SARA Law **R**esearch **C**enter
International **J**ournal of **L**egal and **S**ocial **O**rder, https://www.ccdsara.ro/ijlso
ISSN 2821 – 4161 (Online), ISSN 2810-4188 (Print), ISSN-L 2810-4188
N°. 1 (2025), pp. 493-504

THE DECISION OF THE ROMANIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT (RCC) NO. 412 OF 24 SEPTEMBER 2025 – (IN)COMPATIBILITY WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF INDEPENDENCE OF REGULATORY AUTHORITIES PROVIDED FOR BY EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

I.-A. ZORZOANĂ

Received 06.11.2025; accepted 16.12.2025
First online publication: 20.12.2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55516/ijlso.v5i1.293

Ionela Alina ZORZOANĂ
Teaching Assistant, PhD
National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Public Administration
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9213-287X

Abstract

The study examines the considerations of Decision no. 412/2025 of the Constitutional Court, relating them to the requirements of institutional independence of regulatory authorities, enshrined in the norms and case law of the European Union. The originality of the study lies in its comparative perspective on the Court's reasoning and the Romanian state's obligations under EU law, particularly regarding the protection of the functional, organizational, and financial autonomy of these entities.

The analysis highlights the fact that the pronounced solution allows for excessive political interference in the organization and exercise of regulatory powers, which may affect their impartiality and neutrality. It will be emphasized that the lack of adequate guarantees of independence contravenes the standards set out in the sectoral directives and the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, thereby creating grounds for possible non-conformity of domestic law.

The study draws attention to the risk of a conflict of norms, likely to lead to infringement procedures against Romania. The conclusion will support the need for a constitutional interpretation that integrates European standards, ensuring the effectiveness of the principle of autonomy of regulatory authorities and compliance with the commitments assumed by the Romanian state within the Union.

Key words: *regulatory, independence, political intervention, EU law, energy.*

INTRODUCTION

By Law No. 145 of October 3, 2025, on streamlining the activities of autonomous administrative authorities (the National Energy Regulatory Authority, the Financial Supervisory Authority, and the National Authority for Communications Administration and Regulation), by October 30, 2025, the management is required to present a new organizational chart to Parliament. This chart must include a 10% reduction in specialized positions and a 30% reduction in support positions. Additionally, it should outline a new salary scale that reduces basic salaries by 30%. We note that the three autonomous administrative authorities chosen by the legislator are genuine authorities established in accordance with European directives that enshrined the principle of their independence.

By Decision No. 412 of September 24, 2025, regarding the objection of unconstitutionality of the Law, the Constitutional Court of Romania held that the law complies with the requirements of constitutionality.

At the European level, national regulatory authorities have enjoyed increased protection from the outset in terms of ensuring independence, with the emphasis being placed on the fact that „*An independent and empowered regulator is better able to fulfil its duty of serving the public interest long term*" (*Regulatory Assistance Project*[1] *(RAP).* More than that, „*EU-made national agencies are formally part of national level administration, but created and functioning largely according to the rules and standards established by the EU legislation*" *(Szescilo, 2021, p. 192).*

To achieve the proposed goal, the paper is organized in two parts and *Conclusions and Proposals*: *Part I* analyzes the *efficiency* of the three autonomous administrative authorities, by reporting to the considerations retained by the Constitutional Court through Decision no. 412/24 September 2025, *Part II* presents the principle of independence of authorities as established at the level of European institutions, and conclusions presents our proposals, insisting on the importance of respecting the status of these autonomous administrative authorities. The documentary sources accessed for this scientific research, from national and comparative law, were analyzed and legally interpreted to formulate a conclusion. Using methods specific to legal research, the conclusion of the paper will be emphasized, namely that, although it is the right of each Member State of the European Union to organize the administration as it sees fit, however, about autonomous administrative authorities regulated at the level of European legislation, the national legislator has the duty to respect the limits drawn by the European regulatory framework.

[1] https://blueprint.raponline.org/effective-and-independent-nras/

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I. ANALYSIS OF THE *EFFICIENCY* MEASURES ESTABLISHED BY LAW NO. 145/2005 IN RELATION TO THE CONSIDERATIONS OF CCR DECISION NO. 412/2025.

