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Romanian system of professional training for public administration - evolution and involution[1]

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Abstract

Training system for public administration in Romania has undergone an evolution contradictory over the past 10 years. Growth periods (2002-2004 and 2006-2008) have alternated with periods of regression. In 2009 the National Institute of Administration, the main national actors of professional training for public administration was terminated. In this context it is necessary to assess the current state of the system of training for public administration and its remodeling. Beyond the institutional level we have witnessed transformations in parallel to different approaches to the rights and obligations of civil servants to improve their training.

1. Organizational context of professional training for public administration in Romania

At the beginning of the 2000s, public administration reform in Romania gained new directions, generated by the development of the Public Administration Reform Strategy. In order to support the process of transforming public administration, in accordance with the requirements of the reform process from this area, a coherent set of measures was considered necessary to be taken, in a very well determined time period, in the field of public function, with the purpose of creating a professional body of permanent and politically not involved civil servants, in the field of local public administration, by continuing the process of decentralization/ deconcentration of public services and of the system of central public administration, through improving the process of public policy development.

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[1] Paper published in the Presented Papers from the 19th NISPAcee Annual Conferences MAy 19-22-, 2011, Varna, Bulgaria, ISBN: 978-80-89013-55-5

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In this context, considering the ambitious reform objectives regarding civil service and its professionalization, similar to the European experience in the field, in the year 2001 was founded the National Institute of Administration, designed as a major player in the public administration reform in Romania, responsible with the development and implementation of the strategy concerning the lifelong learning training programs of civil servants.

Therefore, in accordance with Government Ordinance no. 81/2002, the Institute was established as a public institution under the Ministry of Administration and Interior and under the patronage of the Prime Minister, having as main responsibilities specialized training and improving professional training in administration, for civil servants and staff employed through individual employment contract within the authorities and public institutions, for persons appointed or elected in office of public dignity or similar to those, from central and local administration.

Also, the institute can carry out studies, projects and publications in the field of public administration, and coordinate the work of 8 regional centers of continuing education for local public administration. As a way of financing, the main resources of the institute were taken from their own activity.

The role of main actor of administrative reform was shared with the Ministry of Interior, the National Agency of Civil Servants, and the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform and Public Policy Unit within the General Secretariat of the Romanian Government.

In an assessment[4] regarding the activity of the main actors involved in public administration reform, made at the beginning of 2005, civil servants have awarded the highest score to the National Institute of Administration (50% estimated its work as being good, 45.5% - very good) .

Therefore, during 2002-2005, the institute progressed, improving its presence both domestically and abroad, being appreciated in the administrative environment. The main criticisms were concerning the position of monopoly held on the training market for civil servants in Romania and the questionable quality of some training programs, mainly the absence of filters concerning the selection of trainers.

[4]Marius Profiroiu, Tudorel Andrei, Dragos Dinca, Radu Carp, Public administration reform in the context of European integration, impact study, European Institute of Romania, 2005, p. 10

Year 2005 marked a strong setback for the institute, both in the field of public image and at the organizational level, in the sense of diminishing the capacity to provide quantitative and especially qualitative training programs.

Based on this decline capacity to fulfill its role, the European Commission's 2005 report was very hard on the training scheme coordinated by the NIA and the European Commission report in early 2006 tackled the issue of training civil servants in Romania, adding that "the general level of training is weak".

In this context, rebooting the NIA activities was necessary, in order to respond to its founding objectives and targets set out in the Government Program, the Updated Strategy for Public Administration Reform (2004) or in the Continuing Education Strategy of Civil Servants in Romania (2004).

In 2006, we started from the following theoretical conclusion: for a long time, marketing research and research on quality were inspired by one other. Common or similar fields of investigation were brought to attention (buyer behavior, mechanisms of consumer satisfaction). If we analyze the quality criteria that Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award[5] takes into consideration for awarding its best companies, five of them are wholly or partially covered by the classical marketing functions. Thus, a strategic approach designed to restore the customer clerk as the focus of the institute's concerns had to begin with CAF[6].

