

**EU's SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL – A
REQUIREMENT FOR FUTURE CANDIDATE STATES
CASE STUDY – THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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Abstract

Sustainable Development is one of the most important long term goals that the European Union set out to achieve. Numerous documents, such as the EU's Sustainable Development Strategies (2001, 2006), Europe 2020 and, more recent, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as provisions of the EU's Treaties indicate the leading role the EU is assuming in promoting and implementing this kind of development. Such fundamental values and objectives must be shared by every Member State and future candidate must adhere to them as well. Future enlargement of the EU requires an assessment of the capacity of candidate states to do so. EU's relations with Moldavia must lead to the operationalization of shared values, in order to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals that ensure a common future. The aim of this paper is to indicate the progress the East European state, situated at the EU's border has done so far with regard to sustainability. This progress is being assessed on the base of different EU's documents and country reports. Additionally, on site information is being produced as a result of a research project carried out in the village Colibasi. In order to implement an Integrated Management System (I.M.S.), a sociologic research has been carried out, as to permit the development of the baseline review. The collected data was the fundament for the I.M.S., that aimed to provide Moldovan local authorities with a management tool that might contribute to the increase of transparency, citizen's implication and effectiveness of public administration activities in order to achieve a sustainable development.

Key words: Sustainable Development, Integrated Management System

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1. Introduction

The relations between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova have reached an all-time high intensity, after the entering into force of the Association Agreement, in July 2016. This step is very important in the process of Moldova's EU Accession and it comes to confirm what former EU President Herman Van Rompuy announced two years before: "Moldova belongs in Europe by history, by geography, by its way of life, by culture" [1]. This document is built on shared priorities of Moldova and the European Neighborhood Policy, concentrated on democracy, rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, good governance, a functioning market economy and sustainable development (AA, 2016). Nevertheless, there is more to be done in "operationalizing these values", as Ambassador Pirkka Tapiola, Head of the EU Delegation in Moldova concluded.

Sustainable development became a fundamental objective of the EU in 1997, when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an overarching objective of EU policies. At the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, EU leaders launched the first EU sustainable development strategy based on a proposal from the European Commission. Sustainable development represents the process aimed at the improvement of life quality and well-being of generations in a long time perspective. In other words, the EU SD strategy underlines the necessity of meeting needs of all - current and future generation. The goals defined in sustainable development context are focused on improving life quality. So, there are 5 key objectives with regards to Environmental protection, Social equity and cohesion, Economic prosperity, Meeting our international responsibilities (EU SD Strategy, 2007).

In October, 2016, the EU Delegation to the Republic of Moldova together with the EU Member States and Switzerland presented the Joint Analysis Paper – "Programming in the Republic of Moldova until 2020" to the Government of the country. It represents the first phase of the Joint Programming process in the Republic of Moldova, which started in 2015. The Government of the Republic of Moldova, the Development Partners, Civil Society and other relevant stakeholders were consulted and contributed to this exercise which is first and foremost intended to further the strategic partnership for the benefit of the Moldovan people. The Paper serves as a key

reference for planning future EU assistance to the Republic of Moldova for the period 2017-2020.

The Joint Analysis indicates several aspects that still need a more radical approach and the implementation of structural reforms. Public Administration Reform (PAR), combating corruption, improving service delivery are some of the key priorities for Moldova to move closer to EU standards (JA, 2016).

A project that took place during 2014-2015 aimed to assist several local authorities in Moldova to increase the effectiveness and transparency of the public authorities by implementing the Integrated Management System (I.M.S.) for Sustainable Development. It represents one way to bring together experience and expertise and to adjust good practices in order to comply with the Moldovan context.

2. Local Sustainability Management in Republic of Moldova

The project has been funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and by the German Federal Environment Agency with means of the Advisory Assistance Program for Environmental Protection in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It was carried out by two Partners, the Bodensee-Stiftung, Germany and the Foundation for Professional Training in Public Administration Sibiu, Romania. In Moldova, the implementation of the project was assisted by the Foundation for Professional Training in Public Administration in Moldova. As indicated in the Joint Analysis, the EU accounts for a third of overall disbursements, with Romania, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, contributing most to development assistance to Moldova. When aligning ODA disbursements with the chapters of this joint analysis, it becomes apparent that ODA contributes most to Democratic Governance, so reform of public administration is crucial, expecting to deliver “increasingly visible tangible benefits by reducing the proportion of domestic revenue spent on recurrent expenditures.” (JA, 2016). Reducing expenditure as well as increasing return on spending will enable authorities to redirect these resources to investments. “This requires professionalising the civil service at all levels so as to attract and retain the specialised expertise any modern government needs. At the same time, efficiencies need to improve including through merging, downsizing and in some cases modifying the central role that government plays in service delivery.”(JA, 2016).

