

# REFORM OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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The reform of Public Administration in Greece has been aimed at for a long time on the part of both politicians in power as well as practitioners in the civil service and intellectuals concerned about the condition of state performance. The latter is usually regarded as weak and impotent to meet prospects and challenges of development and modernization in the country in a meaningful and creative manner. Civil society has also expressed on a number of occasions its concern for a more efficient, effective, accountable to law and responsive administrative performance.

In particular, the oversized and poorly equipped in professional capacities public bureaucracy has been seen not without cause as no longer a tool and instrument but rather as an obstacle to the development potential of the country. For that reason a number of measures have been designed and taken in the course of the years to reform and modernize the administrative apparatus of the state at the various levels and aspects of its structure and performance; whether the reforms initiated have been successful in attaining their objective is a matter of a different order depending of the evaluations of the results and the framework of interpretation adopted by respective analysts or reformers.

The present paper aims at providing an overall picture of the landscape of reform in public administration in Greece by the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Account is being taken both of the wider structural problems and circumstances conditioning the reform strategy as well as the particular objectives of reforms that have recently been initiated and purport to render the Greek administrative system more efficient and effective, more accountable and more responsive to civil society.

### **THE NEW MODEL OF STATE GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

There can hardly be disputed that the institutional monopoly of state centralism no longer provides an attractive model for state building and organization in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. State centralism has been more or less associated

with policies of nationalization of the means of production, the dependence and inadequacy of civil society, weak decentralization and fledgling local government. Widespread bureaucratization if not corruption of administrative procedures has also been a related aspect of maladministration in the country. There is no dispute that the above presents not as a model to be imitated but rather as a negative model to be avoided in state reform and modernization. Thus the prevailing tendency widely shared among European countries and reflected in policy documents and respective institutional measures seeks to both reduce the overall size of public sector and at the same time increase and augment its capacity potential for effective, efficient and responsible performance. The general policy ideal is inclusive of more concrete measures and reforms to reduce the extent of state intervention in the running of the economy in the context of the open market. Civil society institutions and associations do also seek to function and operate with the minimal or absolutely necessary level of state control and authorization. On the other hand of equal significance is the will to augment the institutional potential and capacity building of administrative organization. That goes in parallel with a more effective policy for decentralization of the executive functions of central government departments and the raising of the level of professionalism of public service personnel. Last but not least in significance, the procedures adopted in decision making within the administration ought to be of such a standard and quality so that they

facilitate analysis and goal attainment.

On the whole the prevailing model of state organization and reform attempts to create conditions for optimizing the steering capacity both at the centre of the government as well as at the decentralized units of public administration in the prefectures and local government authorities.

A kind of a “paradigmatic shift” is underlying the whole effort to “re-build” the state and drastically renew governance and administration for the new era. In that regard changes are being introduced in the context of interaction between the public interest institutional domain and market forces allowing for more freedom of the enterprises with less bureaucratic control and unnecessary interventions. At the same time advancing forms and instruments for decentralization, strengthening local government capacity, increasing the efficiency, improving the quality and professionalism of personnel along with the introduction of novel information techniques into the system looms large in the current reform agenda. That is expected to render the administrative system in a better shape than that received from the past.

### KEY FIGURES OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

The wider public sector in Greece generally accounts for more than 40% of the G.N.P. This is the case despite the fact that the economy is a genuinely market economy functioning within the European context and the prevailing mode of

production is the capitalist one. However the degree of public / private relationship and interaction result in a system of mixed economy. As a result, except the central government departments, the regional and local government authorities and institutions, there is also an extensive sector of formerly nationalized enterprises and agencies that reflect social and political conditions and traditions of the particular mode of social and political development.

The institutional shape as well as the concrete legal status of the wider public sector agencies and entities presents great variety. The particular institutional configuration reflects the way that state, economy and civil society used to link and affect each other. The role of the state has as a matter of fact been a rather dominant one in the process of social transformation. On the contrary that of market economy and civil society has rather taken a more or less dependent if not secondary path and trajectory of development.

It comes of no surprise, therefore, that the emerging model of political economy in Greece under the current administration aims at reversing the role (“rolling back”) of state’s involvement and intervention in economy and society. “Rolling back” and reducing the size of public sector, however, will not suffice. What is even more significant and urgently needed, is improving the steering capacity and quality of public administration and governance. That is, however, even harder to attain, at least in the short run. The tradition of clientelism and party political

control and infiltration in almost all aspects of the administrative machinery has surely had its negative impact and affected the quality of civil service both at the center and the regional level. Measures that have been taken in the past such as, for instance, the setting up of certain independent agencies and institutions to reverse the clientelist tendency have not failed to make their impact felt. But there is still a long way to go before the long desired aim of a professional and neutralized from party political control administration is fully attained and realized.