Following the application of this instrument a number of shortcomings have been identified:

- Poor quality of internal communication
- Lack of organizational strategies
- Poorly shaped organizational culture

[5] National Institute of Standards and Technology

[6] The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a total quality management tool inspired by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the model of the German University of Administrative Sciences in Speyer. It is based on the premise that excellent results in organizations performance, citizens/costumers, people and society are achieved through leadership driving strategy and planning, people, partnerships and resources and processes. It looks at the organization from different angles at the same time, the holistic approach of organization performance analysis-CAF2006_brochure_10July06_V08.doc, p.2, Ministry of Administration and Interior, Romania

- Low quality of external communication, of public relations and marketing activities - low visibility for the Institute before the public
- Lack of a clear and well defined career development and human resources plan
- Limited training capacity
- Insufficient logistical capacity
- Low quality and expertise of trainers and experts recruited
- Lack of a national network of training institutions and training schools
- Increasing competition on the training market
- Wrong perception of the public about the mission and role of NIA
- Legislative changes regarding lifelong learning programs training

Strategic approach

The use of the CAF instrument represented the starting point for developing a set of instruments that were meant to revitalize the work of the institute. We have started from the sustainable elements of the environment in which the Institute acts, reducing the variables as much as we could, and, implicitly, the irrelevance risks. We took into consideration at the same time the identified constraints and conditions.

We used both the "top-down approach", thought which general objectives related to public administration reform and EU integration were taken into account, and the "bottom-up approach", which started from "the need for training of the beneficiaries" and not from the "services offered by NIA".

In this context, the strategic approach of NIA followed the objectives and priorities defined in the above documents, in accordance with other programmatic documents (Partnership for Romania's Accession to the European Union, the National Plan for Romania's Integration in the EU, Single Action Plan for Improving the Management of EU funds in Romania, etc.).

A set of documents, elaborated with the support of the technical assistance team from the Phare project no. RO 0106.022[7], and the evaluation report on the National Institute of Administration prepared by SIGMA experts, have also been consulted and analyzed.

The strategic approach was the result of an extensive consultation process of various stakeholders that where interested in the issue of training civil servants, decision factors within public administration and NIA employees.

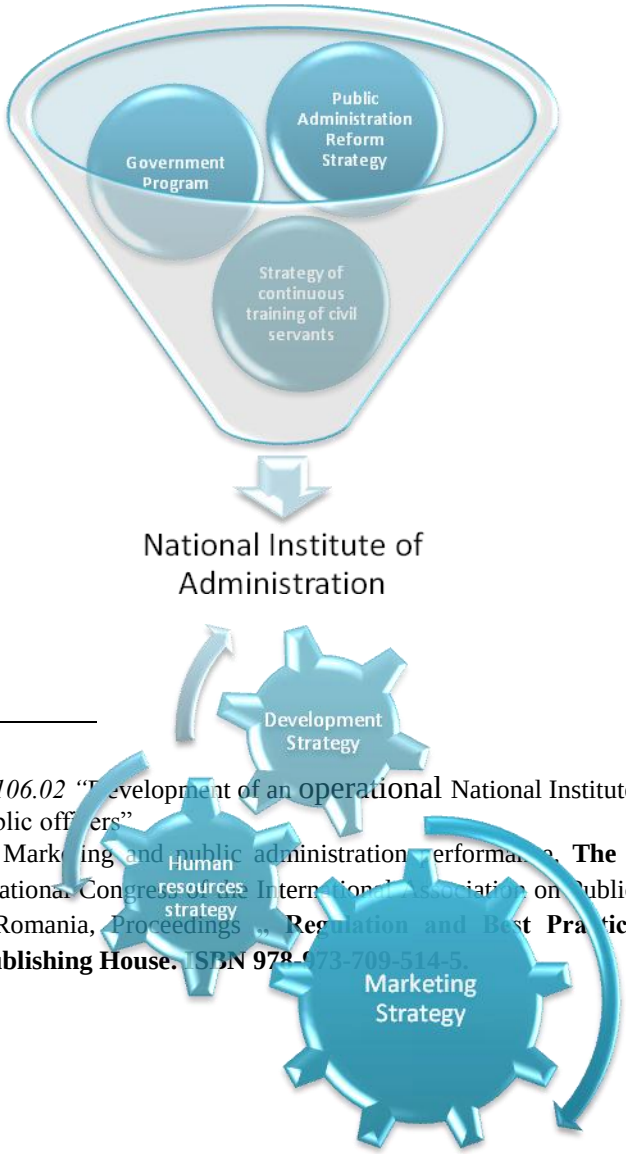
Three major strategies where developed[8]:

a) The National Institute of Administration's Development Strategy, 2006-2009

b) The National Institute of Administration's Human Resources Strategy

c) The National Institute of Administration's Marketing Strategy

Fig. no. 1 NIA's Strategic approach



[7] *PHARE PROJECT RO.0106.02 "*Development of an operational National Institute of Public Administration, able to form competent public officers"

