

Strategies for Achieving Accountable, Open and Transparent Government as Illustrated in the Case of Bulgaria

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Abstract

Because of its importance as an institution, ensuring the accountability and openness of government is a central concern of all democratic societies. In this article, we first examine various means of achieving accountable government, both in general terms and as regards specific strategies. We identify three general categories of mechanisms to encourage governmental accountability with a particular emphasis upon openness and transparency. We then review both prior and new policies being implemented by the government of Bulgaria to achieve an accountable, open and transparent government. Particular attention is given to efforts to limit corruption in Bulgarian government through the introduction of new policies in the areas of openness and transparency.

Keywords

Accountability, administrative reform, Bulgaria, transparency

Introduction

Ultimately, government is the most significant institution of any society for at least three reasons. First, it is the only institution of society which possesses the legitimate right to take away one's property, freedom and, ultimately, one's life. Second, as it organizes and structures any society, it becomes the critical enabling institution for all other societal institutions. Finally, while often not recognized, in reality government is frequently the most important source of policy and economic innovation in society (Mazzucato 2013; Rosenbaum 2014). For all of these reasons, the issue of ensuring accountability in government is absolutely critical to both individual and

collective well-being. It is also very difficult, and sometimes very problematic, to ensure the existence of accountable government.

Without question, government can do many great things. Most of the major technological innovations of the past 75 years (the computer, radar, the internet, geographic information systems and vaccines that have brought major epidemics and diseases under control) are the product of government-conducted and/or -funded and -administered research and development. However, the holocaust, subsequent genocides in various parts of the world and many other kinds of deprivation are also the result of government action or, in some cases, conscious inaction. All of which is to say that the task of maintaining accountable government is absolutely central to the well-being of any society (Neshkova and Rosenbaum 2015).

Openness and transparency are, in most cases, the critical building blocks for ensuring governmental responsiveness and, thus, the accountability of government. In this paper, we shall look at the institutional, procedural and cultural factors that shape degrees of openness and transparency and, in so doing, facilitate responsive government. Doing so will provide significant insight into the manner in which openness and transparency play critical roles in ensuring governmental responsiveness and, in turn, accountability. This paper will then look at efforts to implement concepts of accountability, openness and transparency in government in Bulgaria.

It has been suggested that the quality of a country's government reflects the quality of its bureaucracy (Rosenbaum 2001; Fukuyama 2013). In turn, transparency, openness and accountability are among the main elements of an ethical bureaucracy and an effective public sector (Suwaj and Rieger 2009). For example, transparency and personal accountability are key issues in the British system and are included in the so-called "Seven Principles" of public life that have been endorsed by successive governments and have become the benchmark by which standards of government in the United Kingdom (UK) are assessed. In the UK, the standard of accountability means that holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions in matters of state. As such, they must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office. The standard of openness means that holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions which they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only where the wider public interest clearly demands such action (Suwaj and Rieger 2009).

In its simplest form, accountability may be defined as any situation in which individuals who exercise power are expected to be constrained and, in fact, are reasonably constrained, by external means (e.g. administrative or citizen oversight, dismissal and/or judicial review) and by various societal norms, such as codes of ethics and professional training (McKinney and Howard 1998). Accountability means assuming responsibilities for implementing public policy in an open manner and acting accordingly. Transparency implies the disclosure of appropriate information

which will give a true picture of government actions by providing information that is accurate and verifiable. Both internal and external communication must be clear and timely. As noted in EU Regulation, transparency “allows citizens to participate closer in the decision making process and guarantees that the administration is proud of a higher rightness, is more efficient and responsible to citizens in the democratic system.” In addition, transparency contributes to the enhancement of democratic rules and respect for basic rights, as defined in Article 6 of the Treaty of the European Union and in the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Suwaj and Rieger 2009).

The reality is that there is no single best policy or strategy for ensuring either accountability or transparent and responsive government and/or politics within either a single community or the broader society. This is because there is not one best set of policies – no silver bullet or magic formula – which limits either the extent of, or the impact of, corruption on a society (Rosenbaum 2000). Certainly, as some research suggests, democratic societies are likely to have less, rather than more, corruption (Treisman 2000). But this is not, *per se*, simply because they are democratic. Rather, it is because they are much more likely to have put in place, and to continue to put in place, numerous safeguards – multiple procedures and institutions – that help to create an anti-corruption culture than are societies where political power and governmental authority are more highly concentrated (Neshkova and Rosenbaum 2015).

