

International Conference *Public Administration in a Democratic Society: Thirty Years of Democratic Transition in Europe*

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From 4 to 6 October 2019, the Centre for Advanced Academic Studies of the University of Zagreb, hosted an international conference *Public Administration in a Democratic Society: Thirty Years of Democratic Transition in Europe* in Dubrovnik, Croatia. The conference was organized by the Institute of Public Administration, Zagreb, Croatia in cooperation with two research committees of the International Political Science Association (IPSA: RC05 – Comparative Studies on Local Government and Politics and RC32 – Public Policy and Administration); the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS); the Study Centre for Public Administration and Public Finances of the Faculty of Law University of Zagreb; the Faculty of Law, University of Split; and the Croatian Political Science Association. There were more than 70 participants from over 20 countries, mainly scholars coming from various disciplinary backgrounds: administrative, governance, political, legal, sociological and economic. Inspired by the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the conference was set to analyse and discuss the role of public administration in the process of building democratic, governance, and market institutions in contemporary societies of the former socialist countries, as well as to evaluate the developments and reforms in public administration in the light of democratic values and standards. President of the Organizing and Programme Committee was Ivan Koprić, president of the Croatian Institute of Public Administration.

The conference started with keynote speeches given by some of the most eminent scholars in public administration, governance, and political science fields who framed and thematically directed overall discussion during the conference. Geert Bouckaert (past IAS president) from the Catholic University in Leuven (Belgium) spoke about converging and diverging trends between governance and democracy in contemporary states and supra-national political institutions. Hellmut Wollmann (Humboldt University Berlin, Germany) gave an analytical and evaluative *croquis* of politico-administrative transformations in Hungary, Poland, and East Germany since 1990, emphasizing the importance of decentralization reforms. Edoardo Ongaro from the Open University London (United Kingdom) presented an interesting perspective on administrative reform doctrines by linking their goals and values to the most notable philosophical ideas of Western civilization. Norbert Kersting from Westfälische Wilhelms University, Münster, Germany gave a lecture on democratic values, institutions, and deficits in Europe at the local government level. Ivan Koprić from the University of Zagreb spoke about democratisation and administrative reforms in transitional period, systematised the lessons learned, and offered a programme of further research on post-socialist transition. Three more sessions were scheduled for the rest of the first day, each with three to four papers presented. Jasmina Džinić and Romea Manojlović Toman (University of Zagreb, Croatia) conducted a content analysis of academic papers on administrative reforms in transition countries, while Pawel Swianiewicz and Anna Kurniewicz (University of Warsaw, Poland) presented a meta-study of local government research in Central and Eastern Europe after 1990. Jakub Lysek (Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic) spoke on the quality of governance in CEE countries. The following sessions tackled various aspects of administrative and political reforms and innovations in transitional countries. Natalija Perišić (University of Belgrade, Serbia) spoke about social welfare administration in post-socialist countries. Marko Krtolica (University of Skopje, North Macedonia) presented the lustration processes. Predrag Dimitrijević, Dejan Vučetić and Jelena Vučković (University of Niš, Serbia) talked about the models of electoral administration, while Gordana Marčetić, Tijana Vukojičić Tomić and Iva Lopižić (University of Zagreb, Croatia) analysed the changes in state territorial administration systems in transitional countries. Pierre Bauby (RAP Paris, France) presented a paper written in cooperation with Maria Horehajova and Jana Marasova (Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) about public services in CEE countries, and Michal Soukop and Hana Hurtíková (Palacký Uni-

versity, Olomouc, Czech Republic) spoke about democratic innovations at the local level in the same geographical setting. Citizen participation through e-government tools was tackled by Péter Molnár, Gyula Balazs Csáki-Hatalovics and Ferenc Varga (Károli Gáspár University of The Reformed Church, Budapest, Hungary). Financial burden of reform strategies and policies was the topic of Wendy Kennett (University of Cardiff, UK), who analysed public debt and public administration dilemmas that arise in the process of dealing with it.

