

**NEW MANAGERIAL PARADIGM AIMED AT NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR****Oana MIRON***Valahia University, Str. Aleea Sinaia, No. 13, 130004 Targoviste, Romania
nicoricioana@yahoo.com***Abstract**

The current healthcare system in Romania faces many challenges, including regional disparities and lack of modern equipment. Adopting an efficient organizational model is essential for the prudent use of resources—both national and European—and for accelerating development. This paper aims to highlight the circumstances and motivations behind adopting an organizational and functional model focused on healthcare infrastructure development, starting from an analysis of the general state of this infrastructure and its effects on meeting patient needs. The establishment of the National Agency for Healthcare Infrastructure Development (NAHID) represents such a managerial model, emphasizing performance and efficiency to optimize resources and mitigate risks. This model also underpins the management of the construction of three regional emergency hospitals in Romania, equipped with state-of-the-art technology designed to significantly improve access to high-quality medical care. Our analysis underscores the potential of this model to radically transform Romania's healthcare infrastructure and effectively address both current and future patient needs. In preparing this paper, I have considered data and information from the most credible sources, as well as the relevant regulatory framework as it has evolved recently.

Keywords: *Management; Healthcare Infrastructure Development; Performance / Efficiency; Patient Needs; Quality of Medical Services.*

JEL Classification: *H51; I18*

I. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental right of Romanian citizens to health protection is enshrined and guaranteed by Article 34, Paragraph 1, of the Romanian Constitution ([Romanian Parliament, 2003](#)). In addition to this right, the Constitution mandates the state to implement effective measures to ensure public health and maintain hygiene. This obligation aims to ensure that every individual receives adequate health protection and has real and equitable access to medical services. Thus, the Romanian state is responsible not only for guaranteeing access to medical care but also for creating an environment that supports the health and well-being of its citizens through policies and infrastructure that address the population's needs.

At the European Union level, the Council "recognizes that physical and mental health is a human right and that health is a prerequisite for sustainable development" ([CEU, 2024](#)). In this context, the development of healthcare infrastructure is of particular importance for ensuring quality, accessible, and efficient medical care. Investment in such infrastructure is fundamental for public health, disease prevention and treatment, research and innovation, as well as for resilience in the face of crises. By modernizing and expanding healthcare infrastructure, given the availability of necessary financial resources ([MIEP, 2021](#)), a robust and sustainable health system can be ensured, capable of meeting both current and future population needs.

Given the growing population, demographic changes, and technological advancements, investments in infrastructure are essential for improving the quality of medical services and supporting public health. The development of healthcare infrastructure—which includes constructing and modernizing hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centers, and other medical facilities, particularly in rural and underserved areas—can ensure equitable access to medical services. A well-developed infrastructure reduces response times in emergencies and improves access to precise treatments and diagnoses.

From the perspective of efficiency and quality of medical services, I demonstrate that investments in infrastructure contribute to enhancing the operational efficiency of medical institutions. The use of modern equipment and advanced technologies facilitates rapid and accurate diagnosis, as well as effective treatments. Infrastructure modernization also involves adopting digital solutions, such as electronic medical records, which improve care coordination and reduce medical errors.

Regarding disease prevention and management, the development of healthcare infrastructure has a direct impact on the capacity for prevention and disease management. Well-equipped health centers and trained medical

personnel can implement effective vaccination programs, screenings, and health education. This contributes to reducing the incidence of both communicable and non-communicable diseases and increasing the population's life expectancy.

Research and innovation in health are crucial, and a modern infrastructure is almost vital for their advancement. Well-equipped facilities enable the conduct of clinical studies, development of new treatments and medications, and testing of innovative technologies. This not only advances medical knowledge but also enhances the international competitiveness of the health system.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a resilient healthcare infrastructure capable of responding quickly and effectively to health crises. The development of infrastructure (Romanian Government (RG), 2023) involves not only creating additional capacities for patient care but also preparing for emergencies with adequate stocks of equipment and medicines, as well as crisis management strategies.

