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**TRANSITIONAL DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL AUTONOMY IN
THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES OF THE RESEARCH

The relevance and importance of the researched problem. The Republic of Moldova is constantly in transition to a new model of public administration. The problems of setting up a modern administrative system that would meet European standards have been and always are on the agenda of central authorities. Local autonomy has become a priority and a challenge for theorists, but especially for practitioners, particularly in the context of the local public administration reform that is being discussed more and more in our country. The European aspirations of the country highlight the need to strengthen local autonomy through coherent actions and interventions of national authorities, especially in view of the commitments within the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova, on the one hand, and the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their members, on the other hand. At the forefront is the development of an efficient and responsible public administration, in order to ensure that the institutions function for the *benefit of the entire population and to provide quality services for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova*. [7] The monitoring reports issued by the Council of Europe between 1998 and 2019 clearly indicate the relatively slow evolution of local self-government in terms of the compliance level with the rules of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova.

The scope of the studied subject consists in the need to know the evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. Based on national events, but also on external influences, determined by the geopolitical vector followed by the Republic of Moldova, there are a number of stages that mark the transition of Moldovan society to democracy based on local autonomy. The importance of studying these transitional dimensions is of particular interest for defining the next set of strategic objectives. Or, 2020 was a milestone for the expiration of relevant strategies in the field of decentralization and local self-government. [6; 8] The identification of these stages of the country's development from the perspective of local autonomy determines the level of progress and provides a basis for formulating strategic reform priorities, for planning and implementing concrete transformation measures.

The relevance of the theme is also determined by the opportunity to be inspired by the European model of local autonomy, but also the regional one - the Eastern Partnership. In this sense, the good practices, as well as the common problems regarding the local autonomy represent a point of unity in the European administrative space, of which the Republic of Moldova is part.

The analysis of the situation in the research field. Local autonomy, in a broad sense, is a topic of interest for researchers in the political-administrative sphere. The central research topic - the principle of local autonomy, in its magnitude, concerned the representatives of various

currents of thought. Although not in the current formula, the exponents of various periods of development, especially the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the representatives of liberal doctrine, addressed in their works elements that refer to local communities and their organization.

Conceptual aspects of local autonomy can be found in the works of various authors from a wide geographical area. The visions of the British current were studied through the works of the authors: Gordon L. Clark [18], Goldsmith M. [17], Pratchett L. [34], etc. We find out the relevant theories on the principles and phenomena of public administration in the French doctrine, whose evolution has largely influenced the local conception in this matter. Thus, the opinions of the authors were analysed: Laubadère A. [24], Lafargue P. [23], Marcou G. [25], Auby J.M. & Auby J.M. [11], etc. Also, the representatives of the American school represent as a theoretical-empirical support from the interdisciplinary perspective of the local autonomy: Wolman H. [42], Ostrom E. [28], etc. For a broad approach, the results of the work of Russian researchers in the field were investigated, such as: Гельман В. [43], Грибанова Г.И. [44] and others. At the same time, a number of works by European authors, such as: Fleurke F. and Willemsse R. [16], Kleingeld P. & Willaschek M. [21], Illner M. [19], as well as authors from Eurasia, for example – Terteryan V. [39], have been a valuable support for the research from various perspectives.

The Romanian researchers have a special contribution in the study carried out in terms of the rules of administrative organization: Negulescu P. [26], Teodorescu A. [38], Oroveanu M. [27], Alexandru I. [10], Iorgovan A. [20], Vida I. [40], Popa E. [31], Preda M. [35], etc. In the research process, undeniable were the works of local authors who address either in a broad sense or in a specific context the local autonomy of the Republic of Moldova: Platon M. [30], Cornea S. [13] and Cornea V. [12], Simboteanu A. [36; 37], Dulschi I. [15], Popa V. [32], Popovici A. [33], etc. The visions of these authors allowed a comprehensive analysis and customized the national context.

To study the topic from a legal perspective, a wide range of legislative, normative and methodological materials regulating local autonomy and local public administration in the Republic of Moldova and certain European states have been extensively explored. The official and alternative reports on monitoring and evaluating the public administration reform processes or the fulfilment of the commitments in relation to European Union and other partners had a distinct support for the thesis. Of notable value are the reports of European institutions addressed to the Republic of Moldova.

Although some aspects of the investigation problem were tangentially reflected in the works of local authors, it is noted that there has been no permanent concern for in-depth research on local autonomy from the perspective of the transition of Moldovan society, which led to the start of this study. Or, a complex approach to local self-government in the context of reform processes is a necessity in the current conditions of development of the Republic of Moldova.

The purpose and objectives of the thesis. Starting from the actuality of the topic, but also the degree of investigation of the subject, the purpose of this study is the theoretical and empirical research of the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of framing in the context of public administration reform processes. Therefore the research objectives are:

1. defining the concept of local autonomy based on the ideas of the representatives of political-administrative thinking from different historical periods and different geographical framework, including through the complex analysis of scientific research in the field;
2. a comparative study of the practices of European states with a tradition of democracy, as well as the experience of Eastern Partnership countries in terms of local self-government;
3. investigating the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova by determining the stages of evolution in the context of public administration reform processes;
4. correlative analysis of the legal and institutional framework regarding local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova;
5. assessment of the application level of the local autonomy principle by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;
6. highlighting the impact of the Europeanization processes of the Republic of Moldova from the point of view of local autonomy;
7. identifying the prospective aspects of local autonomy within public administration modernization context.

The research hypothesis assumes the thesis that the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova are determined by both internal and external factors, mainly in the form of developing the legal and institutional framework, in the context of public administration reform and Euro-integration processes.

The research hypothesis is based on the following desideratum:

1. The current forms of local autonomy are the consequences of a series of transformations determined by the processes of democratization, and the concept of the principle of local autonomy is based on both the ideas and theories of thinkers and practical events and phenomena of different levels.
2. The experience and practice of some Member States of the European Union are based on a tradition of democracy, while local self-government in post-communist countries, including the Eastern Partnership, goes through a continuous transition by assimilation of democratic values and good governance.

3. The evolutionary process of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova is closely correlated with the legislative and institutional transformations, which, in fact, determine the level of application and observance of local autonomy according to the provisions of the European Charter of Local Autonomy.

4. The impact of the Europeanization processes of the Republic of Moldova is indisputable, and the influence of the country's membership in various European, international structures, institutions and acts is major, including on local autonomy.

Synthesis of research methodology. In order to present a complex approach to the analysed concept, a series of principles of scientific research were applied, such as: complementarity; simplicity; interdisciplinarity; historicism; objectivity; ethics. *The systemic approach* offered the possibility to research the administrative system in the Republic of Moldova and other states, as an integrated system, but also as a whole consisting of interrelated component parts. The *situational approach* was the basis for studying the institutional administrative structures in the context of autonomy.

Several methods of scientific research have been used to achieve the stated purpose and objectives. The *chronological method* was a fundamental method for identifying the stages of transition of the administrative system from the Republic of Moldova to democracy from the perspective of local autonomy. The *method of documentary research* is a key one, which facilitated the study of the bibliographic framework at national level, but also the international one, the analysis of the legal and normative framework of the Republic of Moldova and other countries with reference to the local public administration. The *phenomenological method* allowed the examination of the phenomena that influenced the evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. The *structural-functional method* was useful in the functional analysis of the institutional framework in the Republic of Moldova. The *comparative method* facilitated the study of the experience of the states in the Eastern Partnership space by highlighting the similarities and differences from the perspective of developing and respecting local autonomy. The comparison is an important premise in the analysis of the stages of transition of autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. The *historical, institutional, statistical, inductive and deductive methods, case studies, analysis and synthesis* were also used.