Experiences from various countries showed that the (ongoing) transformations of legal, political, and administrative institutions have not taken a single path, as there is no universal role model. Still, Europeanization seems to be the most important driving force of institutional transformation. Furthermore, the harmonization of legal frameworks and institutional structures within politico-administrative systems in Europe has been completed and the future accent should be put on capacity building (human resources above all), which would allow for the appropriate implementation of the embraced values, norms, and policies. As public administrations face numerous and various stakeholders (individual and corporate), managing the relations with stakeholders is crucial for both policy quality and effectiveness, and for the attainment of high democratic standards. Decentralization policies and strong local and regional government seem to contribute significantly to the democratization of society. Nevertheless, not only public administration, but also all the other social actors bear their share of responsibility as the quality of governance is heavily related to the existing social capital.

During the second day of the conference, papers were presented in two parallel panels, each comprising four thematic sessions. Two sessions within the first panel were devoted to the issues of the rule of law and administrative legal systems in transitional countries, especially in relation to Europeanization processes. Mateja Held (University of Zagreb, Croatia) presented the development of the administrative justice systems in transitional countries and discussed their role in democratic, economic and social transition. A paper on harmonization of the national legal systems in the Western Balkans was presented by Genc Trnavci (University of Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Dorota Dabek (Jagiellonian University Krakow, Poland) and Jerzy Supernat (University of Wrocław, Poland) talked about the changes of administrative state in Poland after the EU accession, while Łukasz Prus (University of Wrocław, Poland) emphasized the importance of the rule of law for transition process in Poland. Problems in the development of the rule of law and barriers to the improvement

of existing standards in the countries of the former Yugoslavia were presented by Jernej Letnar Černič (New University, Kranj/Ljubljana, Slovenia). Polonca Kovač (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) problematized the position of CEE countries in realization of the principles of administrative procedure standing between post-socialist legacy and European trends. Ana Đanić Čeko and Tunjica Petrašević (University Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Osijek, Croatia) discussed the necessity of regulating administrative procedure in the EU in order to ensure procedural rights of the parties in European administrative procedure. Erzsébet Csatlós (University of Szeged, Hungary) talked about European administration networking. There were three papers presented in the session on local self-governance. Mirko Klarić (University of Split, Croatia) talked about the position and role of sub-municipal government in European countries, with special focus on the state of affairs in Croatia. Depending on the status, position and importance of sub-municipal government, it has a potential to be a driver of the democratic transition in CEE and SEE countries. A paper on local service provision modes in the context of transaction costs in Poland was presented by Katarzyna Szmigiel-Rawska (University of Warsaw, Poland), while Yeşeren Eliçin (Galatasaray University, Turkey) presented a paper on decentralization in Turkey. Papers on migration governance and policy were presented by Goranka Lalić Novak and Teo Giljević (University of Zagreb, Croatia), and Barbara Kowalczyk (University of Wrocław, Poland).

A parallel stream of sessions was comprised of papers dealing with local public services in transitional context, different aspects of the process of Europeanization, and regulatory and institutional innovations during the transitional period. Vedran Đulabić and Mihovil Škarica (University of Zagreb, Croatia) analysed the concept and the practice of co-production of local public services in Croatia within the context of post-socialist transition. Florin Peci (University of Peja, Kosovo) and Carter B. Casady (Stanford University, USA) presented a paper about waste management in Kosovo. The importance of merit-based civil service for democratization and modernization of public institutions was noted by Veran Stančetić (University of Belgrade, Serbia). Marko Tmušić (University of Belgrade, Serbia) talked about institutional reforms leading to democracy and good governance in the countries on the former Yugoslav territory. Several Croatian scholars had a session about general and sectoral adjustments to the EU requirements and policies: Nikola Popović (Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries) spoke about the EU and domestic policies in electronic communications market, Jasminka Pecotić

Kaufman (University of Zagreb, Croatia) presented the developments of competition law system in Croatia, Dalibor Dvorny (PhD student, University of Zagreb) analysed the role of EU funds in the process of Europeanization and its effects, and Jan Klasinc (Zagreb, Croatia) gave a presentation on independent control bodies and their importance for democracy in Croatia. The final session of the day had four presentations. The first was examining the relation between local democratic institutions and the expansion of e-government (Gyula Balazs Csáki-Hatalovics, Péter Molnár and Ferenc Varga from Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Budapest, Hungary). The second dealt with innovations and new functions of state administration (Ádám Rixer from Károli Gáspár University of The Reformed Church, Budapest, Hungary), the third with the process of Europeanization in Kosovo (Remzije Istrefi and Arben Hajrullahu, University of Prishtina), and the last was about the liberalization of railway transport policy (Adam Kabele, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic).