Investments in healthcare infrastructure also have significant economic benefits. An efficient health system reduces costs associated with chronic diseases and disabilities, improving workforce productivity and quality of life. Additionally, a well-developed health sector can attract investment and stimulate innovation and economic growth through the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. In the case of Romania, the healthcare infrastructure is underdeveloped (CAR, 2022), with all the consequences that arise from this fact. The new post-pandemic context (Covid-19), which has led to the adoption of the NRRP, is very favorable for improving the situation (Bostan et al., 2022ab).

For this reason, the regulatory framework governing the management of healthcare infrastructure development activities is undergoing several changes, including the establishment of new organizational structures with tasks and competences aimed at improving the analyzed area. At the Ministry of Health level, there was a period when only a single unit was responsible for implementing integrated projects, which caused multiple difficulties. This limited organization made it challenging to manage and monitor each project individually, leading to significant delays in implementation. It also hindered the development and application of modern management procedures necessary for investment projects in healthcare infrastructure. Essentially, the way these projects were managed did not truly reflect their importance and complexity (RG, 2022).

To address these deficiencies, it was deemed that creating a specialized and independent entity dedicated exclusively to healthcare infrastructure projects could bring numerous benefits. This would allow for the efficient allocation of substantial human and material resources for the construction of major regional emergency hospitals (Iași, Cluj, and Craiova). It would also contribute to accelerating the implementation process, ensuring adherence to deadlines, specifications, and budgets (RG, 2022).

In addition to these advantages, the specialized entity can generally facilitate a more efficient absorption of European funds. With its accumulated expertise, it could develop and implement large-scale projects that address both critical needs of the healthcare sector and the rigorous requirements of European institutions, thereby contributing to the modernization and expansion of the national healthcare infrastructure.

Our paper highlights the most important aspects related to this issue and is structured as follows: (1) Introduction, (2) Motivations for adopting a more efficient organizational and functional model for healthcare infrastructure development, (3) General state of healthcare infrastructure and its effects on meeting patient needs, NAHID - a performance/efficiency-oriented managerial model, (4) Major project management by NAHID - the construction of three regional emergency hospitals, and (5) Conclusions.

II. MOTIVATIONS FOR ADOPTING A MORE EFFICIENT ORGANIZATIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL MODEL FOR HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

In Romania, identifying a more efficient management model for the development of public healthcare infrastructure has required a careful analysis of several critical objective factors. Among these factors is the extremely poor, outdated, and insufficient state of the existing healthcare infrastructure. These deficiencies have led to numerous serious incidents, jeopardizing patient safety and significantly limiting the capacity of healthcare facilities to provide adequate treatments. Often, the lack of modern equipment and necessary resources necessitates transferring patients with severe conditions to medical facilities abroad, which not only affects access to medical services in Romania but also increases costs and the time required for essential treatments.

In this context, it has been recognized that one of the fundamental measures to ensure public hygiene and health is the development and maintenance of a modern healthcare infrastructure, aligned with European and international performance specifications and standards. Modernizing the infrastructure would improve the quality of medical services and could prevent situations where patients need to seek treatment outside the country.

However, considering the limited resources of the national budget relative to the considerable needs of the medical sector, accessing and efficiently utilizing European funds has become a strategic priority (Bostan et al., 2022b). Increasing the absorption rate of these funds is essential to support the financing of large infrastructure

projects, which are vital for modernizing the healthcare system.

Thus, under Component C12 – Health (Pillar V) of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP-2021), it was decided to establish and operationalize a specialized healthcare investment agency in 2022 (MIEP, 2021). This agency is crucial for executing major investment projects, such as the construction of regional emergency hospitals (Iași, Cluj, and Craiova), and for leveraging opportunities for non-repayable European funding. The impact of these projects on the national economy is significant, contributing to the improvement of healthcare infrastructure, job creation, and economic growth.

Furthermore, centralizing the responsibility for implementing these large projects within a single entity would significantly streamline the necessary processes and activities, ensuring more efficient coordination and reducing delays and costs. This strategic approach is also applicable to other major healthcare infrastructure investment projects managed by public hospitals within the Ministry of Health network, thereby contributing to a more robust and resilient healthcare system.

III. THE OVERALL STATE OF HEALTHCARE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ITS EFFECTS ON MEETING PATIENTS' NEEDS

Currently, Romania's healthcare sector relies on infrastructure that was designed and constructed approximately 50 years ago, during a period when healthcare needs were significantly different from today. Most of the 1,392 buildings housing hospitals are outdated and technically and technologically inadequate. Some of these buildings were constructed according to standards from a century ago and have been modified over time based on available funds. However, their structures do not allow for major adaptations to meet current healthcare needs (CAR, 2022).