[8] Dinca D, Dumitrica C – Marketing and public administration performance. **The case of National Institute of Administration"**. 9th International Congress of the International Association on Public and Nonprofit Marketing 10-11 June 2010 Bucharest Romania, Proceedings „ **Regulation and Best Practices in Public and Nonprofit Marketing" Economică Publishing House.** ISBN 978-973-709-514-5.

But all this construction and the entire effort that took place between 2006 and 2009, the work of dozens of people who reached a very high level of professionalism, comparable to the staff from similar institutions in Europe, were in vain.

Although NIA's strategic objectives for the year 2009 were to develop online training systems, using e-learning platforms (being about to obtain financing of 3.5 million Euros), which would have significantly reduced the training budgets, and to "internationalize" its services (participation in technical assistance consortia in Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine), at the end of 2009, **the institute was closed down as a result of the reorganization process of the Romanian central public administration**.

The only central public institution in Romania that has developed and implemented a public marketing strategy, no longer exists.

2.Successful training programs for public administration

a. A special remark must be made concerning The Program for Specialized Training for Senior Civil Servants. This was a unique program, NIA brand, considered the main INSTRUMENT to promote quality in training and generating clients for other types of programs. Although the completion of this program was mandatory for entry into the body of senior civil servants, in year 2006, the program didn't received special attention, bringing together less than one candidate on a place (85 candidates admitted for the 100 places allocated). The promotion of the

program, especially by the alumni, led, in the context of raising the number of places and of substantially increasing the fee, to nearly 3 candidates on a place in 2008.

b. Young Professionals Scheme[9] (YPS)

The Young Professionals Scheme is one route to becoming a public manager, the title currently conferred on the graduates of the scheme when they enter the civil service.

The ideal qualities of a public manager were elaborated in 2004 through a competency framework which defines the key qualities, qualifications and skills that a modern public manager is ideally expected to show in his/her character, aptitudes, professional work and practice. A combination of tests of potential and of performance in the training programme is used in the YPS to identify candidates particularly well endowed to take up public manager positions.

Public managers are prepared through their training to work in various administrative contexts, at central, territorial and local levels. They are trained to become specialists in general management, with a results- oriented perspective, which requires a broad understanding of the public administration mission, duties and tasks. They understand the need for improvement by learning through feedback and careful monitoring of results, and for vertical and lateral co-ordination within and between organizations. Their skills in objective-oriented team-working, internal and external communication and co-ordination allow them to make a relevant contribution to all public administration activities. Their foreign language skills are an important asset in the creation and development of EU-wide networks and partnerships.

The scheme, as presently designed, divides candidates into two groups, either as scholars or as trainees. Both groups follow a broadly common training programme in Romania in their first nine months, but then take different programmes in the second part of the programme. Trainees, subject to good performance, are offered in the second part a 12-week internship in a public administration of a Member State of the European Union, to provide practical work experience in such an administration. Scholars, subject to good performance, are offered a scholarship of up to 12 months (including a 4-week internship) in a Member State of the

[9] YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SCHEME (YPS): A NEW APPROACH AND CHALLENGE FOR TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN ROMANIA, *Marius Profiroiu, Alina Profiroiu, Tudorel Andrei*

European Union. In cycle 2, applications were possible online through the Scheme's website. This technology ensured good outreach and generated applications from each of Romania's 42 counties. A total of 942 applications were received, a 79% increase on Cycle 1; 201 of these applications were from candidates for the Trainees Programme and 741 from candidates for the Scholars Programme.

3.Legal framework and resources allocated to professional training in public administration

a. Professional training improvement – right and obligation of public servants

The Constitution of Romania, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishes the improvement of professional training as a fundamental right: *Art. 52 The right to education is ensured through the general mandatory education … as well as through other forms of training and* ***improvement****.* Also, the Labour Code in Romania (Law no. 53/2003) establishes in Art. 190. (1) that *employers have the obligation to ensure the participation in professional training programs for all employees. Thus, every person has the right to attend forms of improvement of his professional training*, right transposed in the employer s obligation to create the conditions for its achievement.

