

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AGENDA IN MACEDONIA - THREE DECADES OF CHALLENGES AND RESULTS

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ABSTRACT

Democratic countries across the world are usually involved in a continuous process referred to as public administration reform. For Macedonia a former Yugoslav Republic, this reform is vital to them since it is a precondition set for them for a successful European Union integration. Public administration reformation in Macedonia is a step in the structural process of becoming closer to the standards of the EU, putting European best practices into effect, and adhering to the Principles of Public Administration. It is one of the essential conditions for the Republic of Macedonia's entry into the European Union and one of the top priorities outlined in the Accession Partnership. The agenda is continually updated with plans for modernizing and improving the administration. The core of the entire public sector can be said to be public and civil administration which the group and activities of every democratic activity depend on (Mehmedi S., 2017).

The Republic of Macedonia, a candidate country for membership in the European Union, has implanted and refined the principles of the European Administrative Space through the implementation of two public administration reform projects during the previous few years. Although it didn't have a timeframe, the first PAR Strategy was adopted in 1999 and set the foundation for the legislative and organizational framework needed to start the public administration reform process. Its 2010 approval of a 2010-2015 PAR Strategy and Action Plan helped to improve the quality of administrative services offered to people and businesses as well as the formulation and implementation of effective public policies (Stojanovski S, Denkova J, Ananiev J.2015)

The recent political and institutional crisis in the Republic of Macedonia has demonstrated the flagrant violations of the rule of law and the proper operation of the legal system, as well as the serious damage that the strong division of civil and public institutions has done to the institutions' credibility and integrity. The Republic of Macedonia has earned the moniker "the captive state of captive institutions" as a result of the state and institutions' slow response to the political crisis (Zendeli F . 2015).

Keywords: public administration, reforms, North Macedonia

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Reforms in Macedonia from 1991 to 2021

A crucial and one of the most significant components of the government's efforts during the past 13 years in Macedonia has been the reform of the public administration, a process that began in 1998 and is to the present day. They are crucial because the country's future regional and international integration, more specifically, its integration into the EU depends on their successful implementation. Four different governments have attempted to solve the numerous issues related to the public sector in the nation since 1998.

The 1999 strategy

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Macedonia has struggled with significant economic, political, and administrative issues. As a result, over the past 20 years, numerous strategies and action plans have been adopted and put into place by the country's governments to stabilize the nation overall and advance the country's path toward full EU membership. The strategies and action plans for public sector reform that were established in 1999 and the most recent one in 2010 are just two of the various tactics to change the system (Davitkovski B. And others). A couple of state documents outlined several actions that had to be taken in conjunction with numerous institutions. The adoption of new pro-reform legislation and the implementation of better administrative structures and procedures were the main objectives of both strategies to improve public administration in the nation and better support the advancement of a democratic society and market economy. Professional public

administration was also created to gain ongoing support for the country's aspirations for full membership in the EU.

Between 1999 and 2001, the Strategy's initial phase was in effect. At the time, it was believed that future progress required the adoption of reform concepts into legal measures. Several new institutions were founded during the second phase, which ran from 2002 to 2006, as well as deliberate efforts to increase the institutional capacity of those that already existed. This second phase served as a transitional period before the third implementation phase. The third phase, referred to as the implementation phase, can be characterized as a time when the reform provision framework is put into operation. The implementation phase of the 1999 strategy was exactly where it failed the most. The country continues to face significant issues of a political, economic, and administrative nature despite the combined efforts of several institutions and significant sums of public funds spent for the operations of the existing and recently founded public institutions (Naumovski V, and others 2015).

2010 strategy

In 2010, nearly 11 years after the initial Strategy for public administration reform in the country was adopted, the General Secretariat of the Government prepared and adopted a new Strategy for public administration reform in collaboration with the recently established Ministry of Information Society and Administration (2010-15). Striking similarities to the Public Administration Reform Strategy from 1999.