Operational flows within hospitals are often not integrated within the same building but are dispersed across locations that are considerable distances apart, such as in pavilion-style hospitals. These arrangements frequently fail to meet safety and hygiene standards, leading to an increased risk of healthcare-associated infections and a high level of unmet medical needs. Adapting this old infrastructure to current requirements is, in many cases, either impossible or involves disproportionate costs compared to the benefits, making the construction of new buildings for current medical activities more preferable. Additionally, particularly in older hospitals, controlling nosocomial infections is challenging due to physical flow dysfunctions.

The provision of medical equipment falls short of advanced European standards, and the distribution of such equipment is uneven and does not address regional needs (RG, 2022a). Romania's healthcare system shows serious deficiencies in treating complex pathologies such as transplants and major burn care. Currently, Romania lacks a specialized center for treating severe burn cases and only has functional units that can handle cases of limited complexity. Due to insufficient hospital resources and a lack of appropriate expertise for the large number of severe burn patients, transferring these patients abroad remains necessary until a sufficient number of specialized centers and units are built (RG, 2022a).

Furthermore, the poor state of healthcare infrastructure has contributed to tragic events, such as fires or electrical network failures, with this deficient infrastructure being a direct or contributing cause.

IV. NAHID – A MANAGEMENT MODEL HEAVILY FOCUSED ON PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY

In 2022, the National Agency for Health Infrastructure Development (NAHID) was established as a public institution with legal personality, operating under the coordination of the Ministry of Health. It functions as a specialized organ of the central public administration with the primary mission of developing health infrastructure through the preparation, implementation, and completion of major investment projects in this critical sector (RG, 2022b).

The governance structure of NAHID is well-defined and is overseen by a Supervisory Board composed of seven members: two representatives from the Ministry of Health, one representative from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, one representative from the Ministry of Development, one representative from the Prime Minister's Chancellery, as well as the President and Vice-President of the agency. This composition ensures effective interministerial coordination and strategic oversight of the agency's activities.

NAHID plays a central role in managing major investment projects in health infrastructure (Table 1), particularly those focused on the construction of regional emergency hospitals in Iași, Cluj, and Craiova.

Table 1. Investment projects under the competence of NAHID

Categories of investment projects	Target object
A - Of considerable importance in the health infrastructure	Hospitals in the health network of the Ministry of Health whose financing is provided in full or mostly from the state budget, including through the use of reimbursable or non-reimbursable external funds.
B - Of considerable importance in the health infrastructure	Hospitals in the network of ministries and institutions with their own health network (ministries and central public institutions, other than the Ministry of Health, and local public administration bodies), in connection with which NAHID can exclusively provide technical assistance activities.

Source: RG, 2022a

In addition to these projects, the agency may, at the request of the Ministry of Health, take on responsibility for other large-scale initiatives in health infrastructure, particularly those involving hospitals within the ministry's network. Given the substantial funding from European sources, NAHID adheres strictly to all relevant principles and rules, ensuring the correct and efficient implementation of projects (Florescu, 2012; Florescu and Onescu, 2012; Marin, 2015; Negru, 2019; Vlădoi, 2021).

Regarding significant projects in health infrastructure, classified as Category B, which are funded through the NRRP, NAHID provides technical assistance and specialized support to beneficiaries that may include ministries and other central public institutions, local authorities with their own health networks, or public hospitals within these networks. The agency is equipped to partner with these beneficiaries to ensure the success of the projects.

The investment projects managed by NAHID encompass a wide range of essential activities, from the construction and rehabilitation of public hospitals to their modernization and expansion, including the provision of modern medical equipment. The agency has exclusive responsibility for managing projects of considerable importance that exceed 40,000,000 lei, in accordance with the threshold established by Law 500/2002 on public finances, in which case the approval of technical-economic indicators falls to the Government (RP, 2002). The responsibilities of NAHID are illustrated in Figure 1.