So, what are the critical factors which contribute to the discouraging of corruption and which encourage accountability, transparent and responsive government, especially on the part of public employees and elected officials (Neshkova and Rosenbaum 2015)? For analytic purposes, one might suggest that they fall into three very general categories. The first category is that of cultural factors, that is to say, the traditional qualities, norms and values of a society. The second category are the institutional arrangements which frequently have been established as part of the process of democratic institution-building; many of which do play a key role in helping to discourage corrupt behavior. Finally, there are procedural factors which include the various policies that regulate the behavior, performance and relationships of public employees and which have been designed to limit the opportunities for corrupt behavior and activities.

Procedural elements will be examined here first because, in most instances, they are the easiest and quickest steps to implement and, if implementation is carried out in a committed fashion, there can be significant impact. However, generally speaking, procedural factors are perhaps the least consequential over the long term since any procedure, when established by a government (or at least one of its agencies), can be changed, ignored or subverted. Institutional structures, on the other hand, especially those designed to assure the accountability of public officials, when effectively established, are more difficult to undermine or circumvent.

Most assuredly, however, over the long term, arguably the most important factor in discouraging corrupt behavior, and encouraging accountable, ethical, transparent and responsive behavior, is the growth and development within any country, or society, of a culture that promotes, values and inculcates a very real concern about, and commitment to, transparent and accountable behavior on the part of public officials, government employees and the entire citizenry (Rose-Ackerman 1999).

Procedural factors to encourage accountable, responsive and transparent government

There is a myriad of procedural arrangements which governments around the world, and especially in more democratic settings, have adopted to combat corruption and encourage accountability and ethically responsive conduct on the part of public employees and political officials. In general, procedural approaches to maintaining responsive and accountable behavior tend to fall into two very broad categories – first, ensuring the availability of full and adequate information on governmental activities in order to enable the citizenry to exercise effective oversight over public officials and government employees and, second, the regulation of the individual behavior of public officials and governmental employees.

The former category includes the establishment of such procedural arrangements as the implementation of open records laws, requiring open meetings and holding public hearings generally (and especially on governmental budgets) and the provision of extensive, relevant documentary information to enable the citizenry to accurately assess the activities of their government and those who represent them. The latter includes making governmental statutes, regulations and rules readily available to the citizenry and providing clear and extensive written information about the activities, budget and programs of government and the organization and delivery of public services. All of this, of course, presupposes that government, its public officials and employees will be held legally accountable for any efforts to deceive the public by altering or withholding information in a manner that is not consistent with established law.

Of particular importance in terms of maintaining an accountable and ethical government is the availability of regular, accurate, understandable and highly specific information on government financial transactions. While many, if not most, practices which contribute to the availability of such information have been in use for some period of time in well-established democracies, in relatively new ones, such practices often do not exist or are very limited. Indeed, in many emerging democracies, the traditional practice has been to keep information about the implementation of government activities and programs quite secret – indeed, just the opposite of making information about government actions readily accessible to the public.

Consequently, many local and international organizations have placed an increasing emphasis on encouraging the adoption of procedures that make governmental information much more available in countries making the transition to democracy, and market economies, as a means of promoting more responsiveness on the part of government agencies and their employees. For example, the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development have worked in many parts of the world to encourage the introduction of various types of public hearings, and other forms of citizen participation, in budgetary processes at all levels of government and especially at the local level. In at least some instances, these agencies have made efforts to go a significant step further and introduce open-records laws which require many, if not all, of a government's written documents – ranging, in some cases, from an individual's personal notes of a meeting to formal government records (generally with the exception of national-security documents and individual personnel records) – to be open to the scrutiny of the public and the news media.

Another approach to making adequate information available to the public involves institutionalizing various kinds of procedures that ensure the extensiveness and adequacy of the information that will be produced by government agencies. The introduction, for example, of effective management information, performance measurement and planning, program-budgeting systems can all contribute significantly to making more extensive governmental information available – thus enabling the citizenry to more effectively evaluate the performance and, in many instances, the integrity and accountability of their government officials. Various innovations, such as making available better and more detailed agency reports and informational documents, can be helpful – especially in those countries where the local media and/or non-governmental organizations have developed some level of investigative capacity. The use of new technologies, such as the establishment of web pages and making information available about government contracts via the internet, can all contribute to ensuring the openness, and thus the responsiveness, of government. In so doing, such initiatives help to encourage, if not ensure, both ethical and accountable behavior on the part of those whose job it is to serve the public.