The scientific novelty and originality consists in the realization of the ample synthesis regarding the concept of local autonomy from a historiographical perspective through the temporal and geographical framing. The innovative character of the paper is explained by the author's attempt to identify the transitional dimensions and to delimit the stages of evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova based on a set of criteria developed and applied. The evaluation of the level of

observance of the principle of local autonomy according to the provisions of the European Charter of Local Autonomy from the perspective of the transitory dimensions of local autonomy, represents an element of novelty. This allowed to highlight the impediments and shortcomings regarding the coherent application of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. All these are correlated and complemented by the assessment of the impact of Euro-integration processes on the local autonomy of the Republic of Moldova. In the same sense, the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova are presented in terms of strategic perspectives for the country's development.

An important scientific problem solved represents the scientific basis of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova in the context of public administration reform, which facilitated the highlighting of a complex study for representatives of the scientific community, government institutions, local public authorities, regional structures and those of the associative sector and development partners. The investigation of the transitional dimensions of the local autonomy led to the elaboration of the recommendations regarding its consolidation in the Republic of Moldova.

The theoretical significance of the research consists in the exploration of research by foreign and domestic authors from various historical periods and fields of investigation, as well as in the conceptual substantiation of the transitional process of local autonomy in Moldova by formulating own definitions and issuing certain paradigms and trends. The reinterpretation of data and information from the analytical reports, monitoring and evaluation of the reform processes, but also from the monitoring reports of the Republic of Moldova by the European institutions in the field is of increased importance. The comparative research of the models of local autonomy in the European states and the experiences of Eastern Partnership countries allowed to highlight the lessons learned and the good practices. The synthesis of the information contained in the strategic documents regarding the administrative system will contribute to the supplementation of the existing knowledge on the local autonomy evolution.

The applicative value of the thesis is explained by determining the factors that conditioned the evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova in various periods, which serve as a basis for formulating strategic priorities and measures to reform the public administration system, especially local. In the same sense, the linkage between the legal and the institutional framework becomes indispensable in the process of achieving local democracy. The results are relevant in the sense of the applicability of the matrix of compliance with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, which indicates the arrears registered on specific areas and possible intervention measures.

Main scientific results submitted for defence:

1. Identifying the transitional dimensions of local autonomy, that define the delimitation

of the evolutionary stages of local autonomy in Moldova between 1990 and 2020, which supports the perception of the specific evolution in the national context from a theoretical-empirical perspective.

2. The usefulness for the Republic of Moldova of the practice of European countries, including some Eastern Partnership states regarding the transformational processes of local autonomy.

3. Arguing the level of compliance and application of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova.

4. Elucidating the influences of the Europeanization processes on the local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova and highlighting the Euro-integrationist tendencies on local public administration.

The approval of research results. The results of the study were reflected in 17 scientific papers, inclusive 4 *articles in specialised journals* and 13 papers in the materials of the *international scientific conferences* organized by the Academy of Public Administration (2018 - 2022, including as a *member of the Editorial Board* of the conference "Contribution of young researchers to public administration development", ed. 7: 2021); National University of Public Service, Budapest (2018); Regional Institute of Public Administration, Odessa (2021).

In practice, the results of the study were shared during study visits and internships in Poland, within the Polish Ministry of Development (2017, 2019), and town halls Żyrardów & Starachowice (2017); town hall of Warsaw city, of Grajewo and of Elk (2019).

The researcher is also one of the authors of the *Guide on urban revitalization for the cities of the Republic of Moldova*, Warsaw / Chisinau, approved by Order of the Minister of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment no. 200 of September 11, 2020. Some of the results of the investigation were promoted within the inter-ministerial project no. 309/ 2017 / M3 "Support for the administration of the Republic of Moldova in implementing the National Regional Development Strategy for 2016–2020 through integrated and sustainable urban development", implemented in the period 2017–2019, under the coordination of the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland.

The volume and structure of the thesis. The thesis consists of annotation, introduction, 4 chapters, conclusions and recommendations, bibliography of 255 titles, 8 annexes, 14 figures, 7 tables.

Keywords: local autonomy, transitional dimensions, Republic of Moldova, stages, local public administration, administrative reform, European Union, Eastern Partnership, European Charter of Local Self-Government, democratic principles.

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS CHAPTERS

In the **Introduction** the actuality and importance of the research topic are argued, the purpose and objectives of the paper are formulated, the research hypothesis, the applied methodology, the scientific novelty of the study, the solved scientific problem, the theoretical significance and applicative value of the thesis, the approval of the results and the summary of the thesis.

Chapter 1, entitled **Historiographical and theoretical-methodological approaches on local autonomy**, consists of four subchapters and includes historiographical research and conceptual aspects by investigating international bibliographic sources and analysis of local scientific materials, as well as defining the methodological research framework.

The first subchapter *1.1. The genesis and evolution of historiographical approaches related to the concept of local autonomy* includes the investigation of the genesis of the principle of local autonomy in a complex temporal and geographical framework. It reflects the work of the great thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who highlight elements of independence in action of human formations. With the evolution of political thinking, there are important conceptual leaps in the relationship between the state and the individual. It is gradually evolving in the form of a "social contract". In Grotius's work we find elements of the relationship between the state and the "civil power" whose acts are independent of other higher powers. [14] The synthesis of the visions studied indicates the origin of autonomy in the form of decision-making freedoms.

In the conception of the Anglo-Saxon doctrine, the local level went through a process of development naturally. This inherent right to self-government facilitated the organization of local communities, which were later formally and legally recognized by the legislator. And the notion of local autonomy, in English "*self-government*" appeared between 1622-1623, with the meaning known today: the quality or state of self-government, especially, the right to self-government. [45]

The importance of managing public affairs at the local level is to be found in Tocqueville's definition of democracy. The Enlightenment highlights the relationship between government and local government, by deducing from the terminology specific to the period the elements related to the freedoms of local communions in the handling of public affairs, as well as the distribution and delegation of power. Spencer emphasizes the need for the authorities to get closer to the citizens and to act according to their interests, by comparing them with "joint stock companies". Representatives of Marxism argue the concept of government as a product of the social relations of power between the dominated classes where self-government can never reach the political level of the general interest. Lafargue P. observed in the 1880s the polysemy of the term local autonomy, in the sense that it is not an eternal principle, but a historical phenomenon that varies depending on the

environment in which it occurs. [23] The relationship between the state and the local administration is analysed by the Social-Democratic doctrine, which invokes a new form of leadership, based on workers' councils - "Soviets", whose elective nature was only formal.

The complex form of autonomy is obvious, which in history starts from the autonomy of the individual and evolves in a political context to administrative autonomy. The forerunners of administrative science analysed and promoted the phenomenon of local autonomy, including in the process of formulating the foundations of public administration as an independent science. For example, Stein starts from the idea of the local community, and Vivien emphasizes the local interests that underlie the functioning of the administrative system. [41] With reference to the Romanian space, Negulescu P. analyses the system of attributions that the public authorities of different level have, condemning the high degree of centralization coming with a plea for a functioning local autonomy. [26] From a historiographical point of view, we deduce the ideas of local autonomy from the perspective of the conceptual elements related to the state, the form of government, human rights, the citizen-state relationship, the social division, the separation of powers.

Subchapter **1.2. Institutionalized theoretical-conceptual variables of local autonomy** contain the analysis of international and local bibliographic sources on the concept of local autonomy in multiple currents, sciences. The studied bibliographic references demonstrates a heterogeneous evolution of the principle of local autonomy both from a conceptual perspective being a widely debated idea by specialists in various fields of development, and from an application point of view - representing a practice implemented in different ways in society.

