

REFLECTIONS “PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AS THE FOUNDATION OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION”

The conference “**Public Governance as the Foundation of European Integration**” held in **Vienna June 23 and 24, 2016** focused on the modernisation and reform of public administrations in EU and partner countries in the Danube Region and the Western Balkans. On this occasion the Danube Governance Hub was launched.

The participants discussed the main challenges in the field:

- Public finance management at national and sub-national levels,
- Human resource management in public administrations,
- Important role of cities in better public service delivery,
- Civil society as vital partner of public governance.

Apart from the general conclusions that sustained reform efforts in these areas are key to economic development, democratic governance and European integration emphasis was put on:

Strengthening European Values and Instruments of Public Management

In the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Commission has developed initiatives focused on promoting innovation in the public sector, the Digital Agenda, and on the efficiency of justice:

- the European Commission Better Regulation Agenda,
- the EU Quality Public Administration Toolbox (DG Employment),
- the EU Macro-regional strategies,
- the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the European Public Sector Award (EPSA) and the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN).

On the other side the vital role of Public Administration Reform (PAR) is strongly reiterated in the EU’s enlargement strategy where PAR is explicitly referred to as one of the three fundamental pillars of the enlargement process together with rule of law and economic governance. All three areas need to be systematically addressed early on in the accession process. The OECD – EU SIGMA program has defined a set of principles of public administration to assist the candidate countries. Their progress and sustainability are regularly reviewed and monitored by evaluation and progress reports.

The conference discussions revealed that more comprehensive approaches for the modernisation of public administrations in the EU member states AND the candidate countries are needed. Common European standards and values for good governance are essential for an efficient management of public sector organisations having a direct impact on economic governance and sustainability of socio-economic reforms.

Establishing a platform for exchange on public administration instruments and strategies

Due to the lack of *acquis communautaire* for setting standards for governance of national public administrations, an open dialogue how to harmonize European standards and values and the expected developments of the public sector should be initiated.

Areas like strategy and policy development, human resource and financial management, accountability, transparency and service delivery are always on the top of the agenda but communication gaps between the relevant actors lead to duplications. A role model for further discussions of European values in public administration could be the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the quality management tool for the public sector based on European standards. It is an instrument developed by expert groups of IPSP (Innovative Public Service Group) composed of practitioners and experts of national states and

European institutions. A similar forum for sharing information on existing instruments, strategies and the values is needed in the Western Balkans and Danube Region.

❑ Recognizing the essential role of local governments

The important role of local and regional governments in public administration reform is underestimated. In negotiations with the European Commission and EU-Council of Ministers the national governments are the official and sole partners. Often subnational governments are not involved or actively informed about the potential impact of these negotiations relating to areas of their competences. Having the closest ties to the citizens and businesses local and regional governments like Municipal services affect directly the life quality of their citizens and their trust in the public service sector and state structures. Therefore better and more involvement of local and regional government representatives will contribute to a sustainable and efficient public administration reform and European integration.

❑ Improving public sector organizations by implementing pilot projects

Public administration reforms are based on strategies and programmes for comprehensive state modernisation: while this top-down approach is a necessary element of the process, it should be complemented by concrete pilot projects in selected public sector organisations. These modernisation projects could be role models making public administration reform more understandable and motivating. Results could be easier achieved and the added value of a functioning modern public sector would be better visible. Therefore emphasis should be put on innovative modernisation projects - e.g. European Public Sector Award, Label for Effective CAF User - with high potential for transferability.

❑ Encouraging excellent leadership

Good Public Governance needs excellent leadership, management and human resources. Therefore more attention should be paid on education, qualification, recruitment and selection of public service managers. The success of modernization is directly connected to the quality and commitment of the leadership. Although this is a well-known fact, the conference discussions have revealed that although the legal framework has improved, in most of the Western Balkans countries the political influence prevents a merit based recruitment of a modern leadership and human resources.

❑ Opening Government for civil society and transparency

Accountability has been perceived as the key for modern public management which prevents corruption however it can still be observed in all levels of public administration. A culture of openness and participation in administration and policy decision-making requires transparency in all sectors and access to information supported by e-government. The significant influence and power of civil society, non-governmental organisations and the general public in developing and monitoring public administration has been manifested. First steps have been taken but continued efforts are necessary on the way to Open Government.

❑ Profiting from evidence based management and policy making

Decisions have to be based on solid facts and not on dangerous half-truths or myths. This request is the core of all public management reforms since 30 years. It is still a long way to implement this principle in the administrative and state cultures of EU and candidate countries. Good practices of performance budgeting, quality management, monitoring through civil society etc. show the way. More boost for evidence based management and policy making is needed as an antipode to a drift towards post-factual democracies which could endanger the responsibility of political decisions.