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**THE PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN CENTRAL  
AND EASTERN EUROPE**

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# THE PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

This book has been developed on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of NISPAcee. It attempts to provide an overview of both NISPAcee and the state of public administration in the region over the last twenty years.

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## Public Administration Reform in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

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### Introduction

Public Administration Reform (PAR) is at the heart of the developments in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Central Asia (CA). It was not just a reform from centrally steered to market economies. Huge efforts were also made in order to transform and modernize the public sector. NISPAcee's working group on PAR addresses the issues involved in such reforms. It aims at giving an account of what happens within the public sector in CEE and CA countries. As there are many myths and prejudices about the reforms taking place in these countries, it was deemed necessary to discuss studies in which actual and current regional reforms were described and analyzed, to provide a broad range of explanations for success and failure in PAR, and to arrive at conclusions regarding the reforms and the factors of success and failure. PAR also attempts to investigate whether the existing theories on public-sector reform are valid for the interpretation of the developments in the NISPAcee regions.

Below we give an overview of the preliminary conclusions arrived at and the need to address the issues surrounding public-administration reforms further. Before these issues are addressed, we first give a short overview of the developments in the working group itself.

### The developments within the PAR working group

The working group is still very young within the NISPAcee context. It was established as such in 2009, at the 17<sup>th</sup> NISPAcee Annual Conference (in Budva), after two pilot panels that were held at NISPAcee Annual Conferences in 2007 (in Kiev) and 2008 (Bratislava). Since then, it received huge attraction from scholars both from the CEE and the CA regions, as well as from Western Europe. Every year, up to twenty-five selected papers are presented and discussed within the working group at the Annual NISPAcee conferences.

In 2009, our focus involved classic Public Administration issues, mainly the complexities and varying effects of: decentralization, the reforms before and after New Public Management, the impact of the EU on CEE democratization, and those of the Western assistance in reforms in general. Impacts of different theo-

ries on public-sector reforms were extensively debated. In 2010 the papers addressed more critical issues, such as the perverse effects of reforms, the myth of pseudo-reforms, the lacking capacity to evaluate reforms, the problems in public-procurement contracts and in amalgamations of local government. The discussions became more fundamental. In the working-group sessions comparative approaches in researching PAR were discussed, as well as the explaining factors for the success or failure thereof, with special attention to international influences and the costs and benefits involved in Public Administration Reform. The preliminary conclusions derived from these sessions suggested that valid comparative data about PAR were lacking, that theory building and in-depth research was in need of such data, that case studies did enlighten us about actual developments taking place in various CEE and CIS countries, but that they were not yet robust enough to arrive at testable hypotheses and that there were many reforms that are reforms only in name. It was necessary to distinguish such reforms from real PAR. That needed a theoretical framework as well as some comparative data. Furthermore, more evidence was presented regarding the broad range of explanations for success and failure in PAR. As mentioned above those studies still stressed that the context and common inheritance of CEE and CIS countries was very important.

One hypothesis derived from the discussions showing the increased skepticism of the working group was that when countries became members of the EU they lost the incentive to reform further, and the process of PAR stopped. Whether that was true or not became one of the prioritized issues for the PAR working group.

In the past two years the PAR working group achieved maturity by receiving an increasing amount of comparative papers, dealing, among other things, with CA countries. In fact, in 2011, a special session was devoted to the outcomes of comparative analyses, as well as to the developments taking place in the Stans (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan). Overall, the papers of 2011 ardently debated good-governance issues: transparency (of PAs), participation (of communities in CEE, CA and the Balkans) and efficiency (of old and new public managers).

In 2012, we concentrated on a more in-depth approach to studying PAR. As such, we opened the floor for: EU-related issues and the impact of external pressure and advice in general; normative issues, including values, transparency, accountability, public-service motivation and responsibility on the positive side and corruption and hypocrisy as their counterparts; reforms under very adverse circumstances, such as those taking place in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, and also the present-day views on New Public Management reforms.

Below, these general findings are made more concrete by summarizing some of the specific findings of the research conducted within the frame of this working group.

### Main findings in 2009

From the Baltics to the Balkans and from Central Europe to Eastern Europe and to Central Asia, the PAR working group focused on reforms: drivers of change, convergent patterns, scale and alternatives. It was observed that post-totalitarian institutions led CEE and CA countries to develop certain patterns of reform. Success stories seemed to have been correlated to the presence of entrepreneurial political elites and trans-border cooperation. A number of conflicts (and sources of conflict) in conducting reform were identified: conflicts between external pressure to reform (on behalf of international organizations) and domestic path dependencies (as discussed in papers written by H. Huik and H. Lootus; by D.-C. Iancu; and by P. Katsamunskaja); conflicts of interest within public organizations (as analysed by Z. Hajdu), and a lack of skills, knowledge and attitudes within the public sector (as examined by E. Shaskolskaya and S. Melkishev).

