

DIGITALISATION – PART OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

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Abstract

Nowadays, in what concerns the relation with public authorities, the general trend is remote communication, both in terms of obtaining information and in terms of an administrative act. From this perspective, the state of development of society as a whole calls for reform, in the sense of moving away from traditional methods and embracing new approaches to communication, in society in general and in administration in particular.

In this background, we learn from the media that a minister created virtually by artificial intelligence has been appointed in a European country. This made us curious to document the topic in order to find out as much as possible about the communication tools of the future. Therefore, the paper addresses a current topic of general interest, discussing the possibility of modernizing public administration by means of digitalisation.

Therefore, the intended scope of the paper is to document the topic of digitalisation of public administration, in order to learn as much as possible about it, both from a theoretical and a practical, applied perspective.

By using research methods specific to law, the conclusion of the paper will be emphasized, namely that the integration of new technologies into administration is part of existing trends in administration and that this comes as a support for people.

Key words: *reform, digitalisation, public administration, electronic civil servant, robot.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, public authorities are meeting people's need for information and for accessing online public services, modernizing the administration and adapting it to the state of today's society. In this light, at European level, there is increasing talk of digitalisation and the need for everyone to be trained to cope with the challenges it brings. As recently highlighted "*the management of contemporary state-organized society requires a complex institutional architecture, rigorously organized, which has to be able to ensure the efficient functioning of the state mechanism*" (Bărbăteanu, 2025, p. 1).

At global level, public administration is involved in the broad digitalisation process that has impacted society at large. Furthermore, "*law is connected to history and social environment*" (Anghel, 2024, p. 12). However, even if it is truly a factor of progress, "*digitalisation brings with it new issues of responsibility, legal liability, limits and respect for citizens' rights and freedoms*" (Ştefan, 2024, p. 565). Furthermore, "*in the digital age, protecting data confidentiality has become a major challenge, given the exponential growth in the volume of information stored and transmitted electronically*" (Ene-Dinu, 2024, p. 162). That is why this topic should constantly be in the scientific community's attention because it will shape our behaviour in the future.

In order to achieve the intended scope, the paper is organized into three parts: Part I analyses the reform at a conceptual level, Part II summarizes the legislation on digitalisation, and Part III presents a case study on the introduction of virtual civil servants into the administration. The documentary sources accessed for this scientific research, from national and comparative law, have been analysed and legally interpreted in order to draw a conclusion. Also, the methods of legal interpretation have been developed by our doctrine (Popa and Anghel and Ene-Dinu and Spătaru-Negură 2017, 197-202). Using specific legal research methods, the conclusion of the paper will be underlined, namely that, although new technologies are a factor of progress in the history of mankind, there is a need for responsibility in their application in administration, so as to maintain the balance between people's needs, respect for fundamental rights and public interest.

I. REFORM: CONCEPT AND LEGISLATION

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, the word *reform* shall mean: "*limited or structural political, economic, and social transformation to achieve progress*" while *to reform* shall mean "*to change for the better, to correct, to improve*" (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/reform%C4%83>). Therefore, at the general conceptual level, reform implies change. However, all change requires time, resources, and vision. In light of these conceptual clarifications, the assumption we start from in this section is that reform is a component of change.

In our opinion, no reform can be made if the legislator is not grounded in social realities in order to understand the needs of society at a given moment and their

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impact on it. Reform for reform's sake will not be successful because it requires resources, infrastructure, time, and qualified personnel. „(...) *The funds of public financial resources belong to the whole society*” (Cîrmaciu, 2023, p.80). Reform is a long and lasting process that requires a lot of patience. At national level, the reform was based on the political will embodied in the government program.

Among the most important documents, we hereby list the following: *Government strategy to speed up reform in public administration 2001-2003* (published in Official Journal no. 660 of 19 October 2001). This document shows that: “2. *The need for reform* - The trend toward globalization, accompanied by the dynamic development of social systems, places nation states in a completely new position, in which institutions and administrative systems must be adapted.

