

THE SPECIALISED TRAINING - AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STAFF

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Abstract: The professionalization of public administration staff is one of the pillars of the public sector reform process for public administration. The first part of this article describes the general framework of the professional training, according to the legislation in force, while the second part comprises of an analysis of the specialized training programmes for certain categories of public administration staff.

Keywords: professional training, specialized training, professional improvement, public administration

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania is in the full process of reforming the public administration and the successful implementation of the changes can only be achieved with well-trained human resources. The professionalization of public administration staff by developing new skills in relation to new trends in professional training and information technology is a sine qua non requirement for a digitalized, efficient public administration, altogether with quality services, slanted towards the needs of the citizen. For the staff from public administration it is essential to maintain the knowledge at the level of contemporary development, science and specialised technique (Androniceanu, 2000, pp. 185).

According to some studies (Păceșilă and Colesca, 2019) certain researchers (Myers, 1986; Ciobanu, Androniceanu, 2018; Suleimenova, 2016) claim that professional training warrants for an elevated level of professionalism (Ciobanu et al, 2019), while maintaining high standards in terms of employees' skills. The process should be directed towards the entire staff of public institutions and should be accomplished in close coordination with the organization's goals (Profiroiu and Păceșilă, 2010), bearing in mind the specific activity of each individual engaged in the training program. Furthermore, it should emphasize the development of specific skills (Katsamunskaya, 2016; Parkhomenko-Kutsevil, 2017; Naumenko, 2017), the development of relationships with other authorities or with different types of beneficiaries, and the improvement of teamwork between different sections of the institution (Sun, 2019; Severin, 2019).

At the moment, in Romania, the professional training of public administration staff is provided by public and private training organisations, in various fields, established by legislation and based on the identified training needs. The main types of organized training programmes are the professional improvement and the specialized training. Although the Strategy on Professional Training in the Public Administration 2016-2020 envisaged measures to improve the quality of the training process for the public administration, so that the training system would be stable, coherent and unchanging and the training would be completed according to the needs of existing services for the public sector, many of these measures are to be implemented and carried out through the 2021-2027 Strategy.

This paper contains an analysis structured twofold: on the one hand, a general overview of the training process within the public administration in Romania and, on the other hand, a specific regard on the specialized training programmes.

2. THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION STAFF. GENERAL FRAMEWORK. CONCEPTUAL DELINEATIONS

Professional training, according to the Administrative Code, adopted by GEO no. 57/2019, is both a right and an obligation, for civil servants [Article 458 (1)] and for contractual staff [Article 551 (1)], alike. According to Articles 458 and 551, public authorities and institutions have the duty to ensure the participation of staff, civil servants and contractual staff, in a minimum one training programme every two years, organized either by the National Institute of Administration (NIA) or other training providers. The graduation of training programmes with a minimum duration of 30 hours or receiving a minimum number of credits, as a result of participation in training programmes, conferences, experience exchange, study visits, is a prerequisite for the participation of civil servants in an exam or a contest for advancement in a professional degree [Article 479 (1) letter b)], as well as for participation in the competition or the promotion exam in a public management position [Article 483 (2) letter f)]. At the moment, the credit score system is not implemented, but it will be implemented after the approval of the normative act on the competence outlines for public positions.

The authorities must foresee in the budget specific amounts for the payment of training programmes. These amounts distributed for the development of human resources through professional training should be considered as investments, as they are part of achieving significant added value, since the quality of the human resources depends on the efficiency of using other resources: material resources, financial resources and informational resources (Oatu et al, 2019, pp. 106).

A significant role in the training of civil servants and contractual staff within public authorities and institutions plays the National Institute of Administration, which aims to implement the Government's strategic directions on streamlining public administration by professionalizing central administration staff and local staff. The Institute was established in 2001, in view of the accession to the European Union and public administration reform and operated until the end of 2009, when it was eliminated and professional training was taken over by the National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), until 2016, when NIA was re-established.

As a provider of professional training programmes, the Institute has in its portfolio two types of programmes: professional improvement programmes (short term training) and specialized training programmes. Considering that in both specialized literature and in the legislation no unitary terminology regarding the professional training processes is used, from a terminological point of view some explanations are necessary for the following notions: initial training, professional training, specialized training and professional improvement.