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language[2], the word *efficiency* shall mean: *The action to streamline and its result,* and the verb *to make efficient.* Also, *efficient* means *practical, useful.* By Law No. 145/2025, the legislator, in the absence of any analysis, established that the three authorities will be more efficient, that is, more useful, by reducing support staff by 20%, specialized staff by 10%, and the salary scale by 30%. In the context in which, at the European level, the independence of regulatory authorities is elevated to the rank of a principle, we cannot help but note the fine line between these measures and the violation of European norms requiring compliance with the special statutes governing these authorities.

From the analysis of Law No. 145/2025, it can be observed that, without support, the legislator established a series of percentages to streamline the activities of certain autonomous administrative authorities, supposedly. Such a streamlined approach, in the opinion of the European legislator, would be more appropriate under the authority of the head of each relevant authority, and the imposition of these measures through a regulatory act initiated by the government through the General Secretariat only demonstrates the latter's interference with the principle of independence.

The provisions of the Law affect the norms provided for in the art. 117 para. (3) and art. 147 para. (4) of the Romanian Constitution, given that this normative act:

(i) imposes a mandatory reduction in the number of positions within the National Energy Regulatory Authority (ANRE), the Financial Supervisory Authority (ASF), and the National Communications Administration and Regulation Authority (ANCOM), according to fixed percentage criteria.

(ii) establishes the limitation of support functions to a maximum of 20% of the total number of positions.

(iii) imposes a 30% reduction in the salaries and allowances of the staff and members of the management bodies

(v) establishes the obligation for the organization charts and salary scales of the indicated autonomous institutions to be presented to the Parliament and the Government of Romania for validation.

According to the provisions of art. 117 para. (3) of the Constitution of Romania, republished, „*Autonomous administrative authorities may be established by organic law*".

[2] https://dexonline.ro/definitie/eficientizare

As follows from the provisions of art. 1, paragraph (1) of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 33/2007, art. 1, paragraph (2) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 93/2012, and art. 1, paragraph (1) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 22/2009, the three authorities covered by the Law on Efficiency were established as autonomous administrative authorities, thus giving substance to the constitutional provisions previously stated. At the same time, the provisions of the indicated normative acts enshrine the quality of legal subjects as autonomous administrative authorities by virtue of the role and powers that these authorities exercise in the fields of activity established by the legislator, acting independently from a decision-making perspective, in the regime of public power, and to satisfy a legitimate public interest.

According to the basic norm and the establishment's normative acts, the three authorities have the freedom to make decisions, carry out their duties, and organize their own agencies. Autonomy means being able to set their own rules for how they run their operations and make decisions about their organizational structure and human resources policies. It also means that the legislature or administration can't intervene excessively. It is important to note that the autonomy of autonomous administrative authorities is not absolute. It is not intended to separate the activities and functions of these entities from the legislative branch's regulatory power. However, this power must not be used in a way that undermines the unique and defining characteristics of autonomous administrative authorities.

Furthermore, regarding the organizational autonomy of these authorities, the legislator has established that the management of human resources, which is crucial for carrying out activities under optimal conditions, lies solely within their authority. In this context, Government Emergency Ordinance no. 33/2007, art. 7 para. (1) states that „The staff is hired and dismissed from office in accordance with the provisions of the ANRE organization and functioning regulations, the collective labor agreement, and the legal regulations in force". Art. 4 para. (17) of the same law states that „*ANRE establishes through its own regulation the rights and obligations of the members of the Regulatory Committee, of the ANRE management, and of the employed staff*". Additionally, according to art. 15 para. (1) and (2) of the Government Emergency Ordinance No. 93/2012, „*The organizational structure, the number of positions, the management and execution duties of the staff, the criteria for hiring and selecting staff to ensure the smooth operation of the activity shall be established by the ASF Council," and „The ASF Council will adopt the organizational chart, the rules for how the organization works, and the rules for how the members of the Council and the staff are paid. It will also set the rules and principles governing the payment of the Council's members and staff. The Council will decide how much to pay its members and employees based on how much equivalent jobs and responsibilities pay in the financial market*".

Last but not least, according to art. 13 para. (1) lit. f) and m) of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 22/2009, „*The President of ANCOM (...) approves, by internal decision, the organizational structure, the list of positions and the number of positions of ANCOM" and „the employment, promotion, as well as the modification or termination of employment relationships of ANCOM staff*".