Autonomy, from a *political point of view*, refers only to an organizing principle of the state administration, and, from a *legal point of view*, it highlights the fact that local power is provided by someone other than the state. *Decentralization and local autonomy* are treated as closely associated concepts, as pointed out by Fleurke F. and Willemse R. [16], local autonomy being almost unanimously expected to give a positive value to decentralization, according to Marcou G. [25] Page E.C. warns academics early in 1982 about the variety of meanings of local self-government, which proves that there is no set definition and that the scientific literature is not very precise about the operationalization of its various components. [29] The principle of local self-government is also referred to in comparative law as the *principle of free administration*, according to Auby authors. [11]

The ideas of Western researchers studying the typologies of local government systems start from the existence of an inter-relationship between the functions assigned to local government as shown in the research of the British authors - Gordon L. Clark [18], Pratchett L. [34] European authors analyse autonomy in terms of the relationship between central and local government - Laubadère A. [24], including the allocation of resources - as shown in the works of Kleingeld P.

and Willaschek M. [21] and the performance of local authorities - after Goldsmith M. [17] The American authors correlate the concept of local autonomy in the perspective of democracy - Hankla C. and approach the subject in an interdisciplinary sense, not only in relation to decentralization and efficiency of public services as Wolman H. [42], but also with the economic, social, ecological fields as is the work of Ostrom. [28]

Both local self-government and decentralization have been advocated by many European and international institutions as the main instrument of *good governance* to enhance local democracy. The European Charter of Local Self-Government of 15.10.1985 defines local self-government as the right and effective capacity of local authorities to solve and manage, within the law, in their own name and in the interest of the local population, an important part of public affairs. [2]

In Russian literature, local autonomy is more common under the notion of "municipal autonomy". Russian researchers, Гельман В. [43], Грибанова Г.И. [44], analyse the principle more from a political point of view, in relation to political practices and realities. Romanian doctrine contributes remarkably to the conceptualization of the idea of local autonomy. Author Teodorescu A. pointed out that local autonomy must be understood as a right of local authorities to satisfy their own interests. [38] We observe in the definitions of contemporary Romanian authors - Oroveanu M. [27], Alexandru I. [10], Iorgovan A. [20] that the administration is defined taking into account the local aspect and the area of competence of the authorities - Preda M. [35], but also as a modern form of expression of administrative decentralization - Vida I. [40] In the literature, the principle is also called the *principle of useful administration*, after Popa E. [31]

One of the promoters of administrative science in the Republic of Moldova, Platon M. places great emphasis on local autonomy, transparency and personnel policies in his work. [30] The author Simboteanu A. deals with the transitory aspects of local autonomy in a series of articles, by framing the phenomenon in the processes of reforming the administrative system in the Republic of Moldova. [36; 37] Prof. Dulachi I. also analyses topics related to local autonomy by studying the need to reform local public administration in a complex context. [15] In general, local authors explore autonomy as a fundamental principle of the process of local administration along with decentralization - Popa V. [32], Cornea S. [12; 13], Popovici A. [33] The principles are in the sense that democracy it is functional, that is why the authors study the conditions for ensuring local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova and the reform context.

Considering the academic discussions and the studied bibliographic references, we define the *concept of local autonomy* correlated with the rights of the local communities, which becomes a guarantee of them in relation to the state. Being a right, local autonomy represents the assumption of responsibility and the possession of the capacities to exercise it. The rule on the applicability of

autonomy provides for the good management of local resources in managing the community needs.

In subchapter **1.3. *The methodological framework for researching the transitional dimensions of local autonomy*** is established by the methodological research spectrum and the research directions are formulated. The methodological framework for studying the topic is specific to the field of administrative sciences and has the role of facilitating the determination of the transition aspects of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. Based on methodological approaches, we formulate the definition of the *transitional dimensions* of local autonomy that reflect the processes of transformation of administrative phenomena that determine essential changes of local autonomy by overcoming the old components and mastering the elements of novelty. From a transitional point of view, we refer to a series of stages of evolution and adaptation of local autonomy in the context of the processes of reforming the administrative system in the Republic of Moldova between 1990 and 2020. In a broad sense, six dimensions of local autonomy are established for analysis: legal, financial, operational, institutional, development, local democracy. Given the causality and the result that the *legal and institutional dimension* have on the local autonomy, they become as defining factors for the study of the transition stages in the context of this paper.

The ***Conclusions of Chapter 1*** are related to the conceptualization of the local autonomy from the historiographical perspective and theoretical-methodological approaches. The dimensions of local autonomy have evolved with the forms of organization of society, becoming an important concern in the works of great thinkers from different historical periods. The specialized literature highlights the local autonomy as a fundamental principle of the public administration process. The transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova remain to be investigated only tangentially by local authors, which indicates the current state of research.

Chapter 2, European Practices on Local Self-Government consists of three subchapters, in order to present the specific experiences of some Member States of the European Union and those of the Eastern Partnership, from the perspective of good practices but also of lessons learned in administrative reform processes. The chapter includes an analysis of the ranking of countries in the European administrative area for local self-government.

In subchapter **2.1. *Transitional mechanisms of local self-government in the Member States of the European Union***, the practices of applying local autonomy are analysed, including in terms of evolution, in the Member States of the European Union with a tradition in democracy, but also of those with a post-Soviet specificity. In the case of states with administrative experience, there are peculiarities regarding the local level to which the local autonomy is applied, represented mainly by communes, cities, municipalities, but also the presence of the regional level - the so-called hybrid system. Administrative reforms, such as in Italy, Spain and Germany, have been carried out for

various reasons, such as part of the neoliberal agenda of the 1980s, which involves shifting responsibilities from central governments to other levels for modernizing the administration, which had become ineffective and far from citizens and as attempts to strengthen local democracy.

The historical specificity, the local development traditions have individually influenced each European state, and its administrative system, respectively the local autonomy has evolved also according to these elements. Italy, for example, has extensive administrative decentralization in public services, and in France, although the decentralization of public spending appears to be low, the resources of local authorities give them a degree of management autonomy that is not lower than that of other European countries. In this sense, we deduce the rule according to which the possession of own resources by local authorities and the good management directly determines the degree of operational autonomy at local level.

Of particular relevance are the experiences of the states in the ex-socialist space, which through development and democratization became members of the European Union. A model of local autonomy in the region is represented by Poland, being in the top of the European states with a high level of autonomy, with an index slightly above 25 out of a total of 30. [22] Poland ensured a very early degree of local autonomy through the "Territorial Governance Act". Decentralization according to the Polish model is based on decision-making power over local budgets. The Czech experience of implementing measures to reduce the effects of extreme fragmentation demonstrates the effectiveness of inter-municipal cooperation of about 70% of local authorities as an alternative to territorial consolidation. [19] A major aspect of territorial reform in the early 1990s in the Czech Republic was the abolition of second-tier local authorities, considered a control tool.

The purpose of administrative reforms in the Baltic countries is similar, and is based on democratization through the decentralization of central power, thus increasing the quality of public services for citizens and especially their involvement in the administrative process. Estonia was the first country in the former Eastern bloc to adopt a law on local self-government in 1989, followed by about 5 stages of the transition from two levels to a single level of local government in 2017. Estonia is a good practice for local financial autonomy, being one of the largest among the Member States of the European Union. The important administrative-territorial reform took place in Latvia during the years 1998-2009, when the old districts were disbanded and 524 small municipalities were amalgamated into larger units. [9] They are independent, in particular in the field of human resources and personnel management, which are contract employees. After several attempts at territorial organization in 1995, 2010, including the recommendations of the European institutions in Lithuania, the local level includes single-level municipalities - quite large compared to other European countries.

There is a tendency in Europe to create regional structures - established not in the first phase of transformation, but often as part of the process of accession to the European Union. These decisions are based on the rationale for administrative decentralization and local government reforms. We note from a methodological point of view, the principle of simplicity in territorial-administrative organization, which determines a clear system for achieving local autonomy in many European countries.

Subchapter **2.2. *Transitional features of local self-government in the Eastern Partnership area*** presents a comparative and evolving synthesis of the phenomenon of local autonomy in Eastern Partnership countries, based on the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government as a precondition (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine since 1997, Armenia, Azerbaijan - 2002, Georgia - 2004, Belarus did not sign the Charter, not a member of the Council of Europe) and reform processes.

