

## The Role of Public Administration in Crisis Management

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### ABSTRACT

*The public administration must constantly adapt to the needs of society, it must be flexible and fast in making decisions to achieve the proposed objectives. Crisis situations have become more frequent in recent years. Of course, the management of these situations is the responsibility of the public administration. This article aims to highlight the major role of public administration in managing borderline situations. The authorities' response to such circumstances must be rapid, concrete and effective in order to avoid and limit their negative effects. In this study are presented the current crisis situations at EU and national level and analysed the response of the public administration.*

**KEYWORDS:** *crisis, public administration, migration, pandemic, decisions*

### 1.Introduction

Sustainable public administration is a necessary condition for a functioning society. A development of the sustainable capacity of the public administration as well as of the collaboration for the management of the crisis situations did not form the basis for the establishment of the rule of law. The current public administration has been largely developed in periods of relative stability. However, governments need to adapt and provide clear answers in crisis situations, all the more so as the pressure on state authorities in such circumstances increases.

As pointed out at the level of the European Commission, on April 29, 2021, one of the 5 major challenges to which the public administration must adapt is *“the increasing complexity of*



*managing political issues*”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, a challenging role of the public administration is to overcome the routine of tasks and to function coherently, even in times of crisis. Although it is a difficult task, the public administration has no alternatives, as extraordinary circumstances have become more frequent and stability is no longer a finding of recent years.

The recent period has highlighted the need for the public administration to pay more attention to coordination and democratic values and the need to “*transform institutional settings*”<sup>2</sup>. The current system is dominated by various crises, such as those of a political and economic nature, but we appreciate that it is also a crisis of credibility.

## 2. The role of public administration in crisis management

In the literature, the crisis was defined as “*a situation that is approaching a dangerous phase, which requires urgent intervention to avoid harmful effects on the body of an organization to return to normal*”<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, it was estimated that a crisis refers to “*situations characterized by severe threats, uncertainty and a sense of urgency*”<sup>4</sup>.

As highlighted by a large number of specialists, but also in the standard of the United Nations<sup>5</sup>, there are two circumstances that generate a crisis: the natural ones and the ones caused by human beings.

A public body is in crisis when its structures, principles and basic values are threatened. Although crises are generally unpredictable, state authorities have an obligation to act quickly and take the necessary measures so that a major destabilization of the initial situation does not occur.

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<sup>1</sup>European Commission, 2021, *Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Kuhlmann, S., Bouckaert, G., Galli, D., Reiter, R., van Hecke, S., *Opportunity management of the COVID-19 pandemic: testing the crisis from a global perspective*, in *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 87(3), 2021, p. 498, available at: doi: 10.1177/0020852321992102

<sup>3</sup>Lemonakis, C., Zairis, A., *Crisis Management and the Public Sector: Key Trends and Perspectives*, *Public Sector Crisis Management*, in Rozanov, A., Barannikov, A., Belyaeva, O. and Smirnov, M. (Eds.), IntechOpen, 2020, p. 1, DOI: 10.5772/intechopen.90855, available at: <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/70824>

<sup>4</sup>Rosenthal, U., Pijnenburg, B., 1997, *Crisis Management and Decision Making: Simulation Oriented Scenarios*, Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, p.3.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Communications Group: *How to communicate in a crisis, Standard operating procedures*, 2018, para.4, p.2, available at : <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/21-June-2017-UNCG-SOP.pdf>



Currently, the role of public administration is constantly expanding, with public policies having an increasingly broad content. As a consequence, the state apparatus has more and more responsibilities that are more and more complex, especially in extreme situations.

The current and future role and functions of public administration are developing with the changes taking place in society. At the same time, an undisputed role of the public administration is to maintain democratic values, ensuring access to fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens<sup>6</sup>. Failure to do so will increase the damage caused by a crisis. Therefore, it should be noted that overcoming a crisis requires a greater effort on the part of the institutional actors involved, and decisions must be taken in a timely manner.

On the other hand, the quality of public administration should be an element of the European Union's strategic policy for the implementation of its objectives. At European regional level, one of the main objectives is “*to create stable and predictable institutions, but also flexible enough to respond to the many societal challenges, open to dialogue with the public, able to introduce new policy solutions and provide better services*”<sup>7</sup>. In the light of these considerations, it is necessary to make the public administration more flexible and to find new solutions.