The aim of the IMS project was to present managerial tools that proved their efficiency in other parts of Europe, such as the Integrated Management System (I.M.S.), to adapt them to the local framework and to be used by local authorities in order to meet the citizen's expectation for more transparency, participation and accountability. The previous quoted analysis for Moldova states that a comprehensive reform in the public sector is "largely a precondition for effective and sustainable cooperation between development partners and Moldova's government." (JA, 2016).

3. Integrated Management System for Sustainable Development

The Integrated Management System (I.M.S.) for sustainable development on local and regional level is a tool developed by the CHAMP project - Managing Urban Europe - 25 Initiative, in 2012. It was initiated and co-financed by the European Commission (DG Environment) in relation to the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment (TSUE). It aims to establish a general framework for implementing sustainable development by local public administrations (Baltador, 2015).

The Integrated Management System presumes several steps that one local authority should do in order to bring together all local stakeholders and to promote productive communication. It aims to ensure that everyone participates knowing that there is a complex reasoning behind all actions and that it is not by chance or by the will and power of someone. In this manner, bottom-up approach is brought together with top-down. Further, by using the IMS, the internal information flow of the administration will improve and thus, the double-, sometimes triple work will be diminished, contributing to cost reduction and a better return on spending. Also, the transparency of the administrations activities will further improve its image among citizens, investors and other stakeholders (Baltador et al, 2012, p.16). The main steps for the Integrated Management System are the following:

1. **Baseline Review:** its main scope is to establish the needs and measures necessary to ensure a continuous improvement of life in the community. For this, all interested parts should be involved, so that no one is left out. Through research, discussion groups or other means the opinion of most citizens should be obtain.

2. **Target Setting:** is crucial in order to prioritize the main concerns, as found out through the baseline review. Of course, the targets should be

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) and responsible for every task should be appointed.

3. Political Commitment: is meant to assure the engagement of the local authorities, giving, at the same time, more legitimacy to the actions that are being taken.

4. Implementation and Monitoring: should bring into life the targets set out by the community in order to improve the wellbeing of each citizen, on the long run.

5. Evaluation and Reporting: is another important step, which aims to show the progress that is being made towards implementing sustainability.

Furthermore, the IMS permits a more flexible approach, as it allows to adjust to new threats or opportunities that may come about during time. This process is an ongoing one: it will be revised each 3-5 years, in order to cope with the new developments. The good implementation requires some crosscutting elements such as an Organizational Set-up, which should be involved in organizing the whole process of the IMS and also on following how all progresses. Also, Involvement and Communication is crucial, so a plan for internal and external communication and the involvement of all stakeholders should be developed and permanently use.

4. First steps in implementing IMS in Moldova

Guided by the motto “Think global, act local” many local authorities face challenges, mostly with regards of the last part, namely the local action. There are issues rising from particular structural and conjunctural situations, but also from cultural biases. According to its constitution from 1994, Moldova “is a sovereign and independent state, unitary and indivisible.” It is a democratic republic and its fundamental law is similar to many West–European ones. The “think global, act local” imperative is influenced also by the administrative structure. The central public administration authorities are the following: the government, 16 ministries, extra-ministerial central authorities (agencies and bureaus) and de-concentrated services. There are 932 territorial-administrative units, divided in 897 “level one”units and 35 “level two” units. Level one refers to cities (municipalities) and villages, while level two include 32 “raions”(counties), the municipality of Chisinau and Balti and the Autonomous Territory Unit of Gagauzia. After ratifying the Council of Europe’s Charter on Local Self-Government, in 1998, Moldova needs to

modernize its public administration system according to the subsidiarity principles. The National Strategy of Development of the Republic of Moldova 2012-2020, which aims to bring sustainability in the center of the debate has been adopted. In 2014, the Government also adopted a National Programme on Public Services Reform, which explicitly states the commitment to improve the quality and accessibility of public services to the citizens of Moldova. After signing the Association Moldova committed to applying the principle of “de-centralisation of the decision-making process, from the central level to the level of regional communities”.

Colibasi, raion Cahul was chosen as a pilot-project for implementing IMS. Initially, a workshop was organized, in which German and Romanian researcher met with citizens, public servants, political representatives, members of local NGO's in order to present the Integrated Management System, its components and the philosophy around it. Accordingly, the first step was to elaborate a Baseline Review. It is crucial to know what the current situation is and also, what the citizen's most urgent and important aspects of life are. The survey was conducted between march –may 2014, through questionnaires applied to three target groups: citizens, managers and representatives of the civil society.