From a methodological perspective, a clear regulation of the competences of local authorities is needed, a gap registered especially in the process of transition of local autonomy in Georgia, Armenia. And from an empirical point of view, the proper application of the norms is imperative in a functional democracy, a principle not ensured by the Republic of Moldova which has a complexity of provisions in the field. Ukraine's recent experience shows that a clear legal framework and coherent reform actions taken in parallel ensure an appropriate distribution of responsibilities in practice. But in Belarus, the division of competences remains a problem that could only be solved by a complex reform of the entire administrative system.

The constitutions of the analysed countries contain provisions on local autonomy and generally regulate the powers of local authorities, in practice being applied almost similarly in all states with deficiencies of clear delimitation, ambiguity or even doubling of power levels. The application of the balance mechanism between the attributions of the local authorities with the administrative-territorial organization is affected by the consequences of the Soviet system in all Eastern Partnership countries, where the “rayons” and other centralized maintained control tools.

In Georgia, following the 1998, 2005, 2010 reform attempts, the Local Self-Government Code of 2014 marks a new stage in the transition of autonomy, allowing for the election of representative and executive bodies, introducing additional mechanisms for public participation in the governing act. And the constitutional amendments of 2017 and the Decentralization Strategy for 2020-2025 come with a set of measures that should ensure the development of a reliable autonomy. Although the decentralization process in Ukraine started in 2014 is inspired by foreign examples and supported by Western assistance, it is still a transition developed at the national level, based on domestic specificity.

Elements of centralized power and the parallelism of governing authorities are particularly

evident in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Armenia. The merger of communities in Armenia, launched in the process of large-scale structural reform, is taking place in a similar way as in Ukraine - voluntarily, by referendum, but based on legislation and the general public interest. An important aspect of the reform is to support municipalities in developing human and institutional capacity and to improve their organizational performance. [39]

From the financial autonomy perspective, all the states in the region have initiated processes of fiscal decentralization, but for various reasons they have either stopped the reform or it is going very slowly. The voluntary creation of "amalgamated territorial communities" for the fundamental restructuring of central-local relations in Ukraine is accompanied by an extensive resource and finance foundation based on direct budgetary linkages from 2021 onwards. And in the Republic of Moldova, financial decentralization is one of the key pillars of the decentralization process and the one that has made the most progress, compared to other states in the region. In Belarus, the existing financial management system remains centralized and conservative. Although Armenia has updated the legal framework on local finance, a shortcoming of the system is that real financial needs and differences are not taken into account when assessing the financial capacity of communities.

The analysis shows that financial decentralization is a complex task for the systems of the states in the Eastern Partnership area, where the revenues of local authorities between 80-90% come from balancing transfers. Fiscal decentralization involves shifting responsibilities for spending and / or revenue to lower levels of government, a methodological principle that is not properly applied in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The ranking of European states based on the local autonomy index from 1990 to 2014, whose calculation methodology is based on the requirements contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and on the theoretical-empirical concepts developed under the coordination of the European Commission, shows that Eastern Partnership states: Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova are at the end of the list - with a score below 15 and 10 out of a total of 30. [22] These countries have faced many challenges in decentralization processes, in which waves of consolidation of autonomy have alternating with the opposite trend of recentralization of public administration. These processes are mainly influenced by political instability and lack of commitment.

The *Conclusions of Chapter 2* point out that local government in the Member States of the European Union operates on the basis of a clear legal framework. Administrative practice is based on the principle of subsidiarity, which ensures explicit procedures for managing resources, but also legal protection and the ability to recruit high-quality staff. With the intention of increasing the level of local autonomy, there are two opposite tendencies: increased fragmentation versus amalgamation as an instrument of administrative-territorial organization. The experience of the partially

implemented reforms in the Eastern Partnership countries indicates that the processes of decentralization and autonomy reform need to focus in particular on increasing transparency, increasing the local financial level, and elucidating responsibilities between levels of government.

Chapter 3 entitled **The evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova** has three subchapters and includes the study of the situation in the Republic of Moldova regarding local autonomy. The investigation focuses mainly on two key dimensions of local self-government, legal and institutional, while addressing the other four dimensions in a correlative and transitory way. The reasoning is based on the essence of the European Charter of Local Self-Government provisions from a conceptual-empirical perspective in relation to the level of application by national authorities.

In subchapter **3.1. *The legal framework regarding the local autonomy in the context of the public administration reform*** is carried out an analysis of the legal and normative regulations with reference to the local autonomy by framing the transition stages in the reform processes. We define the *legal framework on local self-government* as the totality of legal norms and rules that determine the principles of good governance, establish the framework for the application and realization of local self-government, regulate the competent bodies and their competences, and provide the methods to protect autonomy. The legal framework related to local autonomy is the set of laws, but also other related acts on the rights, limits and conditions of application and observance of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova, based on the provisions of the European Charter and other relevant documents. Also, a major emphasis is placed on the set of rules on the process of reforming the public administration system in the Republic of Moldova, a context in which progress is assessed or - on the contrary, regressions on the application and observance of the principle of autonomy.

As mentioned by Simboteanu A., the initiation of the administrative transition coincides with the initiation of political transformations. [36, p.10] The aim of the administrative transition was to create a system that would comply with the rules of the rule of law. The study highlights 5 periods between 1990 and 2020 of the transitional process of local autonomy.

The first stage (1990 - 1994) is characterized by uncertainties and attempts by the legislator to define "local self-government" in the sense of treating local public administration as a system of authorities. The adoption of a complex set of laws between 1991 and 1993 marked the establishment of the basis for starting a process of subsequent economic decentralization of particular importance for this stage. Thus, the foundations of autonomy are being laid from the perspective of the *operational dimension*, with an emphasis on the patrimonial elements. Efforts at the national level to assert local autonomy are accompanied by the impetus of international acts in this area. During this first period, the Charter of the United Nations enters into force in the Republic of Moldova, through which the state has also assumed the observance of the good governance principles. [1]

The Constitution from 1994 marked the course of the country's general development, thus establishing constitutional jurisdiction, including the enshrinement of the principles of organization and functioning of local public administration. [3] This event initiated the *second transitional phase (August 1994 - October 1998)*. Analyzing the constitutional text, we notice that the local autonomy obtains a central place in the system of public administration principles. Legislative attempts in 1994 to regulate local self-government are defined by obvious contradictions, as some rules promoted the principle of self-government, while others retained the territorial organization of local power, characteristic of the administrative system of command. [37] The logic of these actions does not fit into the constitutional approach launched. Also, the establishment of a special form of autonomy (ATU Gagauzia) affects the *relational dimension of local autonomy*. During this period, the relations of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union are formalized and a series of support measures are initiated in various fields of development in order to democratize the country. An important step in regulating the guarantees of political, administrative and financial independence of local authorities was taken in 1996 by signing of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. [2]

Consequently, inspired by the Charter and the practices of other advanced states in democracy, the national legislature approved two relevant laws in 1998 [4], which delimit the *third stage of the transition of local autonomy (November 1998 - May 2003)*. The new legal framework through which the counties were established, impelled the decentralization of the local public administration in the sense of the transfer of powers regarding the decision-making and the reconcentration of the administrative responsibilities for implementation. This system responds to the idea of freedom and conceptually falls within the essence of the principle of local autonomy. The transformations of the administrative system from a legal perspective had a positive influence on local autonomy, as they supplemented the rules with clear provisions on the context of application and ensuring autonomy, creating more concrete mechanisms in terms of financial, patrimonial, resource distribution, competences. An element of novelty is the introduction in the national legislation of the notion of local choice, defining the position and the special role. [5]

The return to the “rayons” through the 2001 regulations, following the 2003 local elections, represents changes in the recentralization of the administrative system and marks the *fourth stage of transition: May 2003 - September 2009*, when local autonomy was reduced, especially in the first years by centralization of public finances, overlapping competencies. Therefore, in the process of transition of local autonomy, the Republic of Moldova underwent three administrative-territorial reforms, each of them having certain influences on the degree of autonomy at the local level.