It was concluded that Europeanization contributed to the complexity of national (and supranational) administrative structures and functioning in transitional countries. It also had a major influence on administrative procedural and justice systems as well as on public administrations in general in terms of loosening hierarchical structures, orientation on citizens, strengthening people's trust in public administration and administrative courts, etc. Nevertheless, many problems impeding realization of the rule of law and threatening human rights and freedoms are still present and further and deeper institutional changes are needed, especially in some countries, in order to develop or reinforce the principles constituting the rule of law. Development of democratic institutions based on the rule-of-law based is not straightforward, but one that may occasionally turn back and deteriorate. The rise of populism, the process of recentralization, and various other reasons could lead to deterioration of democratization and protection of human rights and freedoms.

The first session of the last conference day encompassed presentations on democratization, administrative reforms, and governmental accountability in non-European countries. Jill Tao (Incheon National University, South Korea) presented a paper on democratic transition and the rise of the administrative state in East Asia, with special focus on China as the cradle of democratic ideas in the region which remained outside the circle of countries pursuing meritocracy as a key strength of administrative state. Continuing with the example of China, Lisheng Dong (University of Tartu, Estonia) explained the failure of citizen-oriented adminis-

trative reforms due to inadequate positioning of party-state relationship, i.e. non-separation of the ruling party and government, and the lack of citizen participation in political and public affairs. The issue of populist politics in Kosovo, which became political mainstream after 2008 and the main obstacle to the EU accession of Serbia, was discussed by Haris Dajč and Maja Vasiljević (University of Belgrade, Serbia). Gwenda R. Jensen (International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board) and John F. Stuart (independent scholar, Canada) were talking about the importance of fiscal transparency for accountability of governments drawing on their experience in New Zealand and discussing progress in fiscal transparency in selected Eastern European countries.

Concluding remarks of the conference were delivered by professors Tom Christensen (University of Oslo, Norway), Jill Tao (Incheon National University, South Korea), Stevan Lilić (University of Belgrade, Serbia) and Ivan Koprić (University of Zagreb, Croatia). It was pointed out that the transition process in post-socialist countries had been launched with strong emotions and high expectations, but without knowledge of where it could lead us. Accordingly, it is important not to reduce post-socialist transition merely to democratic transition. As numerous presentations have shown, administrative reforms cannot be successful without relevant political reforms. Contrary to general statements, it seems that transition has not finished; it continues and, as such, represents a challenge and a good thing oriented towards continuous improvement.

When considering various countries, one can notice that reforms are a question of convergence and divergence processes that could be explained by different schools of institutionalism. Thus, the impact of the EU and its contribution to convergence in national public administration structures and processes fits to “world society perspective”, while ever-present cultural resistance to reform is explained from the perspective of the old institutional theory. Finally, as historical institutionalism claims, history does not necessarily develop in a straightforward way and institutional backsliding is something that can be normally expected. Consequently, new questions for further discussion are opened: does the future depend on the nation state? Do political and administrative leaders in CEE and SEE can control the change? Do they know what to do and how to manage wicked problems in public organizations as complex as they are? With regard to research of transition and development of democratic institutions, the need for more comparative in depth studies and evaluation of transition results in CEE and SEE countries has been pointed out. Furthermore, in spite of (or because of) limited data availability in CEE

and SEE, the focus should be reoriented from “data available” sectors to “hidden” ones.

Almost 50 papers were presented during the conference, many of which used the comparative approach. Sessions on administrative law enabled normative reflection and contributed to the broader perspective of analysis and discussions. That, together with significant contribution of young researchers, shows strengthening of research capacity in the field. At the end of the conference, professor emeritus Hellmut Wollmann from Humboldt University, Berlin was awarded with a special recognition of merit, and professors Norbert Kersting and Ivan Koprić gave celebratory speeches.

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