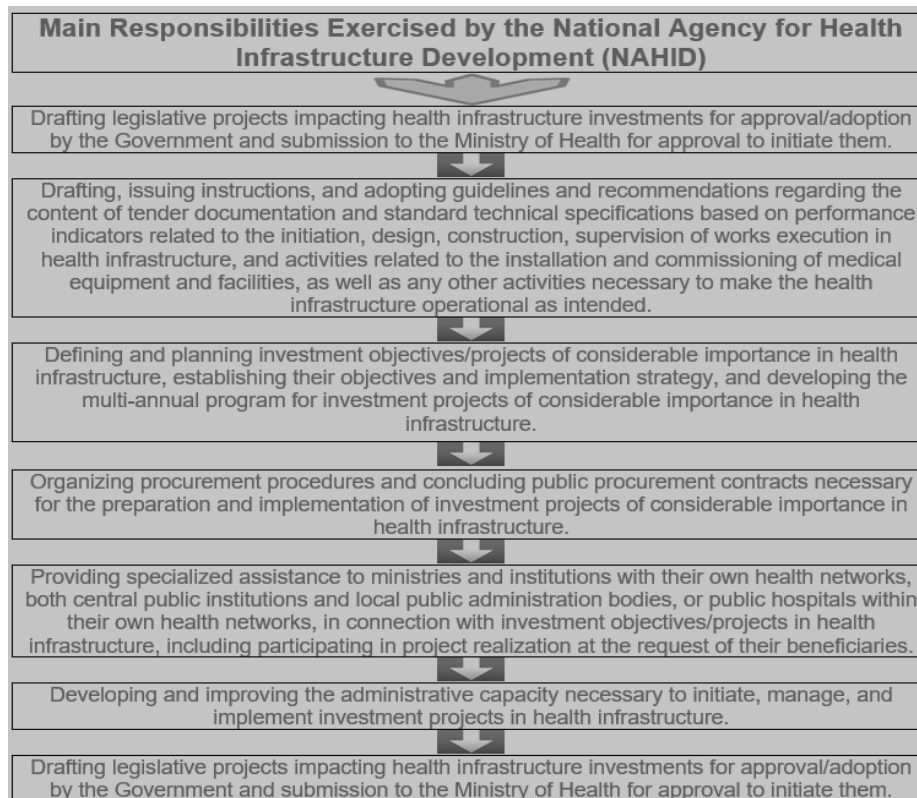


Figure 1. Main responsibilities exercised by the NAHID

Source: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetailiiDocument/255924>

To fulfill its mission, the Agency is responsible for developing and implementing a multiannual program for significant investment projects in health infrastructure, which is aligned with the European Union's financial programming periods. This program focuses on the projects in which the Agency is directly involved, ensuring that the Agency's resources and expertise are used optimally.

For projects managed by other beneficiaries, the program includes only those initiatives for which the National Agency for Health Infrastructure Development (NAHID) has taken responsibility for providing technical assistance, thereby guaranteeing a high level of quality and professionalism in the development of health infrastructure in Romania.

V. MANAGEMENT OF MAJOR PROJECTS BY NAHID - CONSTRUCTION OF THREE REGIONAL EMERGENCY HOSPITALS

Until 2020, the Ministry of Health was primarily responsible for coordinating the construction projects of the regional emergency hospitals in Iași, Cluj, and Craiova, which were financed through structural funds under the Regional Operational Programme (ROP 2014-2020). These projects were planned to continue into the second phase during the period 2021-2027 through the Operational Programme for Health (OPH). However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for a more specialized approach to managing these complex projects and led to the transfer of responsibility to NAHID.

As previously mentioned, NAHID was established as a dedicated entity equipped with qualified staff and high-level expertise, with the goal of becoming a center of excellence in managing and implementing major infrastructure projects funded by European funds. The total value of these projects, which include the construction of the three regional hospitals, is estimated at approximately €1.64 billion (RG, 2022a). The funding comes from a combination of sources, including loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB), structural funds, NRRP, and contributions from the state budget.

The projects are structured into two distinct phases, spanning two financial programming periods: 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. Phase I, covered by ROP, is scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2023, while Phase II, funded by the OPH, will commence on January 1, 2024 (RG, 2014; 2023). By this time, feasibility studies have been completed, and technical and economic indicators have been approved for all three regional hospitals. Additionally, the land required for construction has been identified, transferred to state public ownership, and placed under the administration of the Ministry of Health. Financing contracts for Phase I have already been signed, and loan agreements with the EIB have been concluded for the Iași and Cluj hospitals (RG, 2022a).

