility and efficiency. Human resource management, no matter how much it is adapted and improved, no matter how many recruitment, retention or performance reward procedures are applied, has limited results in the absence of real responsibility. When decisions are made almost entirely by politicians, and senior civil servants, who in theory should be the professionals of the system to guide and advise policy makers, are for the most part appointed temporarily, precisely so that they can be changed more easily, then a real human resources management policy in public administration is practically a utopia [9, p.8].

A careful evaluation of the previous achievements of the public administration reform in the Republic of Moldova from 2006 to the present leads us to formulate some conclusions:

- excessive importance has been given to procedures, such as the elaboration of regulations, norms, to the detriment of the content;
- budgetary resources have been dispersed to several areas of public policy, without prioritizing the most important ones;
- lack of transparency of the results obtained;
- the lack of a unified vision of a coherent system of public administration, which

stimulates stability, the career of civil servants and performance.

In conclusion, public administration reform must start from the following premises: the resources spent must find the best use, respond to long-term needs, strengthen administrative capacity, capacity for analysis, monitoring and evaluation of public policies, to depoliticize the civil service.

#### References:

1. Hotărârea Guvernului Republicii Moldova cu privire la aprobarea Strategiei de reformă a administrației publice centrale în Republica Moldova nr.1402 din 30.12.2005. În: Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova nr. 1-4 din 06.01.2006.
2. Evaluarea performanțelor implementării Strategiei de reformă a administrației publice centrale în Republica Moldova, Chișinău, Edit. Epigraf, 2010.
3. Hotărârea Guvernului Republicii Moldova pentru aprobarea Strategiei privind reforma administrației publice pentru anii 2016-2020 nr.911 din 25.07.2016. În: Monitorul Oficial al Republicii Moldova nr. 256-264 din 12.08.2016.
4. Șaptefrați T. Eficiența administrației publice: criterii de apreciere și factori de influență. In: Administrarea publică, nr. 1, 2010.
5. Simon Herbert A. Decision Making and Problem Solving // <http://www.dieoff.org/page163.htm> (accesat pe 1.04.2018)
6. Matei, A., Anghelescu, A., Săvulescu, C. Modele teoretice și empirice ale dezvoltării locale, Editura Economică, București, 2009.
7. Antonescu D. Eficiența economică a administrației publice din Uniunea Europeană și România, Institute of National Economy, 2016.
8. Worldwide Governance Indicators // <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#reports>
9. Dinu D., Giosan V., Cum îmbunătățim eficiența guvernării în România? Policy Memo 45, 2013.
10. Ivanoff, I. V. Deontologia funcției publice-exercițiul onest și patologic al funcției publice, Târgoviște: Editura University Press, 2004.
11. Peters, G., Pierre, J. Politicization of the Civil Service in Comparative Perspective, NY, London: Routledge, 2004.
12. Alexandru, I. Politică, administrație, justiție, București: Editura All Beck, 2004.
13. Țaranu A., Clipa C. Politizare și depolitizare a funcției publice // [http://advocacy.ro/sites/advocacy.ro/files/files/article/2016-11/politizare\\_si\\_depolitizare\\_a\\_funcției\\_publice\\_-\\_motivatie\\_masa\\_rotunda.pdf](http://advocacy.ro/sites/advocacy.ro/files/files/article/2016-11/politizare_si_depolitizare_a_funcției_publice_-_motivatie_masa_rotunda.pdf) (accesat pe 20.03.2018)