Equally important for efforts to combat corruption and hold government accountable is the establishment of those procedures and processes that seek to ensure that when there is a question about the ethical behavior of government officials and public employees, adequate investigations can occur. Governments around the world have taken many different approaches to dealing with such matters. These include the establishment of clear policies and rules regarding handling complaints about and investigating questionable employee behavior, the creation of internal and external audit arrangements, the conduct of legislative oversight activity and the requirement of specified executive responsibility for the performance of government employees.

A second major approach to combating corruption and encouraging open, responsive and accountable government is to regulate the behavior of government employees and public officials. Frequently, this is done through legislation or statute. In some cases, it is supplemented by codes of ethics which (where laid out by professional associations) are enforced only through social pressure. In most instances, however, governments themselves have chosen to pass a variety of laws which regulate the performance of public employees and make those employees who deviate from the standard established in law liable for criminal penalty. Such arrangements are of critical importance in areas where financial matters are centrally involved – especially in the procurement for government of supplies, equipment and facilities. Similarly, the establishment of effective rules and procedures regarding the manner in which government services are provided to the public, and the programs doing so are managed, can also be of critical importance.

Another area in which the behavior of public employees is regulated in some countries is with regard to political activities. In some democracies, public employees are by law not allowed to engage in partisan political activity and, therefore, are assumed to be less susceptible to efforts to manipulate governmental activities in such a manner as to benefit one or another political party, or group of individuals, at the expense of others (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013). Finally, it should be noted that increasingly, democratic societies are creating procedural safeguards to protect those public employees upon whom they sometimes must rely for the revealing of conduct and performance that is less than accountable or ethically responsive. Nevertheless, while more such laws are being put in place, the reality is that they are often not as effectively implemented as is needed.

In some democracies, it is typical, especially at the local government level, for government officials to contract with private-sector accounting and auditing firms to review the effectiveness and integrity of governmental financial and general management procedures. The companies contracted with are themselves subject to legal prosecution, should their reports on these matters be found to be negligent or misleading. Likewise, various kinds of procedures exist for oversight to be carried on internally within government itself. These range from simply requiring that the chief executive be held responsible in one manner or another for the performance of those who report to him or her, to requiring reviews of individual and agency performance on some regular routine basis.

Institutional factors to encourage accountable, responsive and transparent government

Without question, one of the most important structural arrangements helping to ensure responsive government involves the separation of contemporary government into different branches and levels in such a manner as to disperse power and

authority. As the 19th century British political analyst Lord Acton commented, “Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Dalberg-Acton 1986). Consequently, dispersing the ability to control government activity, and especially the allocation and disbursement of public funds, and other financial activity among different units, branches and/or agencies of government and individuals can be a critical factor in discouraging corrupt behavior and ensuring accountable government. Such arrangements limit the possibilities for the monopolization of power very significantly and provide a critical opportunity to encourage checks and balances among branches and levels of government.

A system of multiple independent branches of government requires making information available across branches and, thus, further helps to ensure open, effective and transparent government. Of particular importance, it encourages the responsiveness of government bureaucracies, and the people who staff them, by holding them accountable to the legislative branch of government, as well as to the chief executive of the government, and, ultimately, to the judicial system. Of particular note in this regard is the existence of a fair, impartial and effective prosecutorial and judicial system. Without such institutions, the likelihood for effectively minimizing the probability of corruption in any community or society is, at best, problematic. Without question, the independence and effectiveness of the prosecutorial and judicial systems are among the most critical factors for encouraging accountable, ethical, responsive and transparent government (Gibler and Randazzo 2011).

Also of note is the fact that many established democratic governments, and particularly those well known for responsiveness and integrity, rely very heavily upon the decentralization of governmental institutions. Especially notable in this regard are some of the countries of Northern Europe and North America, where a very high proportion of governmental expenditures occur at the sub-national level, thus providing citizens with the possibility to more closely understand the activities and workings of their government. This allows the citizen the possibility of a more direct relationship with, and a better sense of the workings of government that is close to them – as well as to more easily understand and gain access to information about government and its programs (Rosenbaum 2009).

