

## THE CORA REPORT

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On 26 October 2012 the Spanish Council of Ministers created the Commission for the Reform of the Public Administration (CORA). The compilation of the Commission's work led to a report (the CORA Report) that was handed in to the Council of Ministers on 21 June 2013 and presented a set of 218 measures of very different kinds aiming to reform the structure and operation of the Spanish public administrations. On that day the Government approved by royal decree the creation of the Office for the Execution of the Administrative Reform (OPERA). Since then, the different measures have been gradually implemented. The results have however been disappointing as we have not really experienced an effective reform. On the contrary, what has been done is to apply the tag "CORA" to a set of varied measures and legal reforms with very different scopes and put them together for a joint qualitative evaluation.

In fact, the description of our public administration included in the Report is quite accurate: limited expenditure, central role of the essential services (Social Security, education, health care) and underfunding. The measures given to solve this situation are nevertheless too heterogeneous: from administrative simplification and management improvement procedures to poorly thought-out proposals to eliminate regional institutions and unilateral measures to reinforce the autonomous communities' fiscal discipline. In this regard, a broader scope for the reform of the public administrations is offered by the Organic Law 2/2012 on budgetary stability and the Law 27/2013 on rationalization and sustainability of local administrations.

In any case, the specific proposals included in the CORA Report can be criticized on grounds of both form and substance.

On grounds of form:

- As commented above, there is a mix of measures of very different scope and nature: reasonable administrative simplification measures, other measures such as the proposal for elimination of regional institutions (which should be addressed separately and through a specific debate) or laws regulating the administrative procedure and legal system of the public sector (which operate in a different context).

- In addition, both the CORA and the OPERA are exclusively composed of national organisms and institutions and do not count on the participation of the autonomous communities. These national organisms and institutions want the autonomous communities to adopt crucial decisions such as the elimination of their own institutions or they directly decide upon the autonomous communities' financial situation by unilaterally taking regional resources and using them for the Supplier Payment Plans. This, without any participation whatsoever of the autonomous communities in the proposal, analysis and evaluation process. A joint analysis of the necessary reforms, as well as subsequent joint proposals would have obviously been more appropriate.

Once the inappropriateness of the way the CORA has acted has been analysed, the objections in terms of content are as follows.

- The only justification alleged for the different measures proposed by the Report is cost reduction. The elimination of regional institutions is not based on their operability or usefulness but only on cost reduction, which cannot be the only criterion to sustain a political decision.
- Secondly, the reason of administrative duplication is also arguable. There is no duplication when the functions of two organisms are similar but there is when they are the same. Inefficiency does not derive from duplication but from overlapping or simultaneous execution of the same activity. Complementarity needs to be enhanced to achieve a more efficient activity of the public administrations.

To summarise, the debate and proposals for administrative reform contained in the CORA Report have been poorly suggested and their implementation is deficient. The reform of the public administration cannot just be based on a list of measures of very diverse scope. Neither can these be unilaterally adopted by the national Government or be defended exclusively on economic grounds. The Report includes interesting measures on administrative simplification (one-stop customs office, interoperable electronic medical history, single notification board, etc.), simplified procedures (integrated environmental authorization) and e-administration. However, the form and substance of the process and proposals lead us to state that this is not the administrative reform that Spain needs.

Furthermore, the CORA Report's role is not being crucial in the design of this new administration. The control and coordination mechanisms set forth by the Organic Law 2/2012 are having much more weight, and so is the Law 27/2013 at the local level. Doing more with less as the new paradigm for administrative activity simply means spending less on essential public services.