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Poland in the European Union: A Challenge for Polish Administration

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- *Our membership in the European Union necessitates strengthening State administration. It is not only a matter of hiring more civil servants but, first and foremost, of thoroughly changing the structure and operating methods of individual institutions. Stronger administration is needed not only because we must adapt to EU procedures and laws; it is also required to ensure a proper utilization of the EU membership for the purpose of solving domestic problems and stimulating economic growth.*
- *The influence of an EU member-state on the functioning of individual EU institutions depends to a large degree on the competence and professionalism of its administration. Therefore, our administration must acquire the ability to identify national interests and plan political and economic growth strategies, and effectively influence EU laws and policies compatible therewith.*
- *The development of these abilities by Polish administration requires introduction of administrative specialties in five principal areas. In addition to administration handling routine government work, it should be expanded by new structures responsible for planning political strategies, effectively implementing government programs, monitoring their outcome and responding to crisis situations.*
- *Among these administrative functions, the management of knowledge and information is particularly important. The current practice of promoting quantity rather than quality of supplied information must be abandoned. Information management is closely tied to giving a proper rank to government priorities and improving the coordination of government work.*
- *There must be a further intensive expansion of administration personnel that deals with European funds, as well as a large-scale training and education effort. The Irish experience shows that the good quality of administrative personnel was precisely the factor responsible for a high structural fund absorption rate and utilisation of the EU membership to the benefit of dynamic economic growth.*

An immense role in European Union activities is played by bureaucratic structures and a regulatory manner of expanding economic and political integration. This is why so much importance is given to the professionalism of civil servants working in EU institutions, particularly in the European Commission, and administrative support of individual member-states. The peculiar role of State administration in the European Union lies in it serving as the exponent and representative of national sovereignty. This is first and foremost associated with the process of member-states sharing their national sovereignty with other players on the European stage, including other countries. Another

aspect which decides on the peculiar role of State administration is the deficit of political legitimacy characteristic of European structures, which do not fully have the mandate of democratic elections. Owing to the complicated nature of negotiation and management procedures, the significance of political representation diminishes while the role played by civil servants and experts increases. An additional factor lies in the instability and haziness of the line demarking competencies and political powers of member-states and European institutions. These circumstances promote the influence of civil servants, who move with ease in the meanders of European procedures and laws.

Influence of the EU on State administration

Administration of an EU member-state is required to implement European policies and legal norms in domestic legislation. However, in practice, states are relatively free to shape pertinent institutions. Still, influenced by EU policies, State administration is compelled to adjust certain activities conducted within the framework of domestic policies. It also alters objectives and substantive content of these policies.

Member-states are also forced to build up their diplomatic and domestic services with a view to participating in political and bureaucratic processes on the European forum. This is particularly visible in the case of new member-states. For example, while preparing for absorption of structural funds, the Polish government has been planning to hire over 600 employees only in 2002/2003. According

to expert assessments, there are many more civil servants servicing European funds in Western countries than currently in Poland. In EU member-states, one civil servant handles on average between Euro 2.5 million and Euro 5 million. It is worth reminding that, in Poland, in the years 2004-2006, one civil servant will handle more than Euro 11 million, which means that starting next year we will need approximately 5000 qualified civil servants to handle EU funds. Therefore, it is imperative to further intensify the expansion of the pool of civil servants handling European funds as well as their training and education.

Influence of State administration on European Union activities

Member-state administrations participate to an important degree in the creation of Community policies and laws, and can largely affect the functioning of the European Union. Domestic civil servants are present at every stage and in all areas of EU institutional activities. The member-state administrative personnel exert a particularly strong influence on the activities of the EU Council and ministerial committees that prepare these activities (e.g. COREPER and ECOFIN Permanent Representative Committees). National administration representatives also participate in the activities of consultative, management and regulatory committees.

In practice, the range of influence of an EU member-state on the functioning of individual EU institutions depends to a great extent on the competence and professionalism of the endeavours

of its administration. State administration that is feeble, poorly staffed and lacking in coordination and expert backing becomes a passive observer of political processes rather than their active participant and initiator. As a result, it does not use its presence in EU structures to a sufficient degree.