For CEE and CA countries, the transition in Public Administration Reforms seemed to have tried to move from one extreme (state) to the other (market) and, eventually ended somewhere in between (administrative market) (as discussed in the paper by T. Brandsen).

### Main findings in 2010

Our working group focused on two research questions: a) What explains successful public-administration reform (in post-socialist countries)? and, b) What effects are visible because of public-administration reform? There was a high level of interest, many abstracts were submitted, and eventually 30 papers were presented during the six sessions reserved for our group. One of the first answers the papers offered was that political will, leadership, and financial and human resources usually set the lines between failure and success in PAR. International donors (like the EU) might also make the difference. Moreover, reforming in scarce times appeared to be a puzzling process as shown by authors like: M. Profiroiu, A. Profiroiu, and T. Andrei; G. Suleymanova; T. C. Ţiclău and S. D. Şandor. Theories of public administration were also debated: D. Fuller and V. Junjan analyzed the classic Weberian perspective in contrast with New Public Management, F. Van den Berg proposed different interpretations to the classic Chinese literature on government as a way of invigorating the European perspectives, while I.

Sobis and M. S. de Vries focused on steering professionals involved in complex projects from an inter-organizational perspective.

### Main findings in 2011

The year 2011 offered us the perfect forum for both academics and practitioners to discuss whether international donors (EU, World Bank, IMF) were capable to steer reforms in the public sector and if there was a path dependency observed within the region. Prestigious researchers, young academics and policy makers worked together in five sessions analyzing PAR theory and case studies from CEE, the Balkans, the Caucasus, CA and Afghanistan. Be it focused on *civil-service reform* (such as the papers presented by M. Aminova and A. Karini), *leadership* (I. Sobis, F. Van den Berg, and M. S. de Vries) and *consolidated administration* (M. Karadzowski; A. Profiroiu, T. Andrei and M. Profiroiu), or concentrated on debating stretching concepts like *good governance* (T. Tanev, R. Urinboyev), *New Public Management* (as G. Hajnal; N. Shekiladze; and J. Urbanovic) and *professionalism* (T. Brandsen, J.-K. Helderma and M. Honingh), PAR nurtured fruitful exchanges of practices and theoretical arguments on PAR across the region. We also hosted the “Best Comparative Paper” presented at the Conference, co-authored by V. Junjan and D.-C. Iancu.

### Main findings in 2012

A wide debate in PAR studies was developed by the East-West cleavage and the “Return to Europe” logic of the EU’s Eastern enlargement. In Ohrid 2012, NISPAcee celebrated 20 years of active conferences and projects across and beyond CEE and raised the challenge of assessing PAR performed in the East (also) in the presence of the West.

With such a generous point of departure at hand, our working group brought together scholars and practitioners interested in analysing multiple institutional settings, traditions and expectations in: the Baltic States (as discussed by J. Mikolaityte and O. Mejere; K. H. Pedersen; A. Pilkaite and A. Chmieliauskas; R. Raudla; and J. Urbanovic and M. Honingh), Central Asia (in the contributions of I. Bankova; G. Suleymanova and C. Sulayman; R. Urinboyev), Central and Eastern Europe (for papers of S. Gallai; D.C. Iancu; D. Klimovsky; I. Sobis and M. de Vries; Z. Xhaferri) and the Balkans (I. B. Berceanu; Z. Jankulovski et al.; M. Karadzowski; A. Patoska and B. Dimeski; M. Ristovska and N. Pelivanova; and M. Stankovic). Civil service de-politicisation, territorial reorganisation and inter-ministerial coordination were some of the topics the presenters and most certain-



By the participants of the NISPAcee Conference lingered on, in an attempt to construct methodologically sound tools for assessing the success or failure of PAR.

## Conclusions

So far, the PAR working group especially discussed the causes of absent, slow and ineffective reforms. By the first NISPAcee conference, the main causes were still sought in conflicts between external pressure to reform and path dependencies. The context and common inheritance of CEE and CA countries, including the previous role of officials, denial of the importance of competence, absence of a merit system and lack of public service were deemed to be of crucial importance. The variance in speed of progress in different countries was also quite important. Explanations were found in conflicts of interest within public organizations, lacking skills, knowledge and attitudes within the public sector, and the seemingly inevitability of such problems. The PAR working group looks forward to discussing what the future brings for reforms sustainability. What challenges should we look at further? Is the CEE region becoming a possible model for the Western Balkans? These questions remain to be addressed by the next conferences. The increase demand for the sessions of our working group suggests that there is a huge interest in the public-administration reforms that take place in the NISPAcee regions. Moreover, an increasing part of the papers addresses questions from a comparative perspective. Reforms regarding normative questions in reforms and change in governance are increasingly addressed and the analyses become more realistic in that the problems, conflicts of interests and power relations are increasingly addressed as factors inhibiting and accelerating reforms in the public sector.