In the Republic of Moldova, decentralization has become an objective of the reforms of the administrative system and the administrative-territorial organization, but their inconsistency has

slowed down the process. Increased emphasis has been placed on reforming the central level in the absence of actions related to local government reform. Reforms related to decentralization were relaunched in 2006 with the adoption of a complex legal framework. These represent an evolutionary step in the regulatory process related to local autonomy, the clarification of roles and responsibilities in the administrative system, which are key elements from a methodological point of view.

The *fifth stage of the transition (October 2009 - 2020)* begins with the recognition of decentralization and local autonomy as a governmental priority, in the context of the socio-political events of that period. The system of rules in the field of local government is completed on the basis of democratic standards, including due to external monitoring and on the basis of the new framework for cooperation with the European Union. [7] The complex strategic cycle on decentralization in 2012 [6] and the reform of public administration in 2016 [8] determine the national mechanisms in the field of decentralization and ensuring a genuine local autonomy. The impact of the implementation of the strategies is reflected in legal changes to increase financial, fiscal and operational autonomy. Moreover, the legal guarantees of local autonomy have been strengthened, by establishing the right of local authorities to appeal to the Constitutional Court since 2016.

The analytical study highlights that the administrative-territorial fragmentation and the delay of the reforms in the field of decentralization in the Republic of Moldova create difficulties for the proper functioning of the local authorities. Theoretically, the legal framework on local self-government is complex, according to European and international standards, with an emphasis on democratic principles. In practice, however, the lack of adequate implementation mechanisms determines the inefficiency of the local finance system, the unclear distribution of competencies, the inadequate administrative-territorial organization, the poorly developed inter-institutional dialogue. And the reform processes that have been inconsistently tested over the years have made it difficult to transform the administrative system into a democratic and transparent one.

The study is completed by researching the institutional specifics of local autonomy carried out in subchapter 3.2. ***The evolution of the institutional framework for asserting local autonomy.*** In the context of this paper, we define the *institutional framework* as the set of bodies whose activity is based on the principle of local autonomy, as well as the relations between them, governed by national law in the light of European rules defining local democracy. Approaching the *institutional framework related to local autonomy*, we definitely refer to the respective officials - human potential, their competencies, context of activity, legal rules and limits, circumstances of action, set of available resources, organization and management. The institutional framework belongs both to the local public authorities that have autonomy as a right and exercise it as a capacity, and to the competent state bodies with attributions in the sense of regulating the local autonomy, its protection and

assurance. In this respect, the institutional framework is addressed extensively, with special attention also being paid to structures with specific functions in the process administration system reform.

The changes that affected the socio-political life in the Republic of Moldova in the period immediately after 1991 have produced considerable changes in administrative thinking and the provision of public services. The state is retiring from the position of main welfare provider in the sense that it will only have the role of coordinating the activity of agents who will work directly in the community. [12] Thus, the Republic of Moldova is engaged in a process of decentralization, an option that required a reform of institutional structures. The 1994 Constitution established a new system of local government in the country, with the state recognizing the right of local communities to run their own public affairs. [3] The establishment of the Standing Parliamentary Committee in 1994, with the role of restructuring of the local autonomy, later reformed in the *Public Administration Commission*, determined the role of the legislator in regulating the activity of the local administration. Attempts to establish a new territorial-administrative organization in 1994 are characterized by contradictory approaches: the failure to establish counties, followed by measures to authorize the interference of central authorities in establishing the district institutional framework.

An important element of the *institutional dimension* is the clear delimitation of the powers of local authorities, achieved by the 1998 reform. The relations between the deliberative and executive local authorities and the “Prefect” as a representative of the Government were of *collaboration and legality*. We appreciate that these elements created the premises for building a new system of functioning of the public power based on the *principles of local autonomy and rule of law*. The return to the “rayons” in 2003 involved redefining the institutional system, through scenarios involving the prosecutor in charge of checking the legality of local acts, the chairman of the district executive committee, with a double quality, the involvement of the higher level in local tax measures and others. The 2003 change did not strengthen the country's administrative-territorial organization, but returned to a pre-reform model inherited from the Soviet system.

The role of a ministerial structure dedicated to the local administrative system determines the awareness of the autonomy importance and the intention to provide support through a specialized institution, such as the *Ministry of Local Public Administration* in 2006. This major step would have been appreciated if the political factor that conditioned the democratic exercise to last only 3 years had not been involved. By establishing in 2009 the *State Chancellery*, it was set up coordination of the deconcentrated services by the territorial offices, and the implementation of decentralization policies, control of the legality of local acts, monitoring the execution by local authorities of delegated tasks. Thus, the *Government* exercises its prerogatives on relations with the local level.

Decentralization started through a complex strategic framework, given the existence of small

local authorities in size and weak from a patrimonial and financial perspective, is only a subtle way to maintain the centralized system of exercising public power. [13] The analysis of responsibilities of the Ist and IInd level authorities, notes the overlap of the intervention areas. The study shows that in essential areas that are naturally related to level I, they have no skills at all - e.g. in schooling, public order, environmental protection and natural resources. Many tasks are fragmented, limited or shared, not allowing the full exercise of local mandates in accordance with the European Charter, as in the case of economic development, education, health. These practices contradict conceptually and methodologically the rationale for the free management of local resources by the community.

In the context of local democracy, the establishment of the *Congress of Local Authorities in Moldova* in 2010 was in fact an act of commitment of all local authorities to follow the principles of good governance stipulated in the European Charter. In this way, for the first time in the country's history, the right of local powers to associate is capitalized. Thus, the Congress has become the unified voice of local authorities and the main partner in discussions on local self-government, both nationally and in relation to the European institutions. From the analysis we deduce the instability of the national institutional framework on the processes of reforming the administrative system in the last ten years, caused mainly by the lack of integrated vision on reform, but also the inconsistency of creating institutional structures, in which the local level is not properly represented.

The causal linkage between the fiscal capacity, as well as between the administrative expenses and the size of the administrative-territorial units is not one of balance in the Republic of Moldova. Only 10% of them can cover their administrative expenses from their own income, which *limits the exercise of autonomy*. The case study on lending capacity reveals that larger and consolidated administrative-territorial units capitalize on this legally recognized right, in particular for the purpose of capital investment projects. Although basic services are not delivered in many localities, the proximity of local authorities to citizens, easier access to local elected officials compared to other authorities ensures a high degree of trust in them.

From an *institutional and procedural perspective*, during 2017-2019 there are a series of controversies regarding the status of local elected officials: the manner of electing the district president, the case of the suspension of the general mayor of Chisinau. The current operating conditions of local employees do not allow local authorities to recruit high quality staff; and there are no adequate training opportunities, payment and career prospects, which would ensure adequate *administrative capacity*. Although some progress has been made on expanding the powers and rights of local authorities, the planned administrative-territorial reform has not been carried out, which would have a considerable impact on the local institutional framework, by increasing staff capacity and efficient performance, and administrative capacity in terms of the quality of public services.

As a result of the analysis from an evolutionary perspective and included in the complex process of public administration reform, *Conclusions of the Chapter 3* were formulated. The evaluation reveals an intermediate level of development of local public administration in the Republic of Moldova, explained by the proper application of only 15 of the total of 30 provisions of the European Charter. The evolution of autonomy in the 5 periods delimited by the author, is based on a specific algorithm influenced both by external incentives, but especially by internal factors, most often political. The study highlights the tendency of permanent completion of the legal framework in the field related to local autonomy in the context of reform, which limits the coherence of enforcement, and the lack of authentic mapping of rules conditions gaps in vision at the national level, but also inconsistencies in the distribution of powers administrative levels. In terms of cause and effect, we note that these premises create an uncertain context of institutional functioning by recording resource management constraints at the local level. The institutions tested in various periods of reform indicate the need for administrative-territorial reorganization by reducing fragmentation and strengthening administrative and financial capacity at the local level.