Therefore, the legal provisions implement the principle of autonomy established by the constitutional legislator in Article 117, paragraph (3), in the normative acts governing the organization and operation of the three administrative authorities.

The attribute of autonomy of the three authorities is an imperative requirement of the Union legislator, as follows from the provisions of Directive 2014/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on markets in financial instruments and amending Directive 2002/92/EC and Directive 2011/61/EU, of Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 concerning standard rules for the internal market in electricity and amending Directive 2012/27/EU and Directive (EU) 2018/1972 establishing the European Electronic Communications Code. The rules used state that the three authorities are independent because of the roles they play in the markets they oversee and regulate. These roles can only be carried out if there is no interference with how they are organized and run. But the Law on Efficiency contradicts this constitutional principle, which is meant to ensure that autonomous administrative authorities can perform their duties under the best possible conditions, without excessive interference from the legislative or executive branches. Even if, on a purely formal level, the normative act under constitutional review does not get rid of the legal tool used for managing human resources, which is the act that comes from the management of the administrative authority, by setting clear percentage-based indicators for cutting staff or setting up a The proportional relationship between specialized functions and those deemed supportive compromises the fundamental decision-making principle that should guide the management actions of the authority. The executive takes over the management of independent administrative bodies by imposing his own view on human resources and finances, which are essential to the idea of autonomy. At the same time, the Law on Efficiency appears to conflict with the constitutional provisions of Article. 117 paragraph (3) and the planned cuts in salaries, allowances, bonuses, or premiums for the staff of autonomous administrative authorities and the management bodies of these entities. By limiting or stopping the grant of these monetary rights, these authorities' ability to manage their finances is damaged, which could weaken the autonomy that the constitutional legislator sees in them. Thus, by imposing a generalized reduction of basic

salaries or allowances by a percentage of 30%, without this aspect resulting from a substantiated analysis carried out by the management of the autonomous administrative authorities regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing human resources, a significant interference occurs in the capacity of the entities in question to manage their resources, the attribute established by the legislator within the provisions of art. Paragraph 117 (3) of the Constitution is being reduced to a form without content.

Moreover, even from reading the explanatory memorandum that accompanied the draft normative act, it can be observed that, although the executive recognizes and explicitly presents the autonomous character of these administrative authorities, it intends to suppress it indirectly, by altering the elements that define it, such as the independence and freedom to manage the resources held.

Last but not least, by establishing the obligation to present before the Parliamentary Committees convened by budget-finance and labor, from the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, respectively before the Government, of reports and information notes regarding the modification of organizational charts and salary scales in accordance with the indicators established by the Law on efficiency, an interference is made in the right to autonomous management of resources by placing the authorities in question in a position of dependence on the Parliament and the Government, contrary to the norms of art. 117 paragraph (3) of the Constitution, which is aimed precisely at preventing any such interference in the autonomous functioning of the entities in question.

By Decision No. 412/2025, the Constitutional Court held that the law is in accordance with the constitutional provisions. In the motivation for rejecting the objection of unconstitutionality, the The Court explains that the independence of regulatory authorities includes decisional, organizational, and functional aspects. Decisional autonomy ensures impartiality in decision-making. Functional independence means no interference from the executive or accepting directives from outside entities. Organizational independence allows authorities to set their rules and structures. The Court notes that the law in question does not impact these authorities' obligation to establish organizational rules but sets criteria for reducing staff and salaries. This does not undermine their decision-making autonomy or organizational independence, as reductions are based on analyses of overlapping duties and efficiency. Therefore, the law’s measures to cut positions and salaries do not compromise their autonomy.

Such a justification is in contradiction with European norms, particularly the principle of the independence of autonomous administrative authorities. Moreover, it can be observed that the Constitutional Court omitted or, better said, avoided answering specifically how the organizational and functional independence of the authorities whose "efficiency" was regulated by Law No. 145/2025 was not affected.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF INDEPENDENCE. CONCEPT AND REGULATION

Through a series of directives (including those retained by the Constitutional Court in the recitals of Decision no. 412/2025), the European legislator has established specific criteria that must be met for these authorities to be in line with European norms. *Jean-Marc Sauvé, Vice-President of the Council of State of France* mentioned that conditions for the successful creation of an independent administrative authority: first, to ensure that the establishment of this authority meets an absolute requirement, in relation to the status of independence; second, the mission assigned to this authority must be precisely defined; we must guarantee the statutory independence and administrative and financial autonomy of this authority and ensure that it will have sufficient means to carry out its missions. What these authorities have in common is that they enjoy functional and decision-making independence from other state authorities, an independence imposed by European law, the violation of which is severely sanctioned by the European Commission through infringement procedures.