Many democratic governments also have established, and rely heavily upon, various institutional arrangements which provide for the oversight of governmental activities. The Scandinavian countries introduced the office of the Ombudsperson, an institutionally independent government official, who possesses extraordinary investigative powers to determine if governmental agencies are acting appropriately as regards responsiveness to the citizenry. In the United States, at the national level, and in many state and local governments, the office of “Inspector General” has been established within individual government departments and/or agencies. These are officers within government agencies who are given extraordinary powers and the authority to investigate the normal operations of the government agencies of which

they are a part in order to ensure the maintenance of the highest levels of professional responsibility and integrity.

Equally important is the authority given to the legislative branch of government, as well as the judicial branches, to carry out their investigative activities unimpeded by the executive branch of government. Often when legislative branches (usually through their committees) are given significant oversight authority, they will have various important resources (specialized staff expertise, high public visibility, etc.) which enable them to engage in independent investigations of the accountability and integrity of the executive branch and its various agencies (Gering and Thacker 2004). When fully developed, legislative bodies will, in many cases, have the power to compel testimony from members of the executive branch on the threat of imprisonment. In addition, many legislative bodies establish audit agencies designed to exercise direct oversight over the fiscal activities of the executive branch. While many such agencies focus principally on issues of financial management and auditing, others have much more wide-ranging investigatory and evaluative authority.

There are many other slightly less common structural arrangements that democratic governments have established to encourage ethical, accountable, transparent and responsive government. These include, for example, institutional arrangements which directly involve private citizens in the policy-making and management of specific government programs. Thus, the United States relies very heavily upon volunteer citizen boards to advise, oversee and, in many cases, actually make critical policy decisions for government agencies. These boards will often have access to highly trained staff and have high levels of legal authority to require the provision of information by the government agencies they oversee or advise. The use of such boards enables citizens to gain better access to information as well as to develop specialized expertise in the area of policy for which the board is responsible. It also enables them to hold non-responsive agencies much more accountable and, in so doing, encourage and support the responsiveness and/or ethical behavior of public authorities.

There are other kinds of institutional arrangements which help to facilitate accountable government. For example, in the United States, especially at the local level, many governments have arrangements whereby individual citizens can initiate the removal of public officials from office by obtaining a designated number of signatures on a petition. This results in the conduct of "recall elections", which, if the electorate approves, leads to the individual officeholder being removed from government prior to the conclusion of his or her term of office. In some communities, the participation of political parties in local elections is forbidden as a means of encouraging ethical accountability and responsiveness by limiting the potential for corruption that sometimes arises from intense party competition involving the control of patronage jobs and government contracts. Also, in some democracies a high

reliance is placed upon the employment of professional, non-partisan managers in local (and to a lesser extent, national) government as another way of encouraging responsive, non-corrupt government and lessening the potentially corrupting influence of intense political competition.

Creating a culture that supports accountable, responsive and transparent government

As noted earlier, procedures established by government sometimes can be easily changed or manipulated. Likewise, institutional structures can, in some instances, be significantly altered – especially in newer or more fragile democracies. Consequently, in the end, the traditions, values and cultural norms of a society represent an equally important, perhaps the most important, means of sustaining the procedures and structures that ensure accountable, responsive, honest and open government. Certainly, one of the most important factors promoting honest, responsive and accountable government in many Western democracies is the tradition of a free and open investigative press (Brunetti and Beatrice 2003). Indeed, it is arguable that the existence of a strong independent media may represent the single most important force for encouraging and preserving integrity and accountability in government. While frequently attacked and criticized by government officials for being biased, in most democratic societies, media investigation is an extraordinarily important force in the promotion of responsiveness and honesty in government. However, because of the tradition of politicians routinely attacking the media, it has become increasingly important to provide constitutional or statutory protection for journalists who call attention to inappropriate and/or illegal behavior on the part of those within government.

Another key factor in promoting accountable government is the approach taken regarding educating and socializing the citizens of the country, and especially those who work in government. In academic programs great emphasis must be placed upon the notion that the person working in government is “a public servant” who is responsible and accountable to the citizenry. In educating those who will go into government there should be a widespread consensus that public officials must be responsive to the citizenry and be held accountable for high standards of integrity.