Chapter 4 is entitled **Local autonomy in the context of Euro-integration processes**, being structured in three subchapters, contains the investigation of the role of local autonomy with reference to the European integration processes of the Republic of Moldova. The study includes prospective research on areas related to local autonomy that contribute to the modernization of public administration in the Republic of Moldova, based on democratic principles.

Subchapter *4.1. The impact of public administration Europeanization on local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova* reflects an analysis of the influences of the country's Euro-integration transformations from the perspective of the principle of local autonomy. The proposed definition for Europeanization term is the assimilation of the principles, standards and policies of the European Union at national and local level. With an extended connotation, the phenomenon of Europeanization also implies the possibility of transferring national practices to the European Union.

Since its independence, the Republic of Moldova has expressed the desire to adopt democratic principles. By joining international and European organizations in order to democratize society, the country assumes a number of commitments at the national level, including for the proper application of local self-government. The impact of the interventions of the more than 20 specialized agencies, funds and *UN programs* operating in Chisinau, in the field of local autonomy is direct, referring to the acceleration of complex reforms in public administration and the decentralization process. The country's membership in the *Council of Europe* determined the substantiation of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova based on European regulations. Ratifying 107 Council of Europe treaties out of a total of 225, the Republic of Moldova has transposed local standards in

various spheres, including local democracy. [47] And the support scheduled for 2021-2024 refers to the establishment of modern human resources management in public administration, which is a key area that needs immediate intervention, as it determines the administrative capacity at the local level.

The 6 reports addressed to the Republic of Moldova out of a total of approx. 120 monitoring reports issued by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe from 1995 to 2020 [46] demonstrate the need for more action for local democracy by national authorities in the light of the European Charter. The study highlights the continuing trend of blurring of competencies between local government levels I and II, reduced financial autonomy, poor local remuneration mechanism and lack of effective communication between central and local level.

Empirically, European monitoring actions and recommendations have led to the implementation of the 1998 administrative-territorial reform, which is seen as an important step towards democratization from a methodological perspective. The recommendations of the Congress take the form of roadmaps, such as the experience of 2016 and 2021, which include clear milestones and support for national authorities to remedy the situation and align with democratic standards. These relations lead the state to take concrete measures on local autonomy, from legal framework perspective: the example of creation 8 working groups in the Parliament in 2005 to update the system of rules in the field of administrative decentralization, which resulted in legal consolidation of the autonomy; institutional: creation of the Ministry of Local Public Administration in 2006 etc. Following the impetus of the European partners, the Republic of Moldova has placed the issues related to local autonomy as a national strategic priority. But the most recent Report of 2019 reveals a rather negative situation, in terms of local autonomy with a tendency towards recentralization.

An absolutely relevant partnership on good governance is Moldova's relations with the European Union. The local aspect has a transversal character within the assumed commitments, highlighting three directions relevant to the local autonomy: the reform of the public administration as a central pillar, the management of human resources and the management of finances. [7] The key areas addressed with the support of the European Union until 2020, refer to the implementation of administrative-territorial reform – unrealized, legal adjustments in the main areas of decentralization. The process of implementing the rules was not and is not a simple one for our country. The analysis of official and alternative reports shows the poor progress on the administrative system reform with a focus on the central level, and the backlogs of the local level reform.

We emphasize the adaptation of the European methodology to the local context, through the prism of the studied local development tools - LEADER, urban revitalization, which ensures the efficient implementation of the approach at all levels, facilitating the increase of *decision-making autonomy and management*. The impact of Europeanization is a direct one on local development,

and therefore on local autonomy, through co-financed projects. In recent years, the European Union has adapted the support paradigm, directing financial sources more directly to the local level. The Republic of Moldova as a state in the European administrative space actively participates in various cooperation structures, which positively influence the integrationist processes: *the Central European Initiative, the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of the Eastern Partnership, NALAS*.

Subchapter **4.2. Prospective transitional elements of the local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova**, has the role of presenting the correlations with the set of public policies directly or tangentially to the investigated field, and the needs of strategic programming at national level are underlined. Recognizing the *importance of governance for sustainable development*, Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda in Moldova aims to develop efficient, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels. Many of the targets are linked to national priorities, as justice, corruption and public administration are among the biggest challenges and at the same time the Government's priorities. Public administration reform has modernized the process of strategic planning, policy formulation and decision-making. However, the policy document mapping exercise has shown that there is an excessive number of such documents, their number continues to grow, lacking monitoring and evaluation capabilities, and responsibilities are not clearly shared between implementing partners.

In this regard, the Moldova 2030 National Development Strategy should become the central long-term strategic document for ensuring coherence between national, sectoral policies and the budgetary framework, as well as a reference for all policy documents at national, regional and local level. We notice that the local autonomy is a basic principle in the realization of the Strategy which is appreciable. Unlike in previous years, the focus is no longer on economic development, but on people. Or, the local autonomy belongs to the people, the local authorities being the closest to the citizens. Being structured on 4 pillars of sustainable development, with 10 long-term objectives, the draft National Strategy is going through a process of reconceptualization.

The practice of implementing the National Strategy "Moldova 2020", including in order to synchronize with the financial cycle of the European Union for 2014-2020, demonstrates the influence of measures on local economies in terms of increasing economic powers of local authorities, by decentralizing public assets, improving services and infrastructure. The lack of evaluation of the National Strategy, similar to the strategies in the field [6; 8], makes it difficult to assess the practical impact, especially as there has been poor promotion at local level and little involvement of local authorities. The studies argue the lack of programming and implementation of strategic priorities, conditioned by the insufficient correlation of policy documents and the repeated takeover of strategic objectives. Thus, the implementation of the matrix for the implementation of strategic intervention actions would facilitate the organization of a genuine administrative reform.

Joining the Open Government Partnership in 2012 has led to positive changes in the transparency of decision-making, including at the local level, such as the Register of Local Acts. The new directions of intervention for 2021-2024 show the awareness of the service quality importance at the local level, which is an act of maturity of decision makers. The study of the documentary references in the field of regional and local development underscores the increased attention paid to the local level by establishing the dedicated national fund and creating the conditions for accessing public sources by local authorities of level I, which is a novelty in this process, and can be considered a step forward in empowering local authorities on development projects.

Although local public authorities have a high level of public confidence compared to other institutions, it is declining and negative perceptions are related to public spending and public procurement. These realities indicate the need to increase the level of transparency in all public resource management processes, as well as decision-making mechanisms. Insufficient human and financial resources do not allow the development of networks for the development and implementation of local anti-corruption policies, as well as ensuring access to professional training for local officials. However, the data analysed indicate that local authorities of IInd level are making significant progress in implementing anti-corruption plans, and their performance needs to be strengthened in order to expand multi-scale anti-corruption efforts at the local level.

The study of reform measures in the Republic of Moldova emphasizes major delays in all four factors relevant to the implementation of reforms in the field of local self-government according to European methodology: conceptualization of reform, political motivation, support of the population, prepared human resources. In response to the recommendations of the Council of Europe and the European Union, but also to the obvious needs of the country, the Government assumed between 2020 - 2023 the elaboration of a new strategic document in the field of strengthening local autonomy, clarifying the competence system, strengthening the dialogue on local democracy. In a broad context, the prospects for consolidating local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova are part of the European and international approach to a *potential world charter for local autonomy*.

The ***Conclusions of Chapter 4*** are based on the idea that membership of the Republic of Moldova in European and international institutions is a precondition for the proper application of local self-government, in terms of commitments. The effects of the country's Europeanization process are reflected in a series of measures to democratize society, with an increased emphasis on administrative reform. We emphasize the need to adapt development instruments to the local context and to apply a systemic approach, including on the participatory side of citizens as the main recipients of public services. The current challenge is to negotiate the new Association Agenda with the European Union, but also to establish the new strategic framework for the country's development.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Starting from the purpose and objectives of the research, as a result of the study we deduce the following **conclusions**:

1. The concept of local self-government is based on the important variable that emphasizes the freedom of the community to decide and act. At the international level, the concerns in the field have a specific genesis, interfering in the modern period with fields such as economics, ecology, ethics, etc. The origins of autonomy are distant, knowing along the way conceptual-empirical transformational processes, culminating in European-level regulations and the need for world-wide provisions being questioned.

