

Public Administration Reform and EU Integration

The Public Administration (PA) in Macedonia, even after its succession from Yugoslavia, has functioned according to the same old principles, which have served well the interests of the governing political parties. Efforts to reform the PA have come only due to the fact that Public Administration Reform (PAR) stands as an important precondition for Macedonia's accession in the EU. Every time the EC calls for PAR it refers to the Copenhagen criteria that emphasize the ability of the candidate state to cope with the obligations of membership and the administrative capacity to effectively apply the *acquis*. Enlargement experiences have enlightened the EU to become more attentive about the administrative capacities of prospective Member State (MS), particularly after the Mediterranean enlargement in 1981. The Commission's 1995 White Paper states that “the main challenge for the Associated countries in taking over internal market legislation lies not in the approximation of their legal texts, but in adopting their administrative machinery and their societies to the conditions necessary to make the legislation work.” Therefore, an efficient Public Administration, as the apparatus responsible for implementing policies, is indeed the ground upon which most political criteria can be met.

Ensuring the compatibility of copious EU laws with domestic legislations is an expensive and complex procedure, primarily since it makes changes in the administrative structures indispensable. Nonetheless, in EU's history of enlargement, post-communist member states showed how they could swiftly (procedurally) incorporate the *acquis* into their domestic legislation without conducting distinctive reforms in their administration machineries. Certainly, their deficient administrations, not only obstructed their positions in the Union, but also posed an obstacle to the efforts of older MS to deepen integration within the EU. Hence, the EC with the support of the member states has presented tougher and standardized conditions for membership to the countries that joined the EU in 2004. Macedonia faces the same

conditions today and is offered close support by the EC and MS in its effort to reform the administration.

The Government of Macedonia has launched a promising PAR Strategy for the period 2010-2015, which if properly implemented should introduce significant advancement in the administration. It tackles all sensitive issues, from the lack of professionalism, through overstaffing and corruption, to politicization. It also envisions charging the Ministry of Information Society with the competence of coordinating and implementing the PAR (renaming it the Ministry of Information Society and Administration). The establishment of the Ministry is a success story as it will become the sole central institution burdened with the responsibility of overlooking the evolution of PAR, since until now several institutions have had competencies in the field.

Impeccable as the Strategy may seem, there are always restraints on being hopeful for impressive progress. The Macedonian government has always produced exemplary laws and documents regarding the PA (and the PAR Strategy is not the first of its kind), but has done little to implement them in practice, which indeed, is exactly what the EU fears and hopes to ameliorate. Additionally, although not necessarily definitive, the prolongation of the name dispute with Greece, which continues to delay the date for negotiations with EU, risks to witness the fading of the “spirit of reforms” in Macedonia. Nonetheless, should the government implement the Strategy even partially, it will certainly mend its communication with EU and pave a safer path toward accession for itself.

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