The 2010-2015 Strategy was expected to have an impact on the management of public finances, human resources, e-government & management, and corruption. Between the years of 1999 and 2010, the

Agency for Civil Servants was established, and the Law on State Civil Servants was passed. Additionally, all public sector employees are given special treatment under the country's current general public legislation according to the Law on Public Servants, which was passed in April 2010 (Karadjoski M., 2015)

In response to proposals from the EU, a new Ministry of Information Society and Administration was established on January 1st, 2011. Implementing organized and coordinated methods for the implementation of public administration reform processes that will hasten the speed of reforms throughout the entire society is the Ministry's main goal in this area.

2018-2022 strategy

The aims and objectives outlined in each of the key categories are to be accomplished during the next five years, according to the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2018 - 2022. Strengthening the processes for sectorial strategies and the planning documents of the government to be consistent in their execution, monitoring, and performance evaluation will receive particular attention. Depoliticizing the administration will be a top priority for the public service and human resource management sectors. A special focus will be placed on the professionalization of senior management structures through the establishment of a senior civil service category, the definition and regulation of transparent and competitive merit-based hiring processes, and the clear separation of political and professional levels (Garding S. 2019).

A Council for Public Administration Reform will be established, presided over by the President of the GRM, and comprised of deputies of

the head of the state of Macedonia, ministers, in addition to several senior individuals from institutions in charge of and/or involved in the implementation of the activities listed in the Action Plan of the PAR Strategy 2018 - 2022, to achieve the goals anticipated under the PAR Strategy and to coordinate the overall PAR process at the political level (Çani EM, Mazelliu A. 2021)

A PAR Team will be established in MISA as the primary institution for administering and overseeing the process execution to manage and monitor the public administration reform. The Ministry of Information Society and Administration shall be responsible for monitoring and reporting on the PAR process. Every six months, the PAR Council and once a year, the Macedonia government will receive an outline on the implementation of the PAR Strategy 2018–2022.

Results and Potentials of Macedonia Reforms

The initial phase following the enactment of the public administration reforms is characterized by the definition of the fundamental principles and their transformation into a legal framework for the development of the government administration bodies and their competencies, with the organization and functioning of the government, as well as the development of the institutional framework. After the basic legislation was passed, the focus of the reform was on the establishment of the institutional framework required for the execution of the reforms in specific areas, as well as the intensification of the changes in areas that weren't prioritized at the time the Strategy was adopted.

With the reform of the state administration system, tremendous progress has been made in a short amount of time, particularly in creating the legislative framework and bylaws required for the operation of the new

system of state service. As an example, the Law on Organization and Operation of State Administrative Bodies, the Law on Government of this country, the Law on State Servants, the Law on Local Self-government, the Law on Territorial Organization of the Local Self-government of the Republic of Macedonia, the Law on the Financing of the Local Self-government units, the Law on Prevention of Corruption, etc., were all passed (Azizi A, 2015).

Additionally, a crucial institutional framework for managing and coordinating public administration reform has been established. Furthermore, additional actions and initiatives are taken to carry out the desired reform objectives. The definition of new systems and institutional structures for the budgetary process, treasury operations, public debt, and procurement management, as well as internal audit, have all improved overall financial management and control. This is a significant advancement in the field of public finance.

Conclusions

The structural reconstruction of the country, with a focus on public administration, has been subject to the political determination of each of the Macedonian governments since the country's independence in 1991 to the present. The country's public administration reform gained momentum when a significant democratic achievement was made, and the beginnings of the implemented economic reforms were seen. Although there have been certain successes, there is a broad perception that the country's reform of its public administration is split between the political and legal spheres. This is particularly evident in the determination to execute the terms of the Ohrid Framework Contract of 2001, enforced through revisions to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, at all

costs. We are currently experiencing a classic collision between constitutional amendments, the Law on Civil Servants, and advertisements as a rule. All of this is the result of politicians' futile efforts to ensure equitable representation of all communities in all central and local public organs at all costs while ignoring the standards of competence and integrity that public advertisement must abide by.

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