Initial training represents that type of training organized within an educational institution, for a long-term period, intended for the trainees to acquire the general or professional knowledge necessary for the integration into the social or the professional life of those who study prior pursuing a primary activity (Ghețe et al, 1999, pp. 15). Regarding public administration, a specific form of education is pre-employment education, through which candidates for positions in the administration are trained for the perspective of selection procedures.

Regarding the terms of professional training, specialized training and professional improvement, these are defined in Article 3 of the Government Decision no. 1066/2008 on the approval of the norms regarding the professional training of civil servants and these can also be extended for the contractual staff. Thus, professional training is the method of continuous training for the development of determined competencies and abilities, in order to improve the quality of individual professional activities. The two major components of the professional training are the specialized training and the professional improvement.

Professional improvement is that type of professional training designed to develop those skills necessary to increase the quality of results obtained in the exercise of certain tasks, carried out in an organized framework, for quite a short time, with broadly defined target groups and dealing with a unitary theme, subsequent to a specific field of activity.

According to P. Demarne's formula: training + experience + improvement = updatable potential (Bercu, 2009, pp. 152), where "initial training" involves the learning process, "experience" involves the build-up of new knowledge, as a result of the work done, and "improvement" involves the development of skills that contribute to streamlining the activity of that person. This formula, if correctly applied, shows that civil servants and contractual staff in the administration must be a viable source of information, able to provide answers to the questions they receive.

In our opinion, that formula can be completed as following: initial training + experience + professional improvement / specialized training = updatable potential, whereas specialized training underwrites to the development of those skills necessary for the exercise of a position of a high degree of complexity.

Regarding associated professional training, the Administrative Code primarily regulates this activity in the case of local elected officials (Article 217), civil servants (Articles 56, 395, 458, 459, 462, 479, 483, 487, 489, 537) and contractual staff (Article 551) (Bitea, 2019), providing for the two types of professional training: professional improvement and specialized training, both for civil servants and contractual staff.

According to the provisions of the Administrative Code, professional improvement programmes are organized by the National Institute of Administration or other training providers, while regarding specialized training programmes, the Code puts NIA in charge with organizational competence for four types of training programmes: specialized training for the nomination of a prefect or sub-prefect position (Article 251), specialized training programme for a public position matching the category of high-ranking civil servants (Article 394), specialized training programme for the development of competencies necessary for a public management position (Article 458) and the specialized training programme for the development of competencies necessary for a contractual management position (Article 551).

The model of organization and a more detailed description, as well as other specialized training programmes in the Institute's portfolio, will be presented below.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the data regarding number of participants to specialized training programmes organized by National Institute of Administration since 2003 to present in order to support the preparation of future specialized training programmes organised by National Institute of Administration.

During research, a series of primary and secondary documents were analysed, in order to configure a complete situation regarding the specialized training programmes organized by the National Institute of Administration and the National Agency of Civil Servants. The analysis of documents was used as a quantitative research tool which granted knowledge on the overall context about the organization and development of the programmes, as well as the formulation of relevant statistical data.

4. THE SPECIALISED TRAINING

Specialized training programmes are an essential tool of the training process. This type of programme adds to the development of those skills necessary for the exercise of certain positions with a high level of complexity such as: high-ranking civil servants, prefects and sub-prefects, public and contractual management positions, public managers etc. The specialized training for public administration staff was conducted mainly by the National Institute of Administration and the portfolio included a high number of such programmes (many of

them prepared with the support of foreign experts), that ensured the professionalization of certain categories of staff in public administration.

The Young Professional Scheme (YPS) project took place in 2003-2009, based on PHARE projects, as initiatives of the Romanian state to speed up the rate of the upgrading of public administration by setting up a core of professionals to support the implementation of structural reforms of public services (NACS, 2015, pp. 5). During this process, two groups of graduates were recruited, selected and trained: students (scholarship holders) and trainees.

The students (scholarship holders), all university graduates with a bachelor's degree, followed a 2-year specialised training programme, after which they obtained the status of public manager, while the trainees, who were civil servants or contractual staff in the public sector, with a minimum of 1 year experience in administration, followed a 1-year programme.