Institutional actors work to support the coherent functioning of a well-ordered society. During a crisis, the role of public administration is vital, so that the impediments are overcome and return to the initial situation, that of stability<sup>8</sup>. The public sector's response to critical situations is reorganization. This is the analysis and planning of all workflows, as well as processes within and between institutions.

As the doctrine emphasizes, “*in contemporary society it is necessary to achieve a new balance between the domination of the administration and democratic principles*”<sup>9</sup>. Obviously, all public administration activities must be carried out in compliance with the principle of legality

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<sup>6</sup>Moroianu Zlătescu, I., Marinică, C. E. *Good governance and happiness of citizens*, in *Fiat Iustitia*, No. 1/2020, Bucharest, Romania: Pro Universitaria Publishing House, p.199.

<sup>7</sup>European Commission, 2021, *Efficient public administration*, p. 1, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/themes/better-public-administration/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/better-public-administration/)

<sup>8</sup>Moroianu Zlătescu, I., Marinică, C. E., *Building European solidarity in time of crisis*, in *Fiat Iustitia*, No. 1/2021, Bucharest, Romania: Pro Universitaria Publishing House, 2021, p.129.

<sup>9</sup>Bălan, E., 2011, *Principiile și normativitatea bunei administrări*, p.1, available at : <https://www.scribd.com/doc/56661867/Principiile-Si-tea-Bunei-Administrari-Emil-Balan>



which “covers all organizational and functional aspects through which public administration is carried out”<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time, in extreme situations, the principle of transparency is of particular importance. Regional, national and local public administrations are the interface between the EU and citizens. In any case, but even more so in extraordinary circumstances, we appreciate the importance of public administration using channels to communicate clear information to citizens. At the same time, it is vital that the information to be updated and reliable.

### **3.The public administration in the face of the challenges posed by the crises of recent years**

Extraordinary circumstances are what bring to light the efficiency of an administration, but also its weaknesses. The last years have highlighted both at international level, as well as at European and national level, the positive and negative points of the public administration “*under stress*”<sup>11</sup>. Economic shocks, migration, COVID-19 pandemic are the most important challenges that go beyond jurisdictional limits.

Although the European Commission has actively supported and cooperated with Member States, including Romania, in order to develop a quality public administration through financial resources, identify critical problems, implement reforms, there are still bottlenecks that prevent the public administration from functioning effectively.

In recent years, which culminated in the outbreak of the pandemic, a wave of substantial transformations in the mechanisms of the states has been generated. All levels and functions of public administration have undergone major changes in response to extraordinary circumstances.

With regard to migration, it should be noted that since 2015, the sudden influx of aliens entering the territory of the Member States has triggered a crisis - both humanitarian and political. Some states have opened their borders, others, such as Hungary, Poland, Slovakia have been

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<sup>10</sup>Vasilescu, B., 2011, *Drept administrativ*, Bucharest, Romania: Universul Juridic Publishing House, p.251.

<sup>11</sup>Meuleman, L., *Public Administration and Governance for the SDGs: Navigating between Change and Stability. Sustainability*, 2021, 13, 5914, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115914>



reluctant. The impact of migration is still felt today, both at European regional level and at national level.

Migratory pressure has forced political and administrative actors to make new decisions, find solutions and act as quickly and concretely as possible so that the asylum system does not collapse. The European Union has implemented measures to control its external borders and migration flows. Thus, in 2020, just over 125,000 illegal crossings across the Union's external borders were recorded<sup>12</sup>, which is a decrease of 12% compared to 2019.

Migration policies cover a wide range of action, such as international protection, the labour market, family reunification, immigrant integration, illegal migration, etc., all of which are the responsibility of public administration authorities. The challenge was even greater when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out and Member States were forced to impose restrictions on the admission of foreigners<sup>13</sup>.

The pandemic has challenged the ability of the administrative system to be effective in the face of external shocks and has led to widespread institutional and structural changes. At the same time, a new element must be emphasized, namely the major involvement in the formulation of policies of experts in the field of health and academia.

Initially, governments were forced to take steps to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to ensure that the medical system, although under maximum pressure, was not overwhelmed. The measures taken have generated negative effects at micro and macroeconomic level. Thus, the central government continued to try to provide answers that would mitigate the impact of the economic crisis. Moreover, governments have had to make the way public governance systems work more flexible.

