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# *The Regional Policy in the EUMS from Central and Eastern Europe between Decentralisation and Recentralisation*

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## **Abstract**

During the accession process and after they became members of the European Union, the Central and Eastern states went through a process of decentralization that emphasized the local and the regional level. Although the process was not complete, after the financial crisis erupted, these states began to develop a centrifugal behaviour and started a recentralization process that decreased the competences of local and regional authorities. The present article argues that undeniably the European Commission through its regional policy has been an important driving force regarding the process of territorial decentralisation in Central and Eastern European countries. However, this influence has generated different outcomes, given its lack of clear perspective and competences.

**Keywords:** Central And Eastern countries; the EU; decentralization; recentralization; local and regional level

## Introduction

The enlargement process from 2004 and 2007 was possible due to the adoption of the membership criteria by the member states. It is well known the fact that besides the three criteria that were adopted in Copenhagen in 1993 (the political, economic one and the *acquis comunitaire*), in 1995 in Madrid the strengthened administrative capacity criterion was added. The regular evaluation and monitoring of progress analysis for the countries from Central Eastern Europe highlights the developments that took place at the level of administration and public management system<sup>1</sup>.

Pollitt and Bouckaert highlight five different reform models on the administration and the management of public systems, from a very narrow and limited model to a very stretched and broad span of reform. Choosing one of these models has tremendous practical implications for the content of a reform programme, for the choice of the reform projects, but also for the sequence and the timing of the reform portfolio. It also requires different tactical choices to be made. One of the issues that can be arisen here is how many degrees of freedom there are in reforming the public sector<sup>2</sup>.

The first proposed model has a span of reform which is limited to single organizations within the public sector. In this sense, the “public management is a merger of the normative orientation of traditional public administration and the instrumental orientation of general management.”<sup>3</sup> In practice, this means that private-sector management techniques are imported into the public sector<sup>4</sup>.

The second model has a broader span of reform which looks beyond single organisations to clusters of public sector organisations. There is the question of relationships, (e.g. hierarchies of organisations) in order to have good delivery service and policy implementation. This requires a vision on the architecture and the mapping of the public sector<sup>5</sup>.

The third model includes the interface of the public sector, but also the civil society. This interface needs to be reformed too, which in some cases requires civil society to be

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1 IANCU, Diana Camelia - *Uniunea Europeana si Administratia Publica*. Iasi: Polirom, 2010, pp. 126-127.

2 POLLITT, Christopher; BOUCKAERT, Geert - *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. 2nd expanded edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

3 PERRY, James L.; KRAEMER, Kenneth L. - *Public Management: Public and Private Perspectives*. California: Mayfield, 1983.

4 Ch. POLLITT, *op.cit.*, p. 97

5 *Idem*

(re)built. This requires the recognition of civil society as a partner in reform. Therefore, platforms for exchange, transparent discussions and contradictory debates are necessary to reform the public sector in a sustainable, legitimate, and transparent way<sup>6</sup>.

The fourth model goes beyond the infrastructural level and includes the supra-structure that is also involved in the reform process. This reform's scope includes the realm of ideas and ideologies, culture and values within a society. Reforming the public sector includes not just its infrastructure (organisations and their interactions within the public sector and its civil society) but also its supra-structure. Although this does not mean that identities of communities or nations need to change, it does imply that practices are based on the belief of systems with norms and values, cultures and ideas<sup>7</sup>.

The fifth model goes beyond the fourth one and includes all elements of the system. This requires a reform strategy which includes the major steering mechanisms in society, depending on the state structure itself. Market mechanisms are obvious within the private sector. Budget mechanisms are clear within the public sector. In a mixed economy, you also may have consensual allocation of resources amongst non-profit organisations. Public sector reform affects the proportions and regulates the allocation mechanisms of all these public, private and not-profit sectors. It also affects the allocation mechanisms within the public sector using hierarchies (budgetary top-down distribution with e.g. envelopes), markets (market type mechanisms such as vouchers or competitive tendering) or networks (consensual distribution)<sup>8</sup>.

Looking to see which of the five aforementioned models had been implemented in the public administration reform and management from Central and Eastern Europe states, we started our analysis from Bouckaert's finding that the public administration and public management system in this region present themselves with chosen mixed models of "public-sector reform, and these choices have changed over time"<sup>9</sup>.

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6 *Idem*

7 BOUCKAERT, Geert - "Cultural Characteristics from Public Management Reforms Worldwide." In SCHEDLER, Kuno; PRÖLLER, Isabella (eds). *Cultural Aspects of Public Management Reforms*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007, pp.29-64.

8 BOUCKAERT, Geert - *Public Sector Reform in Central and Eastern Europe*, Halduskultuur, vol 10, 2009, pp. 98

9 *idem*