The need for reform is driven by four main categories of reasons: a.) *Economic reasons*: low economic growth and a reduction in budgetary resources allocated to public administration; the private sector's need for modern, flexible administration that is open to public-private partnerships; b.) *Technological reasons*: introduction of information and communication technology in public administration; c.) *Sociological reasons*: Citizens, as beneficiaries of public services, are increasingly demanding and no longer accept their needs to be determined exclusively by what administrations offer them; d.) *Institutional reasons*: the integration of Romania in the European Union structures entails a different way of managing services (...)".

Subsequently, *the accession to the European Union* on 1 January 2007 led to a comprehensive process of European integration, which included the harmonization of national legislation with EU legislation. In our opinion, the accession of Romania to the EU is part of the administrative reform. “*The Romanian government was and is in the permanent contact with European officials, who note the progress made by our country*” (Cîrmaciu, 2023, p. 3). The national reform program continued throughout 2013-2016 (https://www.mnuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Program_de_governare_2013-2016.pdf). Subsequently, strategies for developing the administration were developed (Government Resolution no. 909/2014 on the approval of the *Strategy for strengthening public administration 2014-2020 and the establishment of the National Committee for coordinating the implementation of the Strategy for strengthening public administration 2014-2020*, published in Official Journal no. 834 of 17 November 2014).

Currently, the *Strategy for open government in Romania 2025-2030* (published in Official Journal no. 336 bis of 15 April 2025). According to it “National Anti-Corruption Strategies that perfected the public policy framework implemented in Romania with the aim of promoting and supporting open government. To date, three such strategies have been developed, with the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021-2025 (...) being the strategic document currently in force. The aim of the National Anti-Corruption Strategies was to implement reforms in the field of integrity and anti-corruption through measures

to combat corruption and promote integrity and transparency, thereby contributing significantly to increasing citizens' trust in public institutions (...)"'. We note that at the European Union level, the Commission assists EU Member States in undertaking reforms in public administration and governance by providing technical support (https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/public-administration-and-governance_ro). Therefore, digitalisation is necessary for society, by meeting a social need.

II. DIGITALISATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - IN BRIEF

II.1. Public authorities involved in the digitalisation process

In our country, digitalisation is performed by the following authorities: Ministry of Economy, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship, and Tourism and the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania.

According to the normative act (Government Resolution no. 189/2025 on the organization and operation of the Ministry of Economy, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship, and Tourism published in Official Journal no. 185 of 3 March 2025), the Ministry (...) "operates as a specialized body of the central government, subordinated to the Government, public institution with legal personality, which draws up and applies the strategies and the Government Program in the field: (...) of digitalisation".

It acts as a "state authority ensuring the exercise of control over the uniform application and enforcement of legal regulations in its areas of activity, as well as the functioning of entities operating under its subordination, authority, or coordination, and exercises the functions of coordinating digitalisation policies and measures. In the field of digitalisation: ensures interinstitutional coordination in the process of implementing, operating and monitoring national strategies in the field of information technology and digital transformation, developed by the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, a legal entity under the authority of the Ministry (...)".

According to the normative act [G.R. no. 89/2020 on the organization and operation of the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, published in Official Journal no. 113 of 13 February 2020, art.1 para. (1)], the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania "(...) fulfils the role of designing strategies and public policies in the field of digital transformation (...) and to coordinate their implementation (...)".

A.D.R. goals are, among others: a) contributes to the digital transformation of the Romanian economy and society; b) implements eGovernment in public administration in Romania (...) [Idem, art.3].

II.2. Brief considerations on digitalisation

The national regulatory framework applicable to digitalisation was developed over a period of several years, and the reform was implemented gradually. The adopted regulations were published in the Official Journal. "The

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Official Gazette of Romania (...) represents the official “newspaper” of our state in which, in Part I, the normative acts of the central public authorities are published (Boghirnea, 2022, p. 14).

In summary, a major step forward was the adoption of the legal framework on the use of electronic signatures and electronic documents by public authorities. This involves several legislative acts, such as: G.E.O. no. 38/2020 on the use of documents in electronic format by public authorities and public institutions, published in Official Journal no. 289 of 7 April 2020 and Law no. 455/2001 on the electronic signature, published in Official Journal no. 429 of 31 July 2001 (subsequently repealed by Law no. 214/2024 on the use of electronic signatures, time stamps, and the provision of trust services based on them, published in Official Journal no. 647 of 8 July 2024).