Thus, the culture of government, and the expectations of society (reflected in both public attitudes and professional norms), must place great emphasis upon maintaining high levels of integrity and responsiveness on the part of governmental employees. This, in turn, also requires for public employees to receive fair and adequate salaries. In too many developing democracies, and increasingly in more established ones, public-employee salaries are either inadequate or falling behind the escalating cost of living.

Also contributing in important ways to an honest, responsive and accountable government is the long-term political and economic stability of a country combined with the presence of an active civil society. Adequate funding of government is also very important. Stability and adequate funding help to facilitate the establishment of strong norms and expectations for ethical and effective individual and institutional performance. Similarly, the existence of an energetic civil society, which demands honesty and responsiveness on the part of government officials, is a critical factor in promoting governmental integrity and accountability. Many non-profit organizations and civic groups, through various means of financing, are able to employ individuals who become experts in particular areas of public policy and governmental activities. These individuals, through their investigative skill, represent an important check on the potential for corrupt and non-responsive behavior by government agencies and officials. Often such organizations take great pride in their capacity to investigate the activities of government officials and serve as “watchdogs” over government agencies.

The concept of open and accountable governance in Bulgaria and its implementation

The reality is that after 25 years of purposeful democratic reforms, Bulgarian citizens are still seeking good governance and accountable government. Ensuring the accountability of government in Bulgaria is an issue of great importance for citizens, business and civil society because it leads to mutual respect and more effective public involvement in the governing of the country. As administration is the engine to provide coordination and guidance of public efforts for a better life, and to ensure a favorable business environment and economic growth, restoring and ensuring the confidence of citizens and the private sector in government is a critical factor for public administration.

The focus of the Bulgarian government for well over the past decade has been on putting in place procedural arrangements designed to encourage openness and transparency. The vision for good governance in Bulgaria has been based on the well-known principles of rule of law, equality, accountability, responsibility, effectiveness and efficiency, broad participation and consensus-building. The implementation of these principles is envisaged in the Strategy for Public Administration 2014–2020. This Strategy reflects the key recommendations of the European Commission, the World Bank and other international institutions and the recommendations of business and non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria to improve governance.

The measures envisaged in the Strategy are in full compliance with, and focused on, the implementation of priority six of the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020, “Strengthening the Institutional Environment for Higher Efficiency of Public Services to Citizens and Businesses”. The national motto for the

Development of the State Administration for 2014–2020 is “We work for the people”, and it highlights government’s desire to turn the focus of the administration to being more responsive to the needs of citizens and the private sector (Government of Bulgaria 2014). Indeed, this is what separates the current program from prior strategic documents. The strategy includes a critical analysis of the functions and efficiency of the public administration and identifies the main weaknesses, deficits and challenges for its further development.

The previous comprehensive strategic document for public-administration reform – the updated Strategy for the Modernization of Public Administration – was intended to conclude in 2006. Since then a number of separate strategic documents have been developed. These include: The Strategy for Human Resources Management in Public Administration 2006–2013, the Strategy for Training Civil Servants, updated in 2006, and the Better Regulation Program 2010–2013. In 2002, the concept for improving administrative services in the context of the “one stop shop” was adopted, but it has not been updated. The development of a new integrated strategy for the development of the public administration was a result of the increased expectations of citizens and business. The new strategy is functionally connected with the e-Government Development Strategy, the Decentralization Strategy and the Strategy for the Support of the Development of Civil Organizations in Bulgaria.

While recent government initiatives have focused on procedural factors, earlier efforts sought to create, and adjust as needed, existing institutional frameworks designed to encourage accountable government. The first public-administration reform program was announced by government in its 1998 Strategy for Building a Modern Administrative System (Council of Ministers of Bulgaria 1998). During that period, reform mainly focused on legislative and institutional arrangements. The adoption of legislation aiming at defining and regulating activities within the state administration played a major role in setting the direction of reform. Secondary legislation related to public-administration acts was also adopted and entered into force. The establishment of a professional civil service in Bulgaria started with the implementation of the Law on Administration and the Civil Servants’ Act.

