

The crossroad of reforms for the Greek public administration

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The reform of Greek public administration in order to enhance efficiency is a key recommendation put forth by the OECD. Efficient public administration ensures both the optimal utilisation of the resources engaged by public bodies and the allocation of excessive public funds to civil society or to activities promoting economic growth. The reform of the 'machinery of government' toward the attainment of efficiency is one of the fundamental objectives of the Greek National Reforms Programme. This programme highlights the need for downsizing Greek public administration and reducing the resources utilised.

The Administrative Reform 2013 (AR2013), which is the most recent project of the Greek public administration, aims to reform the Central Government Departments (CGDs) by downsizing their structure and reducing the number of staff and the budget allocated to every CGD. The principal objective of the AR2013 is the realisation of a more efficient and less costly central public administration.

Does the AR2013 meet its objectives? The AR2013 has not made explicit a specific methodology to explain how the structural reforms suggested will lead the CGDs to efficiency or improve their efficiency. The AR2013 reform agenda calls for horizontal structural modifications to be implemented across all CGDs. However, drawing on the results obtained from a comparative efficiency assessment of the Greek CGDs, some units seem to meet efficiency standards and do not require further reforms, such as the Ministries of Health; Infrastructure, Transport & Networks; Environment, Energy & Climate Change; Tourism and Macedonia & Thrace. A related objective specified by the AR2013 is the reduction of costs among the CGDs. It calls for budget cuts averaging 13% across all of them. However, in the case of certain CGDs, such as the Ministries of Interior and Labour, Social Security & Welfare, the recommended budget allocation has been increased.

The objective of efficiency for the Greek public administration, which is highlighted in reports published both by the Greek Government (i.e. Greek National Reforms Programme) and international organisations (i.e. United Nations and OECD), requires significant and targeted reforms. The reforms should focus only on structures of particular government departments that do not efficiently transform their resources into results. Based on our analysis, which used data from CGDs, a number of them, such as the Ministries of Culture & Sports and Interior, seem to need structural reform along the lines suggested in the study.

The identification and implementation of appropriate reforms to targeted structures of the Greek CGDs goes beyond the limits of the organisational perspective. The reforms in the machinery of central administration require a holistic approach, which will also deal with the societal impact (e.g. pension system, unemployment, welfare). An efficient central public administration is expected on the one hand to cost less and facilitate growth and development in economy and society. On the other hand, the efficient central administration is inevitably associated with redundancies, which will be a burden on the social security system and the welfare state. Acknowledging that the Greek economy needs immediate reforms to escape the vicious cycle, it seems to be time for radical decisions within a structured framework that accounts for the multiple perspectives on the process of administrative reform.

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