Three key institutions were involved in the development of the YPS programme:

- the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform, through the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform, whose responsibilities were to provide technical support and to monitor the public administration reform process;
- the National Agency of Civil Servants - with competencies on the placement and evaluation of public managers;
- the National Institute of Administration – with competencies on the training of future public managers.

Cycle	Timeframe	Scholarship holders	Trainees	Graduates
YPS 1	2003-2005	87	28	115
YPS 2	2005-2007	48	60	108
YPS 3	2008-2009	51	56	107
YPS 4	2009-2010	65	36	101
Total of participants		251	180	431

TABLE 1: YPS PROGRAM

Source: NIA activity reports (2005-2008) and NACS analysis (2015)

The specialized training programme for public management positions. This programme was launched by NIA in October 2003, and was organized both stand-alone within the Institute, as well as in partnership with 4 prestigious universities in Romania: the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences from Bucharest, the "Babeş-Bolyai" University from Cluj-Napoca and the "A. I. Cuza" University from Iași. The programme lasted for 1 year and involved two specialities: *Modern Government and Local Development* and *European Business Management*.

The main objective of this programme was the managerial professionalization of the leading public positions in local and central public administration. The graduation of the programme was attested by a master's degree issued by a NIA partner university, as well as the NIA diploma of specialized training in public administration, following the dissertation.

Timeframe	Graduates	Organiser
2003-2005	77	NIA
2004-2005	113	NIA

2005-2006	106	NIA
Total of participants	296	

TABLE 2: MASTER TYPE PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Source: NIA activity reports (2005 and 2006)

Another specialized training programme for management positions was organized by NIA, stand-alone within the Institute, in 2007, as well as in partnership with the Regional Training Center for Continuous Training in Public Administration (RTCCTPA) Timisoara and Iasi, and with the National School of Public Administration (NSPA) from Quebec, Canada. The programme was comprised of 7 modules and the final evaluation consisted in the presentation of a project.

Organiser	Participants	Details
NIA	110	
NIA in partnership with NSPA	12	it was organised in French language
NIA in partnership with RTCCTPA Timișoara	27	
NIA in partnership with RTCCTPA Iași	23	
Total of participants	172	

TABLE 3: PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Source: NIA activity reports (2007)

Specialized training programme for holding a public position corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants. The training programme for high-ranking civil servants is the most well-known specialized training programme organized by NIA or NACS. In order to take part in the contest for a position corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants, the Administrative Code requires the graduation of this programme, organized by NIA or to have held a full mandate of a parliamentarian (Article 394 (4) letter d)).

The acceptance to this programme means a national contest, which includes two stages, the dossier selection and an interview, according to a Regulation of the organisation and conduct of the contest, based on the provisions of Government Decision no. 832/2007.

Participation in the programme is conditioned both by seniority in the specialty of the graduated long-term form of higher education – a minimum of 4 years (GD 832, Article 7, letter 4)), and by quality held - persons holding a public position corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants, according to the law, civil servants or persons who have had the quality of civil servant for a minimum of 1 year (GEO no. 57/2019, Article 395, letter b)).

Starting with 2010, the programme runs over 8 modules / 3 days (18 hours) / module and addresses multiple themes, based on government priorities (during 2005-2009 the programme was structured in 10 modules).

The main objectives of the programme are to develop the managerial and leadership skills of staff with public positions corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants, for the efficient and maximum effectiveness management of human, financial, material and informational resources.

The attestation of the programme graduation means obtaining a graduation certificate accompanied by a descriptive supplement on the acquired competencies, following the passing of tests at the end of each module – with the requirements of getting at least a 7 grade / module (which represents 50% of the final grade) and holding a presentation (which represents 50% of the final grade).