In fact, during the early period of transition a number of programs and projects aimed at improvements in the state administration were developed. Special attention was paid to administrative reform in mid-2002, when it was moved higher up on the government’s agenda and, as a consequence, the Strategy for Modernization of State Administration from Accession to Integration was adopted (Council of Ministers of Bulgaria 2002b). Later it was updated, and an Action Plan for its implementation was developed (Council of Ministers of Bulgaria 2003). The Strategy emphasized several key issues: functional and organizational optimization of the administrative structures for improvement of their efficiency; strengthening of the administrative capacity for implementing both Bulgarian law and EU law; formulation of the principles for the realization of a new integrated human-resource

development policy in the public administration as a key element in the modernization of the public administration; creation of a favorable environment for the career development of civil servants, based on the merit principle; and creation of a favorable business environment through improvement of service delivery. In addition, a Strategy for the Training of Public Administration Employees was adopted (Council of Ministers of Bulgaria 2002a). It aimed at improving the professional skills and qualifications of employees in the administration and developing the capacity of the Bulgarian civil service.

Early in the reform process, it became clear that principles of transparency and integrity in the activity of civil servants is of prime necessity for good governance. This understanding led to the adoption of the Strategy for Transparent Governance and for Prevention and Counteraction of Corruption. The development and implementation of the Strategy was followed by the elaboration of a Transparency Program for the state administration and high-level state officials' activity. The program contained measures related to the transparency of competitions for positions and the process of appointment; strengthening of the position of the civil servant; training for a new administrative culture, foreign-language skills and communication technologies; administrative regulation and the improvement of dialogue with the media and the public.

All these initiatives, together with a number of other important measures taken to strengthen the administration, made the European Commission conclude that Bulgaria "has made further progress to complete its preparation for membership (in the European Union – EU), demonstrating its capacity to apply EU principles and legislation from 1 January, 2007." However, the assessment did identify areas of concern that needed immediate action and/or further efforts. These were the justice system, the fight against corruption and the need for greater financial control, for which Bulgaria was strongly criticized by the European Commission (EC) in its 2008 report on Bulgaria's progress, which noted: "the administrative capacity of both law enforcement and the judiciary is weak" (European Commission 2008).

There is no doubt that during the transition period, Bulgaria has made serious efforts to establish effective administrative structures, improve the quality of administrative service delivery, apply the principles of good governance, introduce information technologies in the work of the state administration, as well as improve human-resource management in state administration. These efforts have been considered an integral part of the implementation of the post-communist reforms. However, public expectations concerning the results of the implementation of programs and mechanisms have been higher than what has been achieved. The progress in public-administration reform is obvious, but serious weaknesses in administrative and judicial capacity remain. These make Bulgaria unable to reap the full benefits of EU assistance. Thus, the overriding goal – to establish and achieve

a modern type of governance and a well-functioning and transparent administrative system, capable of applying the best EU practices and policies – remains to be achieved. The institutions and procedures introduced have not yet produced the expected results to demonstrate that the system is actually functioning correctly.

These problems are clearly identified in the 2016 EC Report on Bulgaria's progress under the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism, which mapped developments in Bulgaria and made recommendations for the future (Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 2016). The report noted the country's slow progress and a number of areas where problems have been acknowledged. This resulted in two comprehensive reform strategies being launched, focusing on judicial reform and the fight against corruption, that will continue to be important points of reference for the future.

The need for effective measures against corruption, including high-level corruption, as well as corruption more generally, in public institutions remains a matter of very serious concern. Bulgaria consistently ranks among the EU Member States with the highest perceived level of corruption, and corruption is considered to be one of the most important barriers to doing business in Bulgaria. Previous reports of the EC have pointed to the shortcomings of past efforts in this area. The institutions which have been set up to fight corruption have been characterized as fragmented, uncoordinated and unequal to the challenge. The acknowledgement of these problems by the Bulgarian authorities lead to the adoption of a new comprehensive national strategy to fight corruption. This could be an important step forward as it contains a clear analysis of the challenges and proposes a set of concrete measures to address the problems identified. The real challenge is to ensure its implementation. The national coordination council has been set up to coordinate efforts and monitor progress, but it remains a policy-level institution and will need political backing at the highest level and the support of efficient operational structures in order to ensure success.

As part of its anti-corruption strategy, a number of other initiatives targeting corruption more generally throughout the public administration have been launched by the government. These involve many procedural initiatives, including a reform of the administrative inspectorates, measures to improve the public-procurement system and the preparation of sectorial anti-corruption plans containing preventive measures in a number of specific sectors considered to be of high risk for "low-level" corruption. Obviously, these measures will need continued follow-up, including, in some cases, changes to legislation.