Some authors indicate that the label of independence is somewhat misleading, as it creates excessive expectations about absolute autonomy (Sajo, 2007). Administrative independence is primarily curbed by the principle of legality (Szescilo, 2021, p. 195).

We can say that the principle of the independence of autonomous administrative authorities is a creation of European legal acts and of the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union. Thus, by the Decision delivered in the Case C-424/15, the CJEU held that although Member States have institutional autonomy in organizing their regulatory authorities, but only within the objectives and obligations of the founding directives. During reform, a Member State can't delegate tasks of national authorities to a multi-sectoral body unless it meets the organizational and operational standards set by those directives[3].

Also, in another case, C-48/23 CJEU ruled that: as regards the concept of *independence*, it should be noted that it emerges from the case-law of the Court (…) this concept designates, in its usual sense, in relation to public bodies, a status which ensures that the body in question can act in complete freedom about the bodies from which the independence of that body must be ensured, protected from any instructions and from any external influence. This decision-making independence presupposes that, in the field of the powers and regulatory powers of the national regulatory authorities, they adopt decisions autonomously, exclusively on grounds of

3 https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?mode=DOC&pageIndex=0&docid=184670&part=1&doclang=RO&text=&dir=&occ=first&cid=13304984

public interest, to ensure compliance with the objectives pursued without being subject to external instructions from other public or private bodies[4].

In a comprehensive analysis of a recent CJEU judgment, one author highlighted that the European Court has clarified the meaning of the institutional and functional independence of national regulatory authorities, circumscribing the autonomy of Member States as regards the organisational structure and functioning of regulatory and judicial dispute-resolution bodies. However, the CJEU does so by implicitly transposing several principles from the independence framework it has established to define the requirements of judicial independence (Rizzuto, 2021, pp. 64-75). The judgment has clarified the requirements of EU law as regards the independence of national regulatory authorities. In particular, the CJEU provides essential guidance on the operational and functional dimensions of the concept of independence. Furthermore, the Court recalled that it had already ruled that, as regards public bodies, the concept refers to a status which guarantees the body in question the possibility of acting freely in relation to the bodies from which its independence must be ensured, free from any instructions and pressures.

European Commission Communication of 2016 (Communication from the Commission — EU law: Better results through better application) emphasizes that independent administrative authorities or inspection services required by EU law (e.g., in fields such as data protection, equality, energy, transport, and financial services) play a crucial role in implementing and enforcing legislation. The Commission will therefore focus on ensuring it has sufficient and appropriate powers to carry out its responsibilities.

Subsequently, and in 2022 (*COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL First report on application and functioning of the Data Protection Law Enforcement Directive (EU) 2016/680 - LED)*, the Commission further highlighted the importance of regulatory authorities by designating them as key bodies with an essential role in ensuring compliance with Union law.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Recommendation *of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2012,* mentioned that independent regulatory agencies should be considered in situations where:

1. It is necessary for the regulator to be seen as independent, to maintain public confidence in the objectivity and impartiality of its decisions.

2. governmental and non-governmental entities are regulated under the same framework, and therefore, competitive neutrality is required; or

[4] Judgment No 6 March 2025, https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=296194&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=13311934

3. The decisions of the regulator may have a significant impact on specific interests, and it is necessary to protect its impartiality.

Also, OECD (*The Governance of Regulators, OECD Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy,* OECD Publishing, Paris, 2014) has emphasized that a high degree of regulatory integrity contributes to achieving objectives, impartiality, coherence, and decision-making that avoids the risks of conflict, bias, or undue influence.

Moreover, at the OECD level, in 2017, the crucial importance of regulatory authority independence was addressed. In this regard, a guide was also drafted, called „*Creating a Culture of Independence - Practical guidance against undue influence*"[5] which highlights the key elements of this independence and how the state should position itself in relation to them. Also, it mentioned that „*The independence of regulators is thus constantly under stress*". The OECD Guide analyzes a series of factors that must be taken into account for a regulator to be considered independent, such as: (i) credible long-term commitments, (ii) stability, (iii) addressing potential conflicts of interest, and (iv) developing regulatory experience and capacity.