In what concerns public servants, Law no. 188/1999, republished in 2007, regarding the Statute of public servants, regulates in Section 3 of Chapter V the *Professional improvement of public servants,* indicating in Art. 50 that *Public servants have the* ***right and obligation*** *to continuously their professional skills and training.* To this right of public servants corresponds the state s and public institutions obligation to create the **legal, institutional framework and to provide the resources necessary** for its achievement.

In addition to a contractual employee, the public servant also has the **OBLIGATION** to improve his professional training, obligation deriving from the fact that he exercises public power prerogatives and his action is circumscribed to the general interest. In this context, the public servant must attend improvement forms organized at the initiative or in the interest of the public institution.

b. The obligation of professional training improvement of the local elected officials

With respect to local elected officials (they are not public servants – we are talking about the presidents of the county councils, the county counselors, the mayors and the local counselors), for a long time different formula of professionalization and training have been tried, some successful, achieved in an informal manner by the associative forms of local authorities (training courses, study visits, experience exchanges etc.), other failed, such as the attempt to impose by law a minimum level of education.

Through Law no. 249 of June 22nd, 2006, for the modification and completion of Law no. 393/2004 regarding the Statute of the local elected officials, an important step was achieved on the way of the training of the local elected officials, in the sense of ensuring a minimum level of knowledge necessary for carrying out their term in good conditions (at the time, Romania was the only European country that regulated the requirement of professional training improvement for the local elected officials). Thus, the mentioned law stipulates that the local elected officials **have the obligation to attend at least one training course in the field of local public administration, during the first year of their term.** However, without further detailing, the above regulation does not settle the issue of professionalization of the local elected officials. At the moment, it is necessary to indicate the minimum duration of these courses, the institutions designated to organize them, the financing sources, the manner of completing the training improvement forms, the effects of not observing these provisions.

c. The market for professional training improvement for the local public administration.

According to the Report regarding the management of public office and public servants for year 2008, published by the National Agency of Public Servants, in the local public administration perform their activity 13,979 public servants with bachelor degree university studies or long-term superior education, 2,330 public servants with short-term superior education, and **30,287 public servants with high school education**. Thus, out of the total of **46,596** public servants in the local public administration, **65% have secondary education.**

In what concerns the local elected officials, in Romania, according to the Central Electoral Bureau, there are 2,334 county counselors, 3,185 mayors and 40,299 local counselors. Thus, we are talking about **45,818** local elected officials, for whom, however, there is no record

from the perspective of the level of education (there is no public institution responsible for this aspect). Neither for public servants, nor for the local elected officials there are occupational standards (the Sectoral Committee of Administration and Services within the National Council of Professional Training of Adults was founded only in 2008).

d. Training suppliers for the public administration

In year 2007, NIA executed the National study regarding the activity of the training suppliers for public administration. 112 suppliers were identified, of different sectors: **public institutions suppliers** (financed from the state budget, public institutions financed from the state budget and own incomes, self-financed public institutions, from the perspective of territorial competence – with national competence and with regional competence, from the perspective of the topics covered – with general competence and specialized, from the perspective of subordination – institutions under the Ministry of Administration and Interior, institutions under the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Finance, Ministry of Education and Research etc.), **universities**, both in the public and the private system, **trading companies,** with authorization from the National Council of Professional Training of Adults and without authorization, **non-governmental organizations,** in the same situation as the trading companies.

In year 2008, out of the desire to identify the common points and in an attempt to stand out on its own, in the absence of legal regulations or quality standards in the activity of professional training improvement, at NIA s initiative, RONAT – National Network of Training Suppliers for Public Administration was created, to which adhered only 14 organizations. Also, at the end of year 2009, NIA was closed down, the activity of this institute being undertaken by the National Agency of Public Servants. Thus, the sphere of beneficiaries of training programs organized by NIA reduced to only public servants.

