**Historical Precedents and Outlooks of Administrative Reforms**

**in the Romanian Administration**

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As the most of the countries in Europe and worldwide, Romania is comprised of several regions with different historical backgrounds and thus specific aspects, which can be observed in our days too. On the level of administrative laws and arrangement of the territory, the modern Romania applied a more or less strictly centralistic system, both in the shaping of the Greater Romania after December 1918 and the People´s Republic/Socialist Republic after World War II. Transylvania, throughout the history part of the Hungarian Kingdom, then an autonomous principality under ottoman domination and finally a province of the Austrian/Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, had, at the moment of the unification with Romania, a particular shape, in comparison with the Romanian Principalities, Moldova and Muntenia, united in 1859 to a new state on a reformist path, called Romania some years later after this union. The Principalities Muntenia, Moldova or Dobrogea, which emerged from medieval voivodeships and lands, faced in the centuries of their development mainly Ottoman but also Russian influence, which determined, along with the internal administrative tradition, the shaping of different and specific institutions and practices.

The evolution of administrative institutions was always a result of internal and external political and cultural influences, through the belonging of certain lands or the whole country to broader political entities and ideas, from the heritage of the Roman Empire, through the Austrian, Russian or French models, the model of Socialism, until the membership in the EU.

The reforms after the unification of December 1918 took place mainly in favor of the “old kingdom“. Inspired by the French administrative model, it centralized the power in Bucharest, by means of successive reforms (such as a new Constitution, reforms at the most levels of the judicial system and administration etc.). The local specificities, mainly in Transylvania, were sacrificed for the sake of a uniform and functional state apparatus, with the hope for a functional and, moreover, a uniform administration in a country which comprised now territories with different historical backgrounds and thus having different institutions and practices. The system of “județe” (counties, an institution historically specific for Muntenia) gained its shape in this period, it was introduced in Transylvania in the last weeks of 1918 and replaced the traditional system of counties (Komitate) and sees (Stühle), which had been inspired more from the Western feudal model and cemented through the Constitution 1923.

The Communist reforms introduced after the war[[1]](#footnote-1), enforced by the presence of Soviet troops and in the broader context of the period immediately after the World War, were the most radical caesura in the history and eliminated most of the historical and traditional institutions. A new name of the state (People´s Republic, later Socialist Republic), new fundamental and organic laws, extensive nationalizations and repressive measures against the representatives of the old Romanian society paved the way to a new regime, from which the country could barely recover.

The socialist division in “județe” (counties) actually with little regard to the historical background of the notion, although praised as a return to a historical tradition in contrast to the short-lived establishment which was introduced shortly after the war in Regions and Rayons[[2]](#footnote-2), had in sight also the controllability of the state territory by the means of the new establishment (there had to be administrative institutions in each of this unit, as well Party and Securitate structures) and were meant to represent units in the planned economy too, through specially tailored indicators in the five year plans which had to be fulfilled.[[3]](#footnote-3) In a logical order, the establishing of larger territorial units under the conditions of railway construction and electrification of the country made more sense.

After the regime change, a new administrative reform was not a topic of political discussion; plans in this regard emerged only in the years after the EU accession. A certain number of different reform plans, proposed by parties and coalitions emerged; these proposed simple models of a new administrative organizations with creating a supra-ordered layer of eight-nine regions, 5 macro- and 16 micro-regions or a more complex reorganization, e.g. through creation of eight regions (sometimes called Euro-regions, which were created 1998 as “development regions” for the reasons of distribution of EU funds and statistical inquiries prior to accession) with own institutions such as councils and the transformation of the second representative chamber (Senate) into a representative assembly of these regions. Praised as a measure of decentralization and even reduction of the numerous administrative apparatus, so necessary after the centralizing policy of Socialism and the years after, and a necessity on the path of harmonization with the European legislation, the regionalization became a highly politicized topic and a basis for broad public discussions. The elaborated plans, with all the details of implementation were not politically assumed by the governments in the years 2011-2013. In the debates and motivations of these regionalization reform plans, the historical traditions of administrative entities did not play an important role and were taken as a basis only by a few of them, with arguments regarding the historical names and shape of these entities (in contradiction to the “development regions” which are named by the geographical position, as Centre or North-West) including the idea of reverting to the pre-1950 traditional counties, the existence of their own institutions (courts, town councils, with their respective names) or the maintaining of historical entities with a certain ethnical background (the project of the Hungarian Union for bringing together the former Szekler sees in one, possibly autonomous administrative entity, which was the only project making recourse to older historical institutions).

From all the discussions and attempts remained only a better implementation of the eight “development regions” which exist nowadays too, but do not have essentially an administrative role.

The discussions and plans regarding administrative reforms are part of the uniformization on the EU level, in adopting the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics)-standards of administrative divisions.[[4]](#footnote-4) These levels must not mandatorily correspond to administrative divisions, the institutional structure and prerogatives of these are in the sphere of competence for each member state.

The new challenges of the democratic reforms and the EU membership are opening a new field in the shaping of a new administrative landscape, a process in which the historical, as well as geographical specificities and aspects can become key factors. These days, the projects for an administrative reorganization lost their importance in the political discussions and do not represent a priority, only a topic of secondary, background discussions. The statistical divisions, based on the EU-standards (NUTS), are functioning in the sphere of statistics and EU-funds distribution; the administrative system created in the year 1968, although very cost- and personnel-intensive, will presumably remain in place for many years from now on.

1. The administrative system before this reform, maintained on a provisional basis after the war and the new territorial shape of the now People´s Republic comprised 58 counties (județe), 424 districts (plăși) and 6.000 communes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the 6th of September 1950, the Great People´s Assembly ruled about the new administrative establishment which comprised 28 regions (reduced a few years later to 16), 8 main cities, 177 rayons and 4052 communes. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The National Assembly of the Romanian Communist Party adopted this reform on the 6-8th of December 1867, which redesigned the national territory in 39 counties (judete), 47 municipia, 189 cities, 2706 communes and the municipality of Bucharest, which only smaller rectifications in the following years. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The NUTS-levels are corresponding to the 4 macroregions (level 1), 8 regions (level 2), 41 counties plus Bucharest (level 3): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)