ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Summary of Tunisia

*Lello Esposito, an important contemporary Neapolitan artist, created and donated the cover artwork, which revolves around the colours of the Mediterranean featured in the web site: blue, green, and yellow

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The views expressed do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations and of Italian Department for Public Administration and Formez.
Starting in 1987, Tunisia launched an important reform project that focuses on economic
development and administrative reform. This last issue in particular is an indispensable
condition for achieving development.
Over the last few years, Tunisia has opened up its economy, thus improving performance.
Thanks to its proximity to the huge European market, Tunisia has confirmed its willingness to
host foreign firms and entrepreneurs. Indeed, Tunisian authorities have created a politically
and socially stable framework much appreciated by foreign investors. The cornerstones of
this framework include: legislation that favours the private sector, a series of simplified
administrative procedures, easy access to financing, training for economic operators, etc.
Tunisia was the first Mediterranean country to sign an Association Agreement with the EU,
on July 17, 1995. This Agreement replaces the former Co-operation Agreements. The new
protocol introduces many of the elements included in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership
strategy. In particular, the new protocol introduces clauses on democratic principles and
human rights, political dialogue, free trade, cooperation in the economic, financial, social and
cultural fields, and the creation of an Association Council.
The Tunisian authorities are well aware of the country’s economic achievements and would
like to maintain them. They have therefore launched a policy to strengthen the administrative
reforms of the last 10-15 years. These reforms are at the root of Tunisia’s social and
economic renaissance in 2000.
The Tunisian administrative structure is made up of three levels: central, intermediate and
local.
At the central level, there are 21 Ministries, organised into general directorates in accordance
with the French administrative model.
The Ministry in charge of the public administration and its reform is responsible for the
following offices:
- General Directorate for the Public Administration
- General Directorate for Administrative Reform
- Central Office for Citizen Relations
- Directorate for Public Service Quality
The intermediate level includes 23 Governorates that have political representation at the
central government level. In 2002 the Council of Regions was created. It is a consultative
body in charge of suggesting to the President and the Prime Ministers which activities are
needed in order to give local administrations increased financial and decision-making
autonomy.
The local level revolves around municipalities. Each municipality is headed by a
President elected to a five year term.
Tunisia’s administrative experience is an extremely interesting reference point, as it
constitutes a link between the administrative cultures of the global north and of the global
south.
Starting in the 1980’s, Tunisia’s administration has tried to follow a pragmatic path focusing
on economic and social development. After the initial phase, administrative reform became a
permanent goal for public administration officials. Indeed, in 1980 the Ministry for Public
Administration and Administrative Reform was created specifically in order to meet these needs. In fact, Tunisia began to modernise even before the end of the colonial period in 1956. As a consequence of this, the adjustment process of the 1980’s was less traumatic for administrative structures: the acceptance of juridical positivism and secularism, the experience of the state administration, and the discovery and application of political liberalism have allowed Tunisia to tackle administrative modernisation more successfully than the other countries of the Maghreb.

The problems faced by the administration in the 1980’s come from different sources: overlapping (many administrative units belonging to different generations are in charge of the same issues), centralisation (leading to calls for decentralisation and deconcentration), and the multiplication of units charged with specific tasks (such as mortgage banks or the Office for Urban Rehabilitation and Renewal – ARRU).

There is a pressing need for the effective decentralisation of local communities, for deconcentration in the central administration, for a simplification of procedures and controls, and for better definition of administrative authority and responsibilities. The analysis of problems related to administrative organisation focuses on two sectors; the central administration and the external services. Deconcentration and decentralisation are gradually being introduced, since administrative decisions – especially in matters of social and economic development – are still taken exclusively by the central administration, which remains the centre of gravity for the entire system.

In 1987, Tunisia launched a vast programme of economic and administrative reforms, focusing on strengthening market mechanisms and on opening its economy to foreign markets. The reform’s main goals were private sector development and the improvement of living conditions for Tunisia’s citizens.

The successive partnership agreement with the European Community showed that economic renewal cannot take place without input from the public administration. In 1996, a renewal plan for the administration (PMNA, Plan de Mise a Niveau de l’Administration) was designed in order to re-build the administration with the goal of creating a support structure for economic development within a context of increasing international competition.

During the 1990’s, the pace of administrative reform increased significantly as Tunisia focuses on strengthening the bases of a modern administration that fulfils its duties competently and efficiently while establishing a trust-based relationship with the citizenry. This process quickened in the late 1990’s with the 9th Development Plan, whose implementation coincided with the renewal of the administrative programmes adopted by the various departments. The 9th Development Plan encompassed numerous administrative sectors and activities, including structural re-organisation and better definition of responsibilities, modernisation in the ICT sector, and a clearer division of roles between regional and central administrations and between the latter and the private sector.