In other words, there is a multitude of training suppliers for public administration, which functions according to different rules, without convergence points in what concerns their authorization, the manner of organizing, evaluating and assuring of quality for the improvement activities of professional training in the local public administration. In this moment, any university, any trading company and any non-governmental organization can organize training

improvement activities for the local public administration without previously undergoing an accreditation/evaluation/authorization process for this type of activity.

e. Trainers for the improvement programs of professional training for the public administration

In year 2009, in the trainers' database of the National Institute of Administration and of the 8 continuous training centers for the local public administration, there were registered teaching staff from the university environment, practitioners with trainer qualification, practitioners without trainer qualification, professional trainers. In what concerns other training suppliers, there are only the own selection criteria of the trainers, insufficient for ensuring the premise of a quality activity.

f. Financing sources for the improvement programs of professional training for the local public administration

Considering the obligation of public institutions to provide the framework necessary for the professional training improvement of public servants, annually, in their budgets are allotted financial resources assigned to professional improvement. Also, the public servants attend different professionalization forms out of their own resources, from sponsorships or by means of the financing provided by different technical assistance programs.

According to the study Public Administration Reform in the context of the European integration executed by the European Institute in Romania (2006), for the public servants who attended different professional training improvement programs, 70% were financed in full be the public institutions, 12% were partially financed by the institution, 8% were achieved from the public servants own resources, 6% by means of foreign financing and 4% from sponsorships.

According to the activity report of the National Institute of Administration for 2008, to the improvement programs organized by the 8 continuous training regional centers for the local public administration, participated 12,652 public servants and local elected officials from the local public administration, which represents a financial effort of minimum 2 million Euros, without considering the travel and accommodation expenses, which represent double the training expenses.

Also, through the study executed in year 2007 by NIA, the National study regarding the activity of the training suppliers for public administration, it was established that in year 2006 the other suppliers organized professional training improvement programs for 18,300 public servants and local elected officials.

Thus, annually, the local public administration spends considerable amounts for the improvement of the professional training of the public servants and local elected officials.

g. Information sources for the professional training improvement programs for the public administration

At the moment there is no national, regional or local portal with improvement programs, authorized organizations or agreed trainers for activities of professional training improvement dedicated to the public administration. There are only isolated initiatives – such as the one of RONAT or those of the associations of the local public administration – the Association of Communes in Romania.

Conclusions – the future

From the above are derived the arguments that determined the execution of this paper:

a. the professional training improvement system for the public administration is a consistent and important one, through the effects the results of the work of the public servants and local elected officials have

b. public servants and local elected officials have the right and obligation to improve their professional training

c. the general level of professional training in the public administration is weak

d. on the market of professional training improvement for the public administration there coexist organizations that operate according to different rules, without convergence points between them

e. there are no institutionalized selection filters, from the point of view of quality, for the improvement programs suppliers or for the selection of the trainers qualifications

f. public institutions have no formalized mechanisms to analyze the training improvement needs or to evaluate their impact

g. annually, consistent amounts are assigned from the public resources for professional training improvement

h. there is no portal of the agreed/authorized/accredited training suppliers or trainers

i. there are discrepancies between the legislation specific to public servants, the one in the labour fields, and the one in the field of national education, with respect to the professional training improvement of the public administration

Thus, starting from the European experiences in the field and the research of what is being accomplished in Romania at this point in the field of professional training improvement for the public administration, is necessary to formulate proposals regarding the remodeling of this system in view of identifying the common points and of integrating the current subsystems in order to ensure the premises of a real competition between different suppliers of professional training, a clear bordering of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved in this system, the premises of the certification of the quality of the professional training improvement programs for the public administration and of the trainers performances, the publicity and promotion of the professional training improvement programs for the local public administration, the institutionalization of the analyses of training needs and the impact of training, the coherence of the legislation in the field.

In this context, we consider there are several possible scenarios:

-the re-establishing of NIA, as main national actor, coordinator of the professional training system for public servants and for public elected officials. It should perform the function of regulation and monitoring, less the training supplier function (existing only for the fields that cannot be covered by other suppliers)

-re-defining the duties of other institutional actors, such as the associations of local communities or professional associations, in the sense of taking over professional training duties.

-encouraging the development of an exclusively private market regarding the training of public servants, due to the risk of homogeneity and to the low capacity for the application of national strategies;

-maintaining the current situation, when there are no sufficient regulations, not a clearly defined market, nor institutional responsibilities.

The scenario we consider to be most realistic is the first one, because it corresponds to the mission and to the specificity of public servants' training – the care of the state and local collectivities that their own employees update their level of specialty knowledge.

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