2. From a methodological point of view, based on the principle of simplicity, we deduce that the elimination of intermediate administrative levels in several states of the European Union leads to the efficiency of the local administration system and the increase of the degree of autonomy. Complementary to the administrative tradition, the influence of the European regional context highlights the transparent organization, focused on performance and quality of public services at local level.

3. Implementing local government reforms is one of the most important tasks in the transition from a centralized to a democratic regime. This great challenge was overcome differently, some European countries in the ex-Soviet space approached the path of immediate change, others followed the path of testing solutions by adapting the paradigm of autonomy to the local context including in the administrative-territorial organization. We conclude on the legality according to which the necessary changes presuppose structured interventions at the level of all dimensions of local autonomy: legal, institutional, operational, territorial-administrative, etc.

4. The reforms in the field of public administration carried out in the Republic of Moldova, in the period 1990-2020, strongly influenced the mechanisms of application of local autonomy during the five stages of transition of local autonomy identified in the paper. Significant progress on local and financial skills was made in the 1998 reform. Lessons learned from the 2003 counter-reform test the correlation between territorial and administrative organization and the coherent application of local self-government.

5. The financial dimension in association with the unclear distribution of responsibilities between the levels of local government, is the weak link of the administrative system in the Republic of Moldova. The causality between the techniques of resource management and the methodology of allocating the competencies of the local public authorities is argued by the intermediate level of application of the norms of the European Charter of Local Autonomy by the institutions of the Republic of Moldova.

6. The transitional processes demonstrate a positive impact of the Europeanization of the public administration in the Republic of Moldova, which materializes through three directions oriented towards local autonomy. The Council of Europe's recommendations lead to the implementation of measures to improve the strategic, legal and institutional framework. The technical assistance provided by the partners is translated into practical tools for local development, capacity building and modernization of the working methodology. The third side concerns the mechanisms for cooperation at national and international level, encouraged by Euro-integration actions.

7. The national strategic framework relevant to local autonomy, as well as the related one, had the deadline for implementation in 2020, lacking a comprehensive assessment. Prospectively, the central role of local autonomy in the future strategic configuration of the country based on the principle of good governance is outlined. The correlation of policy documents is a key factor in the programming process at national level, based on both the commitments made in relation to European and international partners, but especially to local authorities and citizens.

Based on the results of the investigation carried out, and the above conclusions, we propose the following **recommendations**:

1. We consider it appropriate to sign the *Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level* and to ratify the *Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government* by the national institutions of the Republic of Moldova, in order to increase the ethical integrity and transparency of local government. These actions will ensure the full application of European rules and contribute to the strengthening of local democracy, in line with the Association Agenda with the European Union and the national strategic framework for the reform of the administrative system.

2. It would be an advantage to consolidate the legal norms regarding local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova in the form of a *Code of local autonomy*. Based on the experience of Georgia, studied in the context of the Eastern Partnership region, the Code would include provisions on all dimensions of local government. Such a Code would make it clear in the framework of rules on the administrative system, merging at least 5 laws and becoming a single benchmark on local powers for sectoral legislation.

3. In view of the successful examples in Europe, it is recommended to encourage *inter-municipal cooperation* through legal and practical mechanisms, including in order to capitalize on the short distances between localities and to strengthen financial and administrative capacity. These collaborations can be achieved by motivating from the perspective of the system of competences and benefits at local and regional level, based on the recent experience in Ukraine,

including in the reform context, on territorial amalgamation.

4. Taking into account the fact that the current administrative-territorial units have small dimensions and limited capacities to provide public services, which considerably affects the local autonomy, we propose the analysis of the scenarios formulated so far, by consulting the best solutions in a broad and transparent. The start of the *administrative-territorial reform must be carried out in parallel with that of the local administration* in order to ensure the proportional dimensions with the system of resources and competences, facilitating the achievement of the local autonomy with emphasis on the citizen.

5. Acknowledging the crisis of human resources in the country and the weak interest in the civil service, but also the importance of the main resource of the Republic of Moldova - people, it becomes urgent to improve the *motivation and remuneration system of local staff*, including local elected officials, based on proposals from government representatives local. This can be achieved by providing practical mechanisms for autonomous and independent human resource management at the local level, in conjunction with professional development tools.

6. As the financial dimension is one of the least developed directions in practically all the transitional stages studied, it is necessary to implement *financial decentralization measures and increase local budget revenues*. It is proposed to investigate the possibility of transferring taxes from local level II to level I (for example: taxes on natural resources) and expanding the tax base at local level, with a view to motivating the authorities to attract investment and economic development.

7. In view of the legal guarantees legally established, local authorities should be firm, including by *applying the right to appeal to the Constitutional Court on violations of local self-government*. This mechanism is absolutely useful in order to eliminate the most important legal contradictions, which are easily noticeable in the practice of local authorities. Likewise, the *active participation of local authorities in the decision-making and strategic programming process* in the field of public administration reform is essential, with proposals based on local experiences.

8. Starting from the fact that the negotiation of the new Association Agenda with the European Union is in process, and taking into account the reports of the European institutions on the administrative system of the Republic of Moldova, it is recommended to focus on *local autonomy and decentralization in formulating new assistance priorities*. And the support of partners should be valued through the principle of adapting solutions to the local context and by involving the local level directly at all stages. In this sense, it is necessary to finalize and *approve the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2030"* as a central document of national programming with a focus on the citizens.

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ADNOTARE

Ștefanița Anastasia, *Dimensiuni tranzitorii ale autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova* Teză de doctor în științe administrative. Chișinău, 2022

Structura tezei: adnotare, introducere, patru capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 255 titluri, 8 anexe, 146 pagini text de bază, 14 figuri, 7 tabele. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 17 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: autonomie locală, dimensiuni tranzitorii, Republica Moldova, etape, administrație publică locală, reforma administrativă, Carta europeană a autonomiei locale.

Domeniul de cercetare: Științe sociale și economice. **Profilul:** Științe administrative.

Scopul lucrării reprezintă cercetarea teoretică și empirică a dimensiunilor tranzitorii ale autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova din perspectiva încadrării în contextul proceselor reformatoare din administrația publică.

Obiectivele de cercetare: definirea conceptului de autonomie locală în baza ideilor reprezentanților gândirii politico-administrative din diverse perioade istorice și cadru geografic diferit; studierea practicilor statelor europene cu tradiție în democrație, și a experienței comparative a țărilor din regiunea Parteneriatului Estic privind autonomia locală; investigarea dimensiunilor tranzitorii ale autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova prin determinarea etapelor de evoluție în contextul proceselor reformării administrației publice; analiza corelativă a cadrului legal și a evoluției instituționale din domeniul autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova; evaluarea nivelului de aplicare a principiului autonomiei locale de către autoritățile Republica Moldova prin prisma prevederilor Cartei europene a autonomiei locale; evidențierea impactului proceselor de europenizare a Republicii Moldova din punct de vedere al autonomiei locale; identificarea aspectelor prospective ale autonomiei locale în contextul modernizării administrației publice din Republica Moldova.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică constă în realizarea sintezei ample privind conceptul de autonomie locală din perspectivă istoriografică, prin încadrarea temporală și geografică. Caracterul inovator al lucrării se explică prin încercarea autoarei de a identifica dimensiunile tranzitorii și delimita etapele de evoluție a autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova în baza unui set de criterii elaborat și aplicat. Evaluarea nivelului de respectare a autonomiei locale conform prevederilor Cartei europene a autonomiei locale reprezintă un element de noutate. Acest lucru a permis evidențierea impedimentelor și neajunsurile privind aplicarea coerentă a autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova. Toate acestea sunt corelate și completate de aprecierea impactului proceselor euro-integraționiste asupra autonomiei locale. Dimensiunile tranzitorii ale autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova sunt redată sub aspectul perspectivelor strategice de dezvoltare a țării.