In the future, all strategic documents and plans to be developed and adopted are to be linked and synchronized with the Strategy for Public Administration 2014–2020. Ensuring an open and accountable government is a key objective of the strategy and, by the end of 2020, three major groups of activities and measures should be implemented. The first group of activities aims to implement an open

data approach and to improve the exchange of information and public awareness; the second group aims to improve monitoring and evaluation of government policies; the third is to increase the accountability of managers and employees in compliance with ethical standards.

Implementing an open data approach and improving the exchange of information and public awareness is considered to be a key factor for ensuring good governance. Towards that end, Bulgaria joined the “Open Government Partnership” initiative, launched in 2011. Together with 62 other countries, as a member of this initiative, it has to apply four key principles of open government – transparency, citizen participation, accountability and technological innovation. The essential goal is to ensure the openness of public databases and information sources that are currently used for administrative purposes. The Open Government Partnership brings together government and civil-society champions of reform who recognize that governments are much more likely to be effective and credible if they open their doors to public input and oversight (Open Government Partnership 2014). As such, it is planned that by the end of the program period a comprehensive, coherent and operational system for the collection, processing, systematizing, exchange and provision of public information to the benefit of citizens and business will be put in place. This will provide for correct and accurate statistics for making objective and informed decisions in all areas of governance.

Introducing the “open data” approach requires the reduction of the existing restrictions on free access to information. The provision of data in an open format in digital form is an important tool to strengthen the potential for accountability, program innovation and the use of information resources in an optimal manner. In this way, the information held by the institutions of the public sector will be available for reuse for purposes other than the original purpose for which it was created. Data will be provided in a format that allows a computer program to uniquely identify separate data contained in the electronic document as well as their internal structure. The goal is for public information (including primary data) to be open and accessible to all persons for free use and to be published in a structured and easy to process format.

It is anticipated that opening access to public data will facilitate greater participation by civil society in political life and will contribute to the improvement of many areas of policy – including health, education, environment and transport. The economic impact is also important, because it will create opportunities for greater policy and program innovation and a variety of business applications and services that result from analysis and visualization of data from different sources. The administrative burden on users and civil servants will be reduced by facilitating the electronic issuance of various reports.

Another positive effect is the anticipated greater openness and accountability of the policies of governmental institutions themselves. The goal of government is

that the website of the Ministry of Finance will regularly publish updated expenditure information about payments made through the System for Electronic Budget Payments. Comprehensive information will be published in one place regarding the programs and results-oriented budgets of the government institutions. There will also be reports on program implementation.

The key specific activities to be implemented in order to achieve the open-data approach, and to improve the exchange of information and public awareness, can be summed up in the following way:

- Development and implementation of a unified filing methodology and nomenclature covering all similar administrations, the central administration and its subordinate units.
- Development of a national archive register of public documents on the basis of a system for e-archiving with open access.
- Determination of a national center, or a body of the central executive, responsible for the methodology and standards for the collection, storage, structuring and use of information by public organizations and institutions.
- Introduction of the obligation of the administration to exchange information in providing services to citizens, as well as the introduction of penalties for failure to apply the principle of “once collected, information from a citizen from one administration is provided free of charge to another administration in providing service to the same citizen.”

The second group of activities is oriented towards establishing an effective system for monitoring the implementation of policies and implementation of the laws and regulations adopted by the Council of Ministers. This is aimed at ensuring sound management decisions and providing the information necessary for the implementation of major policies of government through improved reporting of annual goals of the administration. It will constitute the basis on which the responsible administrations will assess the implementation of policies. In the introduction of a policy-implementation monitoring system for assessing the results achieved by the administration, accurate, specific and measurable indicators will be defined.

In this way, the capacity of relevant administrations and civil-society organizations to conduct evaluations will be strengthened. It is also important to note in this regard the role to be played by non-governmental organizations in serving as a social corrective to government policies. Civil-society institutions will be encouraged to develop and implement tools and procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies. In order for this to happen, and to increase the efficiency of the administration, administrative organizations need to create and maintain databases on the results of the implementation of public policies. For this purpose, special em-

phasis is placed on the implementation of integrated initiatives for the regular assessment of the quality of public services received by citizens and the public sector.