To ensure the timely completion of these projects according to technical specifications and within the approved budget, continuous and rigorous monitoring is crucial, along with specialized project management from the involved national authorities. It is also important to maintain a steady flow of communication and cooperation among all parties involved to anticipate and address any challenges that may arise.

By mid-2024, construction work was already underway for all three regional emergency hospitals, with completion scheduled by the end of 2028 (Icleanu, 2023). Once completed, these hospitals will play a crucial role in modernizing Romania's healthcare system, providing high-quality medical services, and enhancing the country's capacity to respond to public health crises.

5.1. The Iasi Regional Emergency Hospital

The Iași REH will have a total constructed area of 202,689 square meters, spread across nine floors/levels (two basements, ground floor, five floors, and one technical floor) on a plot of 120,000 square meters (Figure 2).

The primary objective of the project is "to improve the quality and efficiency of emergency hospital care by facilitating access for the population, especially vulnerable groups, to high-quality secondary and tertiary medical services, thereby contributing to the overall health improvement of residents in Iasi County and the North-East Region of Romania" (REH Iași, 2022).

The new facility will feature 850 beds, 20 operating rooms, and will employ approximately 3,000 staff members (Icleanu, 2023). It will also replace the current "Sf. Spiridon" County Emergency Hospital, which is 260 years old, and will significantly support teaching and research activities at the Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iasi.

The total cost of Iași REH has recently been updated to 3.3 billion lei (approximately 668 million euros), with funding coming from European funds, a loan from the EIB, and allocations from the state budget.



Figure 2. Scale model of the REH Iași building

Source: <https://apix.ro/sru-iasi-a-fost-semnat-primul-contract-de-lucrari-iar-licitatia-pentru-construire-va-fi-deblocata/>

5.2. The Cluj Regional Emergency Hospital

The Cluj REH will be strategically located between the commune of Florești and the city of Cluj-Napoca, on the site of a former military unit, with an impressive area of 143,064 square meters (Icleanu, 2023). This location will ensure easy access from all parts of the region, addressing the needs of a continuously growing population.

Upon completion, Cluj REH will become one of the most modern and complex medical facilities in Romania, with a total built area of 184,013 square meters. Of this area, the main building, which will have eight levels (including a basement, ground floor, five floors, and a technical floor), will cover 176,638 square meters. A heliport will be integrated into the hospital's structure, ensuring rapid patient transport in critical situations (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Scale model of the REH Cluj building

Source: <https://storage.googleapis.com/stateless-cjcluj-ro/2022/01/SRU-Spital-Regional-de-Urgenta-Cluj-macheta-1.jpg>

With a capacity of 850 beds, Cluj REH will be equipped to handle both medical emergencies and complex, long-term treatments. The total investment required for this ambitious project is estimated at approximately 3.35 billion RON, a substantial amount reflecting the project's scale and importance. Funding will be primarily provided by the MIEP, which will allocate two billion RON, of which 1.64 billion RON will come from national contributions and 350 million RON from European funds.

Additionally, a loan of 1.525 billion RON from EIB will complete the necessary financial resources. It is important to note that the REH Cluj project represents not only a new construction but also a major step in transforming Romania's healthcare system.

The hospital will be equipped with state-of-the-art medical technologies and will include advanced facilities

for research and medical training, creating an environment conducive to innovation and professional development. This project will elevate the standards of medical care in the region and will serve as a model for future investments in healthcare infrastructure at the national level.

5.3. The Craiova Regional Emergency Hospital

The Craiova REH will be a premier medical center, with a capacity of over 800 beds, designed to meet the critical needs of the region (Icleanu, 2023). The main building of the hospital (Figure 4) will be impressive, featuring two basements, a ground floor, and five additional floors, providing ample space for all essential departments, from the emergency unit to specialized treatment and recovery wards.

With a footprint of 34,110 square meters and a total built area of 212,318.63 square meters, the hospital will be a modern and well-equipped complex, capable of meeting the most demanding medical requirements.