For the citizens the questions were related to the description of the living conditions in the present, in Colibași, the evaluation of the general factors that influence the quality of life and the evaluation of the activity of the local administration. Priority measures for improving the quality of living in the village of Colibasi address change of mentality, stronger orientation of the public administration towards the citizen, rehabilitation of roads, selective waste collection, professional medical assistance, support for investors, higher wages. Other measures include a new parc, a new market for local products, rehabilitation of the House of Culture, rehabilitation of the old stadion, public lightning, support for SME's.

Entrepreneurs were also called out to express their views on important aspects that would improve their activities in Colibasi. International Cooperation, privatisation and acces to financial ressources were rated as unfavorable by the managers, while telecommunication, cooperation at local level and services provided by the local administration were considered acceptable.

For representatives of the civil society (teachers, NGO's representatives, priests and public servants) the creation of new working places, better waste

and sewage system, diverse medical services, selective waste collection, mentality changes, professionals for the PA and support for small and big agricultural producers were most important.

5. Key challenges for improving sustainability in the Republic of Moldova

The Joint Analysis indicates some challenges that the Moldovan PA has to address, in order to align to European standards. Such issues regard the implementation of legislation and regulation, lack of adequate budgeting to implement policy frameworks, politization of the PA and an insufficient institutional capacity. “The main task is to develop institutional and functional public authorities, so that they work more efficiently and ensure the transparency and efficiency of service delivery and cost reduction” (JA, 2016).

In order to achieve a better outcome of the PA’s activity, there are several aspects to be considered. One of the most important one is encouraging the citizen’s involvement and participation to public affairs. “The lack of civic education and little investment in an identity and narrative that encourages participation and accountability might prove an important obstacle to democratic governance” (JA, 2016). A possible way to increase the public trust is to increase transparency, so that accountability will be much easier to assess. Unfortunately, according to the Joint Analysis “addressing these bottlenecks all depend on the success of the PAR in instilling a new/modern public sector management culture, for which there is currently no credible advocacy and communication plan.”

6. Conclusions

Moldova is a European country. It shares most of the values that are at the core of European Integration. Still, in order to operationalize these values, further effort is needed. An efficient and effective modern Public Administration will be the best framework for the catching-up process.

As Moldova is a relatively small country, meaning that structural changes have the potential to be implemented quicker and more cost-effectively than in many other larger countries. Additionally, Moldova dependence on external aid - conditioned on greater transparency –“might serve as an incentive to strengthen and cement democracy processes in the country” (JA, 2016). Still,

“politicisation of state institutions, systemic corruption, and slow public administration reform” are amongst other sectors, what the Council of the European Union found as major negative aspect that may affect the countries adherence to the EU.

Appropriate mechanism and tools, such as an Integrated Management System, that could increase transparency of decision-making and participation of economic and social partners, citizens and civil society might have an essential contribution. In each phase of the IMS, there are many ways to combat the problematic issues indicated in the several assessment elaborate by EU’s institution. The baseline review allows participatory local planning and budgeting, by involving many stakeholders with different backgrounds. The IMS project included citizens, public servants, managers, members of the NGO’s, priests and teachers. For the target setting the gained insight was adapted in order to reorganize them as SMART-objectives, but also in correlations with national priorities and, of course, disposable financial resources. The political commitment is crucial in order to overcome excessive “politization”, more so for long term development goals, that should not be changed by electoral cycles, but should be bounding for any elected official, as the citizens and other stakeholder were the one identifying them. Implementation and monitoring is another important step. As well as contributing to a more transparent administration for citizens, it may help implement the government’s commitment to adopt Performance Based Management systems. So, the progress can be easily monitored, through a set of well-thought indicators. Evaluation and reporting represents the last phase of one cycle of the IMS. It assesses the progress made, the causes, challenges and change of some tactics, and maybe the most important function, it contributes to a better accountability of the representatives of the LPA’s according to the competences they received in implementing sustainability. Additionally, because the IMS functions as a cyclic process, there is lots of flexibility in adjusting and adapting to further challenges that today’s complex and globalized world may bring about.

Such managerial instruments, like the IMS may contribute to a more effective and efficient activity of the Local Public Administration in the Republic of Moldova. Although it is not a sufficient condition to implement sustainability, it is a necessary one. The intertwined and complex economic, ecologic and social challenges can find a common ground and optimum solutions only if there is a large involvement from different stakeholders,

which are coordinated by a strong local administration, strength that is provided by motivated and professional employees and public servants.

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