Regarding the financial independence of regulatory authorities, the OECD guide states that proper funding is crucial for a regulator to fulfil its mandate and act independently. How funding needs are set, how funds are allocated, and the regulator's autonomy in managing funds may be more important than the funding sources themselves. For fee-funded regulators, a proper cost-recovery mechanism is vital to set fees correctly and prevent underfunding, industry capture, or executive interference. Regulators funded through government revenues may be more easily influenced by resource reductions.

It must be remembered that, for example, regarding ANRE (one of the three authorities subject to the *efficiency* measures of Law no. 145/2025), an infringement procedure was launched against Romania in 2009. As part of the procedure, the European Commission expressly requested Romania to ensure that ANRE is a legally distinct and functionally independent entity from any other entity (…), with separate budgetary allocations, autonomy in the execution of the allocated budget, and to have the human and financial resources necessary to carry out its tasks. And as regards ANCOM, the Commission was concerned in another infringement procedure by two aspects: the absence of a stable legislative framework guaranteeing the independence of the national regulatory authority, and the fact that the position of the regulatory authority depends to a large extent on the Government, which can adopt and has adopted in the past various emergency ordinances restructuring the regulatory

[5] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/creating-aculture-ofindependence_9789264274198en.html#:~:text=This%20report%20provides%20practical%20advice%20on%20how,regulators%20and%20how%20to%20interact%20with%20them

authority. The Commission expressed concern about the independence of the Romanian telecommunications regulatory authority. In fact, the infringement procedure launched in 2009 served as the basis for the adoption of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 22/2009. Thus, the preamble of the normative act mentioned the following: Considering that in the letter of formal notice dated January 29, 2009 (Case no. 2008/2.366), the European Commission highlights that the provisions of Directive 2002/21/EC on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (Framework Directive) have been violated, and considering that the Romanian Government is invited to respond to the formal notice by April 2, 2009, and that, under these circumstances, developing a normative act establishing the creation, organization, and functioning of the regulatory authority in the electronic communications sector under Parliament's oversight is a solution that will bring institutional stability to the national regulatory authority in this field. The adoption of this draft normative act could also help close the infringement procedure before moving to the next phase of this process, especially considering actions initiated by the European Commission to ensure the stability and independence of the regulatory authority in electronic communications. These principles are also driven by the need to ensure impartiality in the authority's regulatory decision-making. The only way to resolve the breach of Community law procedures is to urgently adopt a regulatory act that sets new principles for the statute, organization, and operation of the regulatory authority in this sector.

So, at least in the case of two of the three authorities subject to the "efficiency" action by Law no. 145/2025, Romania has already been subject to infringement actions by the European Commission. It remains to be seen whether the European Commission's reaction will be the same now.

CONCLUSION

Based on the scientific research conducted, we can draw some conclusions and offer some suggestions, given that the research objective has been achieved.

In general, national governments can decide on the organization of public administration and on the scope of the EU acquis, which has gradually expanded to support the effective implementation of EU legislation by national administrations. EU legislation aims to protect national authorities from undue influence and pressure from markets, interest groups, and elected politicians.

As regards regulatory authorities, Law no. 145/2025 is in contradiction with the independence criteria set out by European and international bodies, which refer to functional and decision-making independence, as well as to autonomy in the execution of the allocated budget.

According to them, as shown by our research, the authorities have autonomous control over the use of the budget, with no restrictions being allowed in this regard, as well as over the way in which the activity is organised, including

personnel policy, given that regulatory authorities must have the financial and human resources necessary to carry out their duties.

In our opinion, by imposing efficiency measures that aim to reduce the number of posts by a predetermined percentage, corresponding to a 30% reduction in salaries included in the salary scale, the premises for the legislator's interference in the functioning of the autonomous authorities are created. Thus, even in the conditions in which the Constitutional Court found that Law no. 145/2025 is in accordance with constitutional norms, we can speak of a (possible) violation of the principle of the independence of autonomous authorities, as it is implemented at the level of European legislation and jurisprudence. The European Commission can find such a violation; such an approach remains open at this time.

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