The Plan achieved a qualitative improvement of both central and local administration. Additionally, public service quality was improved along with the relationship between the public administration and the citizenry.
Within this framework, a series of measures and regulations proved particularly useful in reaching the desired level of efficiency and efficacy. In particular, these measures focused on:

- consolidating the trust between citizens and the administration by improving welcoming and orientation procedures, in recognition of the role they play in determining the image of the administration.
- improving service quality as a way to support the principle of free exercise of economic and social activities: this led to the abolition of over 60% of authorisations and the institution of a single act for the creation of individual firms through the designation of the tax collector as the single interlocutor and the replacement of old procedures with a single declaration; the simplification of service provision criteria; the creation of a quality system for public services (based on international ISO norms) and its experimentation in administrative services in the economic sector;
- bringing administrative services closer to the citizenry by strengthening decentralisation and deconcentration: this includes the creation of new structures such as the Manouba governorate and various new municipalities, the transfer of additional responsibilities to regions, and the strengthening of regional and local structures thanks to additional human or material resources. These efforts were intensified during the reform implementation phase, in particular thanks to the use of modern techniques for the long-distance provision of administrative services (such as the electronic exchange of information - \textit{Liasse Unique} project-, the computerisation of the civil status registry, the e-commerce project and the e-currency and virtual desks projects, which allow for the electronic payment of gas, water, electric and telephone bills as well as subscription, sale, or purchasing procedures).
- re-organising public services and improving administrative action by adopting organisation charts for ministries, reforming archives, adopting a modern administrative document management system, setting up numerous national observatories specialising in analysing and evaluating the performance of certain sensitive sectors, and encouraging consultation in administrative actions.
- promoting human resources, especially with regards to their role in the success of the administrative modernisation process, the improvement in service quality and the elimination of the causes of administrative sluggishness.

When the Tunisian administrative renewal project (PMNA) was launched in 1996, the country took normative, programmatic and concrete steps, characterised by the application of ITC.

This phase aims to “even out” administrative structures through a programme set by decree n°96-49 of January 16, 1996.

At the central level the programme includes: consolidating several national projects to computerise the administration; revising current legislative and regulatory texts; a series of reforms that interest public sector staff (statutes, social security, etc.); reforms on working methodologies; and reforms to improve the relationship between the administration and its end users.
At the ministerial level, the programme includes: computerisation of all ministries; training programmes in ICT for all public sector personnel; identification of responsibilities that can be delegated to the regions; identification of private sector responsibilities; application of goal-based management rules; publication of handbooks for each ministry; adaptation of human resources to the real needs of the administration; simplification of procedures in each ministry; normalisation of administrative printed matter; and a conservation programme for documents and archives.

Within the public administration renewal framework, the following actions have been taken: reduction of authorisations (60% of which have either been substitute by the so-called *cahiers de charges* or abolished altogether); identification of a single interlocutor for investors who want to set up individual projects; creation of a quality system based on international ISO 9000 norms for several pilot projects in light of a future wide-scale implementation of such norms; creation of a regional administrative mediator.

In parallel with this, Tunisia had to create support and piloting structures to ensure control over the various planning procedures: the Secretary of State for Administrative Reform, who answers to the Prime Minister’s Office; the Secretary of State for ICT and the Internet; the Strategic Programming Committee; the National Commission for the normalisation of administrative printed matter.

Tunisia achieved excellent results with regards to several projects to computerise the administration. The country adopted a strategy to facilitate Internet access and promote the use of ICT. This strategy is based on several high-impact pilot projects and promotes the general use of ICT in all administrative functions.

The main pilot projects include:

- **MEDENIA:** this project abolishes territorial competence and aims to build an ICT network to link all municipalities in order to allow citizens to access civil status documents in any municipality anywhere in the country;
- **SICAD:** this is the administrative information and communication system that informs users on the services provided by the administration. For each service, the system provides information on administrative procedures and requirements, deadlines, and relevant legislation and regulations. This system is currently on-line.
- **SIGER:** this system is in charge of the management of citizens requests deposited in public relations offices.
- The Virtual Showroom of the Agency for Industry Promotion offers information on investment and partnership opportunities in the industrial sector, on training courses for budding entrepreneurs, and on studies on communication and competitiveness.

**E-Dinar:** virtual currency used to make long-distance payments to the administration for services including university fees, public transportation passes, donations to the national solidarity fund, and payment of electric, gas, and telephone bills and other services provided by the post office.