In addition to the medical facilities, the project also includes nearly 5,000 square meters dedicated to educational activities, reflecting an integrated vision where professional training and continuing education play a important role in enhancing the quality of healthcare services. This educational component will enable the hospital to become an important center for training future doctors and healthcare specialists, thus contributing to the development of the human resources within the Romanian medical system.



Figure 4. Scale model of the REH Craiova building

Source: <https://spitalregionalcraiova.ro/noutati/>

Furthermore, the educational spaces will host conferences, seminars, and research programs, strengthening the connection between medical practice and scientific innovation.

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To establish the three regional emergency hospitals in Romania, total investments exceeding two billion euros will be allocated. The most significant portion of this funding comes from the Health Program 2021-2027, which will contribute approximately 1.25 billion euros (Icleanu, 2023). Additionally, funding will be supported by several complementary sources, including the ROP 2014-2020, which will provide 141 million euros. EIB will also play a crucial role by providing loans totaling 923 million euros, distributed as follows: 250 million euros for the Iași REH, 305 million euros for the Cluj hospital, and 368 million euros for the Craiova hospital. These funds will be supplemented by additional allocations from the state budget to ensure full coverage of construction and equipment costs.

A significant milestone in this process was the signing in February 2024 of the three major funding contracts under the Health Program 2021-2027. These agreements mark a firm commitment from the Romanian authorities and European partners to transform these regional hospitals into centers of medical excellence, capable of providing high-quality services and addressing the complex needs of the population.

The "Major Regional Hospitals in Romania" project is not just an investment in infrastructure but also a strategic initiative aimed at modernizing the national healthcare system. As mentioned earlier, these new facilities will be equipped with cutting-edge technologies and will include research and medical education facilities, with the potential to attract and train highly qualified specialists.

In the long term, these hospitals will contribute to improving access to quality medical services, reducing regional health disparities, and strengthening Romania's position in the European medical landscape.

VI. CONCLUSION

Improving healthcare infrastructure plays a crucial role in ensuring high-quality and accessible medical services for all citizens. In Romania, this necessity is even more pressing given the persistent challenges facing the healthcare system. Thus, adopting a more efficient organizational and functional model has become a priority, with development and modernization initiatives needing to focus on performance and efficiency.

One of the main motivations for adopting a new organizational model—which I have discussed in this paper—is the urgent need to reduce regional disparities in access to quality medical services. The lack of modern infrastructure and advanced medical equipment contributes to growing health inequalities and suboptimal patient outcomes. Additionally, inefficient management of resources and investment projects has led to stagnation or even regression in some significant initiatives.

Certainly, an organizational model focused on efficiency and performance allows for more judicious use of funds and would accelerate development processes. Indeed, in Romania, the creation of the National Agency for Health Infrastructure Development (NAHID) proposed a new managerial model focused on performance and efficiency. This approach involves employing advanced project management techniques, implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, and adopting best governance practices.

As noted, NAHID aims to optimize resource allocation, reduce risks, and ensure projects are completed on time and within budget. Furthermore, there is also a focus on increasing transparency and accountability—key elements for the long-term success of development initiatives.

A concrete example of the application of the NAHID managerial model is the management of projects for the construction of three regional emergency hospitals. These hospitals will be equipped with state-of-the-art medical technology and will offer specialized services, significantly improving access to high-quality medical care for the populations in the served areas. The Agency will oversee the complete management of these projects, from planning and funding to execution and post-implementation monitoring, thus ensuring the achievement of the proposed objectives. In essence, adopting a more efficient organizational and functional model in the field we analyzed represents a viable solution for developing Romania's healthcare infrastructure.

In our opinion, this model can significantly contribute to eliminating inefficiencies, reducing regional disparities, and ensuring superior quality medical services.

VII. ACRONYMS OF SOME EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE PAPER:

CAR – Court of Accounts of Romania;
EIB – European Investment Bank;
EU – European Union;
MH – Ministry of Health;
MIEP – Ministry of Investments and European Projects;
NAHID – National Agency for Healthcare Infrastructure Development;
NRRP – National Recovery and Resilience Plan;
OPH – Operational Programme for Health;
REH – Regional Emergency Hospital;
RG – Romanian Government;
ROP – Regional Operational Programme;
RP – Romanian Parliament.

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