It should be remembered that many practical consequences of EU activities ensue not only from mutual cooperation and interdependence but also from a rivalry between individual countries. The outcome of that rivalry increasingly often depends not only on the country's economic and political strength but also on the quality of its domestic administration. Therefore, competition in the European Union is not restricted to the marketplace but also covers public entities – member-states, regions and local self-governments. That is why the quality and efficiency of State administration is so important.

Limited performance possibilities

A structural limitation of performance possibilities is a trait characteristic of public administration in EU member-states. There are many intertwined reasons for this. The most important one is, possibly, the influence of European laws and EU institutions, which in many respects take over and restrict traditional competencies of the national state.

Another obstacle to the proper functioning of State administration may rest in the fact that many competencies are delegated to management and regulatory agencies devoid of proper ministerial or parliamentary control. A decentralisation conducted poorly may result in turn in higher operating costs or difficulties in the implementation of public programs. A commercialisation of certain public

tasks or a transfer of their execution out of public administration may also prove risky. Although it is a way of reigning in administrative costs, most often than not it is done to the detriment of the quality of and public accessibility to services. Another threat lies in an overly great dispersion of power within the government and poor coordination of government policy. In situations where ministers have limited powers and the state budget is increasingly stretched, it provides for a rivalry between ministers that may have dear consequences. It contributes to the atrophy of the government's ability to politically steer the most important tasks of the cabinet and to the gradual disappearance of the ability to identify

strategic challenges facing the country. These conditions weaken the importance of a political leadership of administration and, consequently, cause its internal decay.

In addition, government administration in European countries is influenced by business and international capital. In many cases, political decision-makers, often in highest positions, participate in or consent to the penetration of administration by business interests. It goes without saying that such corruption-generating connections lead to the most destructive changes within public administration.

The need for structural changes in Polish administration

Polish government administration should be thoroughly overhauled to cope with challenges that hand in hand with European integration are put forward by the yet incomplete systemic transformation, process of economic globalisation and low level of legitimisation of the political elites. What is required is not only a larger number of civil servants but, before all else, a thorough alteration of the structure and methods of operation of individual institutions. Recently, the European Commission forced a series of organisational changes in public institutions. However, most often such changes are applied in a mechanical and ad-hoc manner and without any deeper thought given to their expediency under Polish conditions. At the same time, many reorganisation endeavours were carried out in recent years for

reasons of party politics. Their hidden goal was to take over individual institutions from the team that had held power hitherto, harbour political clients while in opposition or reward trusted activists with public service jobs. This type of reorganisation is most often carried out at the expense of professional civil servants and to the detriment of the performed tasks. The best example of this was provided by numerous personnel changes in the Agency for Agricultural Restructuring and Modernisation, which resulted in more than two years of delay in the implementation of the SAPARD program.

The ability to identify national interests

As concerns the presence of Polish public administration in the EU, the most important task is to build up two types of its institutional efficiency. The first type is associated with its ability to handle absorption of European funds and adapt Polish institutions and laws to functioning inside the EU structures. Therefore, these adaptation abilities indispensable to ensuring a basic functioning within the EU are relatively simple.

The other type of efficiency concerns making a good use of our membership in the EU. This refers to the ability of identifying national interests, planning political and economic growth strategies, and developing skills needed to exert an effective influence on the European laws and policies consistent therewith.

Strategic planning skills are particularly poorly represented in government administration, especially

at the ministerial level. There is practically no department in the Prime Minister's Chancellery that plays that role. The Prime Minister's direct support structure is dominated by ministers' political cabinets, whereas those few departments that perform substantive tasks are relegated to summary and routine activities.

The introduction of administrative specialties in five main areas is of utmost importance. In addition to handling routing government work, structures must be appointed to design political strategies, effectively implement government programs and monitor their outcome, and, finally, react to crisis situations. However, it should be kept in mind that effective crisis management must not be focused on countering the aftermath of specific situations. It should serve as an opportunity for analysing the given public system and working out structural modifications.