### PROSPECTS OF REFORM AND MODERNIZATION

Greece has for a number of years been a full member of the European Union. This has been a decision of strategic significance for the future of the country as well as the reform landscape in the political and administrative system. In that context state agencies and institutions are challenged to maintain and constantly improve the level of quality, not necessarily the quantity, of their regulatory functions vis-à-vis the economy and civil society. It is therefore likely that measures will be taken to reduce or even abolish altogether practices of direct involvement in the productive sector of the economy. That is to say that the main current of reform under way purports to cease or seriously curtail the interventory role of the state in economy and society and replace it with a more supportive, enabling and mildly regulatory one. As a result central state agencies and institutions are about to assume and contain themselves to a more pro-

grammatic, framework setting and evaluative functioning and performance. The implementation of the more executive functions of the state could then be transferred or delegated to decentralized units, to local government authorities as well as to civil society organizations.

As a whole the emerging model of state reorganization that is currently being tested in the reform agenda in Greece purports to enhance state capacity and quality of governance in society and economy in a different way from that which prevailed in the past. The difference primarily lies on the new emphasis that is being placed on the capacity building of state authorities and institutions not to guide and direct economy and society from above, but to establish a collaborative environment to evaluate public policies and tackle social problems in a more effective and responsive way.

“Steering and governing but not rowing” the vessel of polity is the new model idea that inspires state reform and modernization plans and measures. Governing and steering entails the provision of the essential guidelines, the most appropriate legal and institutional framework, the infrastructure, including the quality and professionalism of civil service personnel, and above all motivation and leadership. On the other hand, “rowing” entails implementation of policy reform objectives under conditions of relative autonomy and discretion by respective agencies and institutions in economy and society, but also in harmony and coordination between state

and society. That in no way may however affect or diminish the general responsibility and moral obligation of the state.

### AXES OF REFORM

Regarding present day developments and the potential of reform, one may specify a fourfold perspective to administrative modernization strategy followed in Greece. This is inclusive of the following particular aspects and dimensions:

- An approach and respective measures to reduce in the medium run the overall size of the public sector. That will be attained by means of curbing rising costs in public expenditure and in seeking economy and efficiency in the management of scarce resources on the part of public agencies and institutions. This kind of economic or efficiency prospective marks to a considerable extent reform efforts in a number of public authorities including public enterprises and independent agencies. Simplifying, codifying and optimizing the procedure of drafting of legal enactments (regulatory reform) plays a significant role in that perspective, too.
- Reform and modernization efforts do also appear to steer a kind of new course in the interface of state - society relations. Thus, strengthening and empowering civil society associations entails among other things an adherence to the principle of subsidiary role of the state vis-à-vis the economic, the cultural and societal sector in the public domain. Reversing, however, the tradition of state control and domination towards a more balanced perspective is a huge task lying ahead and does also occasionally meet the tacit reaction of entrenched interests in bureaucracy.
- Rationalizing and modernizing the administrative machinery itself and the complex institutional armory of the state apparatus refers among other things to the urgent need to advance professionalism and meritocracy in the public services. Thus, combating clientelist practices, revamping recruitment patterns, improving the quality of the personnel, their career prospects, ethics and morality in the performance of administrative agencies present as crucial reform objectives and interventions. Equally significant for streamlining public bureaucracy are measures for decentralization by means of which executive functions and competences are delegated and devolved not only to independent administrative agencies, but also and even more important to territorial units of regional administration and local government. The latter are therefore empowered to proceed in the delivery of public services in a manner and with the standards which are necessary to better satisfy local needs and requirements. Recent concrete administrative reforms in Greece have registered their impact on that perspective and direction.

- A related aspect of reform strategy purports to steer a new course in the management of public services away from traditional bureaucratic practices towards a more entrepreneurial model and profile emphasizing cost efficiency and effectiveness to client interests and demands. Indicative of this reform perspective is the recently announced plan to speed up applications of electronic performance throughout the public services in order to defeat bureaucracy and simplify cumbersome administrative procedures. In that regard a big amount of the 4<sup>th</sup> Community Support Framework is being addressed to the implementation of administrative informatics programs, which are scheduled to be installed not only in central government departments but also in regional units and local authorities. Citizens' bureau offices, which have been established in a number of administrative departments across the country, are also better equipped to handle citizen's cases as "one stop shop" units shortening administrative delays and pushing towards a more responsive bureaucracy and administration of public affairs. Citizens' satisfaction is therefore increased and the quality of services is getting improved to a substantial extent.

### WHITHER NOW

It is a truism among social theorists as well as practitioners that the more complex a system the harder to reform and transform it

in a short period of time. For that to happen is necessary not only a minimum degree of consensus but also concerted effort on behalf of the reform agents, clarity of mission and openness of mind to adapt to changing conditions and unforeseen circumstances.

Greece may have lagged behind in the domain of administrative modernization and reform especially as far as the soft aspects of the internal functioning and efficient management of the system are concerned. It comes of no surprise therefore that that had affected in a somewhat negative way the competitiveness of the economy and the attractiveness of foreign investment in the country. On the other hand, social concern and dissatisfaction with the condition and poor quality of certain public services has highlighted the determination to radically reform and modernize the administrative machinery of the state. Hence, the added emphasis on the strategy and major policy objective to assume the task of "rebuilding" the state and modernize public administration. Although the full attainment of this objective may take some time to materialize, there can hardly be disputed that a number of measures have already been taken in that direction and their impact has been felt. One may therefore expect that the shape and performance of public administration in the country will be in a much better condition before too long time to past.

### USEFUL LINKS

General Secretariat of Public Administration  
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