Problema științifică importantă soluționată: fundamentarea științifică a autonomiei locale din Republica Moldova în aspect tranzitoriu, inclusiv prin formularea concluziilor și recomandărilor privind consolidarea și funcționarea autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova.

Semnificația teoretică a cercetării: rezidă din valorificarea cercetărilor autorilor străini și autohtoni din diverse perioade istorice și din diferite domenii de investigație, precum și în fundamentarea conceptuală de către autor a unor componente a procesului tranzitoriu a autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova prin formularea definițiilor proprii și emiterea anumitor legități și tendințe. Reinterpretarea datelor și informațiilor din rapoartele analitice, cele de monitorizare și evaluare a proceselor reformatoare, precum și a rapoartelor de monitorizare a Republicii Moldova de către instituțiile europene în materie de autonomie locală reprezintă o importanță deosebită.

Valoarea aplicativă se explică prin determinarea factorilor care au condiționat evoluția autonomiei locale în Republica Moldova în diverse perioade de dezvoltare a țării, ce servesc drept bază pentru formularea priorităților strategice și a măsurilor de reformare a sistemului de administrație publică, inclusiv locală, în baza recomandărilor elaborate.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice s-a realizat prin publicarea articolelor în reviste de specialitate și prezentări la conferințe naționale și internaționale, precum și prin participarea în proiect interministerial privind dezvoltarea regională, locală și urbană.

ANNOTATION

**Stefanita Anastasia, *Transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova*
PhD thesis in administrative sciences. Chisinau, 2022**

Thesis structure: annotation, introduction, four chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, 255 references, 8 annexes, 146 main text pages, 14 figures, 7 tables. The obtained results are reflected in 17 research papers.

Key words: local autonomy, transitional dimensions, Republic of Moldova, phases, local public administration, administrative reform, European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Research field: Social and economic sciences. **Profile:** Administrative Sciences.

The aim of the paper is the theoretical and empirical research of the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova from the historical-conceptual perspective by framing it in the context of the reform processes.

Research objectives: definition of the concept of local autonomy based on the ideas of the forerunners of political-administrative thinking from various historical periods, different geographical framework; studying the practices of European states with a tradition in democracy, and the comparative experience of the countries of the Eastern Partnership region on local autonomy; investigating the transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova by determining the stages of evolution in the context of public administration reform processes; correlative analysis of the legal framework and of the institutional evolution in the field of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova; assessment of the level of application of the principle of local autonomy by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova in the light of the European Charter of Local Self-Government provisions; highlighting the impact of the Europeanization processes of the Republic of Moldova in terms of local autonomy; identifying the prospective aspects of local autonomy in the context of public administration modernization.

Scientific novelty and originality consists in the realization of the ample synthesis regarding the concept of local autonomy from a historiographical perspective, through the temporal and geographical framing. The innovative character of the paper is explained by the author's attempt to identify the transitional dimensions and delimit the stages of evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova based on a set of criteria developed and applied. The assessment of the level of respect for local autonomy according to the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government is a novelty. This allowed to highlight the impediments and shortcomings regarding the coherent application of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova. All this is correlated and complemented by the assessment of the impact of Euro-integration processes on local autonomy. The transitional dimensions of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova are presented in terms of strategic perspectives for the country's development.

Important scientific problem solved: the scientific substantiation of the local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova in a transitional aspect, including by formulating the conclusions and recommendations regarding the consolidation and functioning of the local autonomy.

The theoretical significance of the research lies in the researching the analyses of foreign and local authors from various historical periods and different fields of investigation, as well as in the conceptual substantiation by the author of some components of the transitional process of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova by formulating own definitions and issuing certain legalities and trends. The reinterpretation of data and information from analytical reports, those of monitoring and evaluation of reform processes, and monitoring reports of the Republic of Moldova by the European institutions in the field of local autonomy is of particular importance.

The applicative value is explained by determining the factors that conditioned the evolution of local autonomy in the Republic of Moldova during various periods of development, which serve as a basis for formulating strategic priorities and measures to reform the public administration system, including local, based on recommendations.

Implementation of scientific results was achieved by publishing articles in specialized journals, presentations at national & international conferences, and by participating in the inter-ministerial project on regional, local and urban development.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Штефаница Анастасия, *Переходные аспекты местной автономии в Республике Молдова*
Докторская диссертация в области административных наук. Кишинев, 2022

Структура диссертации: аннотация, введение, четыре главы, общие выводы и рекомендации, библиография из 255 наименований, 8 приложений, 146 страниц основного текста, 14 рисунков, 7 таблиц. Полученные результаты опубликованы в 17 научных работах.

Ключевые слова: местная автономия, переходные аспекты, Республика Молдова, переход, местное публичное управление, административная реформа, Европейская Хартия местного самоуправления.

Область исследования: Социальные и экономические науки. **Профиль:** Публичное управление.

Целью работы является теоретическое и эмпирическое исследование переходных аспектов местной автономии в Республике Молдова в контексте процессов реформирования государственного управления.

Задачи исследования: определение концепции местной автономии на основе идей представителей политико-административного мышления из разных исторических периодов и разных географических границ; изучение практики европейских государств с традициями демократии и сравнительного опыта стран региона Восточного партнерства в области местного самоуправления; исследование переходных аспектов местной автономии в Республике Молдова путем определения этапов эволюции в контексте процессов реформы государственного управления; корреляционный анализ правовой базы и институциональной эволюции в области местной автономии в Республике Молдова; оценка уровня применения принципа местной автономии властями Республики Молдова в свете положений Европейской хартии местного самоуправления; выделение влияния процессов европеизации Республики Молдова на местную автономию; идентификация перспективных аспектов местной автономии в контексте модернизации государственного управления в Республике Молдова.

Научная новизна и оригинальность работы состоит в реализации обширного синтеза концепции местной автономии с историографической точки зрения посредством временной и географической классификации. Новаторский характер работы объясняется попыткой автора выявить переходные аспекты и разграничить этапы эволюции местной автономии в Республике Молдова на основе разработанного и примененного набора критериев. Элементом новизны является оценка уровня соблюдения местной автономии в соответствии с положениями Европейской хартии местного самоуправления. Это позволило выявить препятствия и недостатки последовательного применения местной автономии на основе разработанного и примененного набора критериев. Все это коррелируется и дополняется оценкой влияния евроинтеграционных процессов на местную автономию. Переходные аспекты местной автономии в Республике Молдова представлены с точки зрения стратегических перспектив развития страны.

Важная решённая научная проблема: научное обоснование местной автономии в переходном аспекте, путем формулирования выводов и рекомендаций относительно консолидации и функционирования местного самоуправления в Республике Молдова.

Теоретическая значимость исследования заключается в использовании исследований зарубежных и местных авторов из разных исторических периодов и из разных областей исследования, а также в концептуальном обосновании автором некоторых составляющих переходного процесса местной автономии в Республике Молдова путем формулирования собственных дефиниций и определенных закономерностей и тенденций. Особое значение имеет переосмысление данных и информации из аналитических отчетов, мониторинга и оценки процессов реформирования, а также отчетов мониторинга Республики Молдова европейскими институтами в области местной автономии.

Прикладная ценность исследования объясняется определением факторов, обусловивших эволюцию местной автономии в Республике Молдова в различные периоды развития, которые служат основой для формулирования стратегических приоритетов и мер по реформированию системы публичного управления, на основе разработанных рекомендаций.

Внедрение научных результатов было достигнуто путем публикации статей в специализированных журналах, выступлений на международных конференциях, а также посредством участия в межведомственном проекте по региональному, местному и городскому развитию.

STEFANITA ANASTASIA

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THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

563.01 – THEORY, METHODOLOGY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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