The major activities to be implemented in order to achieve improved monitoring and evaluation of policies conducted will include an information system for reporting on the implementation of the annual goals of the administration and development and approval at the central level of a "Methodology for Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies." Other important follow-up issues involve the introduction of public databases on the results of implemented policies and initiatives for regular quality assessment of administrative service.

The third aspect of the concept of open and accountable governance is connected with promoting ethical behavior and moral standards in administration. In order to respond adequately to the expectations and needs of citizens and businesses, the Bulgarian administration must have motivated employees who are distinguished by their professionalism and expertise (Katsamunskas and Pavlov 2006). In view of this, it is necessary to reform the policy for and administration of human-resource management to improve its effectiveness, with an emphasis on expanding the opportunities for career development and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills that will help employees to better perform their functions.

The strategy contains a special section on career development with relevant measures for strengthening the competitive principle in the selection of employees and promoting higher professional competence; introducing compulsory tests conducted during the competitive selection for promotion; and creating mechanisms to sanction and control the bad or poor implementation of regulations or for breach of duties. Consequently, the development of effective mechanisms for interaction between senior civil servants and political leadership is required. This will help to coordinate the development and implementation of priority policies and ensure necessary stability and continuity in accordance with international best practices.

Closely connected with these measures are the activities aiming at the improved accountability and ethical standards of managers and employees. The professionalism of employees and their adherence to the highest ethical standards is important for promoting a positive public image of the public administration in the broader society. Therefore, all measures seek to ensure the implementation of, and compliance with, the highest ethical standards in accordance with current conditions in the member states of the European Union. This includes periodic updates to the Civil Servants Code of Conduct with the aim of unifying standards across administrations while respecting their specific character, as well as refinement of measures to prevent conflicts of interest and abuse of office.

Designing a methodology for the monitoring and enforcement of compliance with ethical standards for civil servants, together with measures and procedures for the introduction of penalties for irregularities, will continue to require special attention. Penalties should be clearly stipulated for breach of duty, and

sanctions should be imposed for acts or omissions by employees which harm or prejudice the legal rights of citizens. Regarding the large number of cases against the administration, a focus will be placed on prevention, and a procedure will be established for administrative arbitration to reduce complaints, appeals and judicial proceedings. Therefore, the objective of improving the accountability of managers and employees requires the introduction of effective sanctions for breach of duty and establishing a procedure for monitoring cases against the administration and administrative arbitration.

Ensuring an open and accountable government for Bulgaria depends upon the successful implementation of all of the adopted activities and measures. For this reason, a systematic review of the activities and the progress of the various institutions involved in the implementation of the strategy is required. In this process, the Council of Ministers has a key role, because it adopts plans for the implementation of the strategy based on the proposals of, and after consultation with, the various stakeholders. The Administrative Reform Council and the administration of the Council of Ministers are responsible for the coordination and the monitoring of progress. The Administrative Reform Council itself bears the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the strategy, based on reports of ministries and expert analysis. In 2017, with the participation of non-governmental organizations, an interim evaluation of the results of the strategy, and its impact on citizens, businesses and administrations, will be made.

Conclusion

There are many procedural, institutional and cultural factors that contribute to ensuring accountability on the part of public employees and government officials. No single approach – be it procedural, institutional or cultural – represents the one best way. The reality, as Bulgaria and other neighboring countries are finding, is that human nature is such that there will always be some degree of corrupt and unresponsive behavior on the part of public employees and officials which, in turn, can seriously undermine governmental accountability. Consequently, all countries, including Bulgaria, must rely on many different approaches to address these issues. Procedural, institutional and cultural factors, when taken together, all play important roles in the institutionalization of responsive, accountable and transparent government. The various procedural strategies initiated by Bulgaria are designed to begin to address such matters.

Although neither the practitioner nor the academic community has been able to offer definitive advice on how to end corruption and ensure accountability, there is an increasingly better understanding of the shared attributes, structures, and methods of organizing administrative systems that serve to limit corruption. These systems are typically characterized by highly professional administration, suggest-

ing that an effective, well-trained and fairly paid civil service should be one of the main steps in anticorruption efforts. More educated and professional civil servants are more likely to work toward broader public goals than toward their personal enrichment. However, in the end, laws aiming to reform the bureaucracy, increase transparency and curb corruption can remain just empty shells if not backed up by strong implementation and enforcement. Thus, of particular importance, as the EU has noted as regards the case of Bulgaria, is the need for a strong, independent and competent judicial system.

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