Knowledge and information management

Within the administrative functions I have listed a particularly important place is held by management of knowledge and information. Its extraordinary significance ensues from the dispersion of Polish administrative institutions, high pace of changes and new challenges facing the State. Especially important is the appropriate segregation and preparation of information from the viewpoint of

the government's strategic objectives. The current practice which promotes quantity of supplied information over its quality must be abandoned. Information management is closely linked to giving a proper rank to government priorities and improving the coordination of its work.

A more effective use must be made of human resources available in the administrative system and of the knowledge of non-governmental and academic

experts. Support must be given to the creation of ad-hoc task networks among civil servants. It is they who should be collaborating and not departments or institutions, as is the case today. A system must be established to motivate civil servants to engage in information exchange and networking. It should focus on problem solving and specific task execution. It should promote creativity among civil

servants. It is not only a matter of giving them new financial incentives. There is a need for motivational techniques associated with transmittal of basic information about the objectives and recipients of the work at hand, its actual consequences and comments expressed with respect to its quality (by experts, the media or politicians).

Flexibility and proper coordination of Polish and EU policies

Also important is the ability to design organisational structures and IT systems commensurate to the needs. Current administrative structures are exceedingly limited by regulations and hierarchal procedural principles. This is why they are not able to cope with occurring changes and politicians' new expectations. Therefore, they must be made much more flexible and variable depending on government requirements. Variable structures and more liberal regulations may also free civil servants' imagination and involvement.

Equally important is the coordination of activities taking place within the government and their subordination to common political objectives. There are at least three basic determinants of an effective coordination of government activities:

- Fluid blending of strategic planning, implementing political programs and monitoring their outcome;
- Management of various IT systems and often mutually incompatible innovations proposed by various government segments. Some of these

innovations result from the will to counter crisis situations. The coordination task consists in this case in an adept inclusion of the appropriate correction in the entire administrative system.

- Ability to coordinate domestic policies with EU policies, and domestic laws with EU laws.

This last element constitutes a particularly serious challenge for Polish high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats. Indeed, one should bear in mind that the legal order, operating strategies and interests of our country and the European Union are rarely the same because they have been established at different times, at a different level of economic development, in response to different political and organisational needs, etc. This is why it is so difficult to join these two institutional trends and coordinate divergent interests. A good example of this phenomenon is provided by the difficulties in linking the Polish regional development policy with that of the EU. Problems with designing an EU fund co-finance system and carrying out a public finance reform associated therewith is another telling example.

The extent of centralisation of the competencies in European matters is yet another problem. It refers in particular to the issue of EU fund management, information flow and methods of coordinating political positions between various levels of public administration, as well as the level of centralisation

of the finance system. It is fair to assume, also on the basis of Polish experience, that an excessive centralisation of the systems in question may be dysfunctional and does not necessarily facilitate administrative tasks resulting from European integration.

Political leadership and control of the whole of administration are indispensable

Administrative reforms initiated to date by successive governments have been fragmented and short-sighted, and were discontinued upon election of the next government. One of the reasons for this state of affairs rests in the substantive and political frailty of successive cabinets, which manifested itself in a low level of public support, weak parliamentary backing or internal conflicts. In such conditions, narrow group interests, including those of individual segments of the bureaucracy, gain the upper hand. These segments become involved in a strong rivalry for power and budgetary resources, sometimes in the opposition to the political leadership of the government. The rivalry eclipses broad social interests and optimality of systemic changes. Unfortunately, Polish administration is preparing for European challenges in just such atmosphere.

This is why the ability to maintain control over the administrative system is the key element of the political power in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century. Before all else, this requires a proper political leadership over the public-service apparatus. To achieve this, the government must

have a proper operating program and strong political backing, and be able to communicate its activities to the population (also by way of promoting them in the media). It also entails maintaining control of the whole of State administration. Here, the most important aspect is the supervision and ability to handle para-budgetary agencies and funds, as well as other government structures such as provincial administration, to the benefit of government policy objectives. Other elements of ensuring control lie in the establishment of appropriate relations between politicians and civil servants, and a thorough overhaul of the Polish civil service system.

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