Then, the elimination of the storage binder on 4 July 2023 was well received in society, a factor of progress in the relationship between the administration and the administered individuals. It was a clear sign that the administration was beginning to modernize. Law no. 9/2023 amending and supplementing Government Emergency Ordinance no. 41/2016 on establishing measures to simplify central public administration and amending and supplementing certain normative acts (published in Official Journal no. 14 of 5 January 2023) has several interesting provisions, such as:

- art. 2 para. (1) – “*Public institutions, specialized bodies of central and local government, as well as private legal entities which, according to the law, have obtained public utility status or are authorized to provide a public service, under public authority, are required to accept an electronic copy of the identity card, sent by email (...)*”;

- art. 2 para. (3) – “*Each and every public institution, specialized body of central or local government (...) is required to eliminate the requirement to submit certified copies of documents when providing public services, replacing them with certification of conformity with the original by the competent official*”.

Subsequently, G.E.O. no. 56/2024 approving the National Program for the Digital Transformation of Local Public Authorities (published in Official Journal no. 520 of 4 June 2024) was also approved.

At EU level, we note that Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 was adopted (published in OJ L 323, 19.12.2022). The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, set up by Decision (EU) 2022/2481, guides the digital transformation of all EU Member States along four main lines of action, with concrete and measurable targets and objectives: digital public services, digital skills, digital transformation of businesses, secure and sustainable infrastructures (<https://www.mcid.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Plan-national-de-actiune-roadmap-pentru-publicare.pdf>, fila 1).

In this background, at national level, in accordance with the provisions of Decision (EU) 2022/2481 (...), the National Action Plan on the Digital Decade for Romania was adopted by Memorandum. On 14 October 2024 ADR announced its official approval as a strategic document of major importance that underlines Romania's strong commitment to digital transformation and alignment with the EU's digital goals (<https://www.adr.gov.ro/autoritatea-pentru-digitalizarea-romaniei-anunta-aprobarea-oficiala-a-planului-national-de-actiune-privind-deceniul-digital-pentru-romania>).

III. CASE STUDY ON VIRTUAL CIVIL SERVANTS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

A case study on virtual public services has been carried out in this section, starting from the idea that "public services are unquestionably a pillar of society" (Cliza, 2023, p.49). Therefore, examples of virtual civil servants at the level of public administration who provide public services, as well as chatbots, were selected.

At the level of local public authorities, the first virtual civil servant in Romania was launched in Cluj on 15 April 2018, known as ANTONIA. It still operates within the Cluj-Napoca City Hall and takes citizens' requests. "Civil Servant Antonia" portal is implemented within the framework of the project "Increasing the transparency of decision-making and simplifying administrative procedures for citizens-ANTO-CIIC (...)" (<https://portal.primariaclujnapoca.ro/>). The overall objective of the project is to strengthen the institutional capacity and make the activity of Cluj City Hall more efficient, by simplifying administrative procedures and reducing bureaucracy, implementing measures from the perspective of public services provided to citizens, both at web portal and info kiosk terminals (*Idem*).

A few years later, *at government level*, i.e. central public administration, *robot ION*, the world's first governmental honorary advisor based on artificial intelligence, was launched for the first time on 1 March 2023 (<https://www.mcid.gov.ro/premiera-romaneasca-ion-primul-consilier-guvernamental-din-lume-ce-va-folosi-inteligenta-artificiala-9546/>). According to public information, ION's role is to help the Government to receive Romanians' opinions in real time, so that it can then inform government representatives of their problems and wishes (*Idem*). Robot ION looks like a mirror and it seems that in the first week after its launch it received half a million messages and tags from Romanians, on various topics such as: education, improving the public health system and conditions for people with disabilities, low salaries and pensions, and the need to improve living conditions in the big cities of the country (<https://hotnews.ro/video-ce-s-a-ntmplat-cu-robotul-ion-controversatul-consilier-ia-lansat-cu-mare-regie-n-primavara-guvernul-pregateste-ceva-26256/>).