Promotion	Series	Graduates	Organiser	Modules
2004	2	75	NIA	10 modules (3 days/module)
2006	1	87	NIA	10 modules (3 days/module)
2007	1	238	NIA	10 modules (3 days/module)
2008	1	142	NIA	10 modules (3 days/module)
2009	2	220	NIA	10 modules (3 days/module)
2010	2	196	NACS	8 modules (3 days/module)
2011	3	186	NACS	8 modules (3 days/module)
2012	3	249	NACS	8 modules (3 days/module)
2013	1	93	NACS	8 modules (3 days/module)
2014	1	97	NACS	8 modules (3 days/module)
2016	1	97	NACS	8 modules (3 days /module)
2018	1	97	NIA	8 modules (3 days /module)
2019	1	55	NIA	8 modules (3 days /module)
Total of participants		1832		

TABLE. 4: PROGRAM FOR HIGH-RANKING CIVIL SERVANTS

Source: NIA (2005-2008, 2018 and 2019) and NACS (2010-2016) activity reports

Specialised training programme for prefects in Romania. The programme was conducted between April and November 2005 and aimed at developing the managerial skills of prefects and sub-prefects, in accordance with the requirements of the prefectural position and in the framework of the reform process of the public administration in Romania. This type of programme was organised prior to the publication of GEO no. 179/2005, when the prefect became a high-ranking civil servant again, starting with January 1, 2006. A number of 90 prefects and sub-prefects participated and graduated from the programme.

A second specialised training programme addressed to the body of prefects and sub-prefects was organized by the National Agency of Civil Servants, through the Operational Program Capacity Building Administration, in 2013. The programme was structured in 6 training modules and was graduated by 86 prefects and sub-prefects, following the evaluation tests after each module and the presentation of a project (NACS, 2014).

Specialised training programme for public management positions. The Administrative Code established the exclusive competence of NIA for organising specialised training programmes that are designed to develop the necessary skills for the exercise of a public or contractual management position. As such, a specialized training programme was developed for both staff categories, structured on 6 modules, 3 days (18 hours) / module that addresses a multiple topic, based on the analysis of training needs conducted by the Institute. The target group was composed of persons holding a public or contractual management position, according to the law, or exercising temporary management positions, in the central and local administration. The programme was organised in 2 series, in 2019, was completed by a number of 35 participants, after passing the tests at the end of each module – and getting at least a 7 grade / module.

The leadership Academy. This type of specialized training programme was a premiere for the Romanian public administration; the programme was piloted by NIA, in 2018, within a project implemented in partnership with the Council of Europe. The programme was structured in 3 modules, 3 days (18 hours) / module and had as its objective the development of general and specific competencies of organizational leadership, as well as of some management competencies, necessary for the exercise of the corresponding public positions. The target group was composed of mayors of municipalities, cities and township, and the programme was completed by a number of 14 participants, following the evaluation tests at the end of each training model.

Legislative amendments and needs identified on the basis of training needs analysis require the development of new specialized training programmes aimed at developing skills, in line with the requirements of a modern and efficient administration.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the data shown above, the number of people who participated in specialised training programmes organised by NIA since its re-establishment in 2017 is relatively low, compared to the number of positions where the target group is a part of. After analysing data on public management positions – 15.417 persons in 2019 (NACS, 2019, pp. 17), we identified that the percentage of those who followed a specialized training programme for the development of skills for management positions is about 0.2% (35 persons). Possible causes of the low percentage include: higher costs compared to other types of programmes, lack of conditioning of employment as a result of graduation or the fact that there is no planning for specialized training within public institutions and public authorities, as it should be provided for the improvement of the staff.

The only programme in which there is a high interest is the one for holding a public position corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants, to which also leads the fact that this is a specific requirement for holding such a position, established by the legislation in force. We estimate that, by amending the statute of the prefect and of the sub-prefect and changing it from a high-ranking civil servant to a dignitary, as well as establishing specific requirements for holding such a position, the new programme to be developed by NIA will present a high degree of interest and contribution to the specialization of these categories of positions.

In the framework of adopting new strategies in the field of civil service, professional training for public administration, for the timeframe 2021-2027, the focus is on: performance management, leadership, training and the development of digital skills, the development of human resources management, skills frameworks, interconnection career path with professional training etc.

Therefore, the main role of professional training, in order to develop skills and competencies, both for management and execution staff, becomes very important in the successful implementation of all the changes regarding public administration.

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