The pandemic also highlighted the need to develop strategies and programs so that they become more resilient and flexible in the face of uncertain situations. The deeper integration of artificial intelligence into public administration has been accompanied by the expansion of existing

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<sup>12</sup>Frontex, 2021, *Risk Analysis for 2021*, Warsaw, Poland, p.14.

<sup>13</sup>OECD, 2020, *Managing international migration under COVID-19*, OECD, p.2, available at: [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134\\_134314-9shbokosu5&title=Managing-international-migration-under-COVID-19&\\_ga=2.169324194.2048727592.1634815398-335831222.1619955326](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134314-9shbokosu5&title=Managing-international-migration-under-COVID-19&_ga=2.169324194.2048727592.1634815398-335831222.1619955326)



programs and practices. Thus, it can be said that government actions have been strengthened through artificial intelligence.

As shown in an OECD study<sup>14</sup>, although they had the necessary technology available, a large part of the EU / OECD countries, including Romania, Italy, Sweden, Slovakia preferred to hold face-to-face government meetings. In other cases, such as in Denmark, attempts have been made to minimize government-level meetings and even to suspend all non-emergency legislative initiatives and measures<sup>15</sup>.

On the other hand, it is natural that in crisis situations many of the rules and working procedures should be relaxed so that the institutions can act more quickly and efficiently. The study mentioned above highlights some cases of good practice. Thus, in Romania, applications and supporting documents submitted for social assistance benefits such as child benefits and unemployment can be submitted by mail or e-mail. In Germany, several types of requests for state support have been modified, such as those for students, unemployment, etc., and in Slovenia and Poland electronic communication between citizens and public administration has been simplified<sup>16</sup>.

The prompt provision of administrative services provided by the state apparatus was affected by the lack of business continuity due to the pandemic.

However, central and local government authorities have taken numerous steps to adjust the provision of services.

Probably the future of public administration requires not only flexible thinking, but also a change in the way public services are provided, that would be different from what we have today.

Crisis management is also defined by the way in which institutional rules and tasks are restored. Thus, during the pandemic, the conditions for carrying out the activity were reoriented towards flexibility, initiating telework, postponing the civil servants' program, granting parents

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<sup>14</sup>OECD, EU, SIGMA, 2020, *Public Administration: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic Mapping the EU member states' public administration responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (for EU Enlargement and Neighborhood countries)*.

<sup>15</sup>Idem, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Idem, p.16-17.



free days for child custody, physical distance measures and online meetings, and administrative documents were sent to citizens in electronic format.

Although the activity did not take place under normal conditions, it should be emphasized that these crises have led to the rediscovery of the crucial role of the public sector. However, this could lead to a higher feasibility of governance in the future, with a view to better implementing the core values and principles of public administration. Throughout this period, the emphasis was on the coherent and concrete implementation of the institutional policy. Obviously, the necessary political instruments and infrastructure were not in place at the beginning of the pandemic, but the administration's response was characterized by adjustments to the state apparatus. Thus, new mechanisms have been developed aimed at modernizing existing tools and digital infrastructure; new platforms have been created for institutional processes and service delivery.

#### 4. Conclusions

Therefore, the role of public administration is dynamic and constantly expanding, being a response to the needs of society. The crises of recent years have had negative effects on both public safety and the economy, representing real tests for public administration. In this context, the use of artificial intelligence, the flexibility and transformation of institutional settings are just some of the new trends in public administration.

We consider that a rebalancing of the relationship between the state and the local administration is necessary. Greater attention must also be paid to cooperation between the intergovernmental system, as “*cohesion of groups and institutions*”<sup>17</sup> is vital for the coherent functioning of the rule of law.

Clearly targeted public administration reform should include measures both horizontally and vertically, collaboration between all sectors and with society as a whole. The public administration needs to redouble its efforts to recover from these crises.

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<sup>17</sup>Emil Bălan, *Reasonable formalism as a dimension of administrative discipline*, in Academic Journal of Law and Governance, nr.7/2019, p.7.



From an optimistic perspective, the current situation can create opportunities for innovation and cohesion.

The public administration is a dynamic one and applies methods in accordance with the evolution of the society, achieving the coordination between the multitudes of institutions that make it up. Page | 45

Moreover, the present time requires an administrative culture that must be ethical, fair, responsible and visionary. Governments have played a key role in adapting to new types of collaboration, and crises can stimulate a whole new variety of government strategies and a more active state, creating a much more complex landscape.





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