Unfortunately, robot ION did not perform up to expectations, making many mistakes and had a short lifetime. It is currently being tested and ION

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version 2.0 will be released, which will also answer questions on certain public services.

With regard to chatbots, research shows that several city halls have resorted to this form of communication. For example, in Bucharest, District 3 City Hall "is the first public administration in Romania to use artificial intelligence," according to a news report from 07.11.2023 (<https://www.primarie3.ro/index.php/presa/comunicat/primaria-sectorului-3-prima-administratie-publica-din-romania-cu-inteligenta-artificiala/6120>).

According to public information, "artificial intelligence supports citizens seeking information and assistance in resolving administrative needs, being available 24/7 to provide quick answers" (*Idem*).

In July 2025, Satu Mare launched the City Hall chatbot, an artificial intelligence chat system, which is considered an innovative solution in relations with citizens, improving and streamlining direct communication with the city's residents (<https://www.primariasm.ro/chatbotul-primariei-este-functional>). When searching the Satu Mare City Hall website using the keyword "chatbot," we were greeted with the official message: "*The City Hall chatbot is operational!*" (<https://www.primariasm.ro/tag/chatbot>). Also, in Satu Mare County, the Town Hall of Turț Commune has a chatbot (<https://primariaturt.ro/chatbot/>).

An AI chatbot system has been operating on the Focșani city hall website since this summer. (<https://www.monitoruldevrancea.ro/2025/08/12/chatbot-ai-pe-site-ul-primariei-municipiului-focșani/>).

Recently, we learned from the media that Albania has appointed an AI minister. Her name is "*Diella, which means sun, and she is the digital assistant that the Albanian government has tasked with fighting corruption*" (<https://www.euronews.ro/articole/albania-a-desemnat-primul-ministru-ai-din-lume-pentru-a-combate-coruptia>).

According to the Prime Minister of Albania, "*Diella is the first member of the government who is not physically present but is virtually created by artificial intelligence, which is tasked with conducting public auctions that will be 100% free of corruption*" (*Idem*). Diella "*was launched in January 2025 as an AI-generated virtual assistant, and its image is that of a woman dressed in traditional Albanian costume to help the population use the e-Albania platform, which provides official documents and various services*" (<https://agerpres.ro/politic-extern/2025/09/12/albania-numeste-un-ministru-generat-de-ai-responsabil-cu-achizitiile-publice--1483745>).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the scientific research carried out, we can draw some conclusions from the analysis of the documentary sources to which we had access, considering that the research objective has been achieved.

First of all, Romania is fulfilling its EU obligations and updating its legislation to bring it into line with EU laws, and the paper presents the applicable legislative framework, both in what concerns the reform and the digitalisation. Second of all, Romania has adopted the National Action Plan on the Digital Decade for Romania in accordance with Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030. Another conclusion concerns the public authorities involved in the digitalisation process in general, identifying the Ministry of Economy, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship, and Tourism and the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania.

The paper also presented a case study that took into account two objectives: identification of virtual civil servants and chatbots at the level of public administration, based on relevance criteria. The first electronic civil servant Antonia which was implemented in 2018 at the city hall of Cluj Napoca and robot ION the first governmental honorary advisor based on artificial intelligence, launched within the Government in 2023 were analysed. We thought it would be interesting to present these two examples, given that, while Antonia is an electronic civil servant at local government level that is still working today, robot ION has only worked for a short period of time at central government level in Romania. The research also identified chatbots at the level of city halls such as Satu Mare or Bucharest District 3 City Hall, as well as Albania's first AI prime minister, Diella.

The final conclusion of the paper points out that our country follows the trend of the digitalisation of public administration, in accordance with the international legislation, but the steps made by the country are small because we need appropriate legislation, well trained personnel, but also digitalisation dedicated infrastructure. The topic of administrative reform through digitalisation is very broad and could only be developed to a limited extent in this paper. Therefore, in future research, we will explore other components of reform such as administrative reform in the European context.

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