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FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONING IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Lenka Štefániková – Marek Lenč*

KOVÁČOVÁ, E.: *Verejná správa v SR a jej súvislosti*. Banská Bystrica : Univerzita Mateja Bela, 2011. 194 s. ISBN 978-80-557-0299-5.

Public administration and its theoretical elaboration represent an issue which gained increased attention in Central Europe only recently. Its examination in Slovakia is part of research background of several professionals, **E. Kovačová** among them. The results of her work are numerous publications and contributions devoted to various aspects of public administration functioning in general, and in Slovakia in particular. For several years she has been facilitating her knowledge and skills in this field within teaching activities to academic students, allowing them to acquire basic orientation in a rather complex issue. The publication entitled "Public administration in Slovak Republic and its context" also serves this purpose. It is an academic textbook, which is supposed, as the author states in the preface of the book, *„to clarify the issue of public administration and its context in the Slovak Republic, so that the readers could be easier well versed and better understand the functioning of specific processes in such a complex and dynamic system, as the public administration indubitably is.”*

Following the defined objective the textbook is divided into eight sections that follow the content line and complement each other.

Entry to each chapter represents an introduction dealing with the fundamental changes in the organisation of public administration in the Slovak Republic, related not only to the position of administration authorities, but as

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well as to the territorial and administrative division of the Slovak Republic.

In the first chapter the author addresses theoretical foundations of public administration examination. The second, most extensive part of the textbook, is divided into four subsections. Its content deals with governance and its importance and position it occupies in a democratic society, while special section is devoted to the issue of civil society as a prerequisite for effective functioning of public administration.

The subject of the next subsection is a system of public administration in the context of its complexity. In this context, the author focuses on public administration as a tool for execution of public power, and does not forget to highlight the essential role that public administration plays in the political system (as one of its integral elements) and as well as to address the necessity of modernisation. This demand, to reflect modern trends as well as to satisfy emerging needs of citizens and the state, plays important role in improving administrative efficiency particularly thanks to modern management methods and their application. The last two subsections of the first part are dealing with legislative adjustments of public administration in Slovakia and the essential technical-organisational principles of authorities building in the public administration of the Slovak Republic. Drawing inspiration from **P. Škultéty**, the author includes among them mainly territorial, sectoral and functional principle; collegiate and monocratic principle; electoral principle and designating principle; principle of centralisation and decentralisation; principle of concentration and de-concentration. However, at the same time she emphasizes the need to respect also other principles in the composition of public administration authorities - the primacy of the citizen, the principle of co-operation and the principle of rationality (p. 49).

In the second chapter the reader learns about one of the fundamental components of public administration – the state administration of the Slovak Republic. Individual subchapters deal with the hallmarks of state administration and later on with the role of government and central authorities of state administration in the Slovak Republic which „*consists in carrying out the state administration and ensuring its execution throughout the territory of the entire Slovak Republic*” (p. 56) and also local administration in Slovak Republic, i.e. authorities engaged exclusively in the restricted area and linked with natural and legal persons who have their residence in a given district, carry on business or hold property. From the point of view of their specialisation we can distinguish authorities of general state administration and authorities of specialised state

administration (p. 62).

Content widest (third) chapter brings in 48 pages basic information about self-government as a part of the public administration of the Slovak Republic. In this part of textbook author focused her attention mainly on territorial self-government of the Slovak Republic. She dedicates it most attention and within this issue she focuses on local as well as regional self-government and their distinctive characteristics. In connection with the local self-government we learn mainly about its position, tasks and changes that affected it, further about the objectives of municipal politics and also about municipality as the basic unit of territorial self-government. The part dealing with the regional self-government offers us the characteristics of the higher territorial unit (HTU) as a basis for regional self-government. At the same time, we can find here references about regional disparities, cooperation at the regional level and challenges on which the regional self-government has to respond. Other types of self-government are being elaborated on the last three pages of this chapter.

Next, the fourth (very short) chapter in short introduces a public corporation as a self-governing organisation. As **E. Kováčová** states, their establishment *„allows to optimise the functions of the state ... they support the fulfilment of the roles of the state, and, eventually, other public roles because corporations naturally impact in favour of the state and the public on the principle of independence from central or local state administration, from other kinds of self-government as well as private administration ... They provide their services to the public and are applied as a form of state owned public administration”* (p. 118).

The key theme of the next (fifth) chapter is the process of decentralisation in public administration. Within it, the author mentions the competencies of territorial self-governments, their transition and impact to self-government and alongside it deals with the issue of fiscal decentralisation in the Slovak Republic and its impact in a positive and negative context.

The control in public administration in the Slovak Republic, its nature and significance, preconditions and procedures of implementation, as well as the differentiation of particular types of control (control carried out by public administration authorities, parliamentary control, the control exercised by the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic, the control exercised by the Public Defender of Rights of the Slovak Republic, courts, prosecution etc.) are the very essence of the sixth chapter.

The penultimate chapter discusses accountability in public administration

and final - eight - chapter, concluding the entire textbook, is focused on transparency and its considerable importance on the public administration it represents (not only) in the Slovak Republic.

In the conclusion of the textbook, the author, **E. Kováčová**, formulates the most fundamental challenges that Slovak system of public administration has to take into consideration in the nearest future in order to ensure its effectiveness and continuous improvement. As **E. Kováčová** aptly states, reform of public administration affects all areas of functioning of our society. However, in the Slovak Republic this reform required, as it seems, more rational approach. *„We can state that the organisational structure of public administration in Slovakia is complicated, administratively demanding and does not meet the demands of efficient and rational arrangement. These shortcomings are mainly at the local level in a complicated organisational and institutional composition of local state administration. Creation of a large number of authorities of specialised state administration led to the fragmentation of state administration, thereby from the point of view of citizen increased the confusedness in organisational structure of public administration“* (p. 180).

Whether the situation will improve in the future is questionable. It is now quite difficult to predict towards which direction the public administration system in Slovakia will head. According to **E. Kováčová** is, in this regard, essential to ensure the continuation of the processes of de-concentration at the state level and also the processes of decentralisation towards self-governments which would contribute positively to the strengthening of citizens' participation in governance.

Among the specific challenges for the future of public administration (especially its quality and efficiency) belongs according to the author mainly training of high-quality human resources who will be dealing with the execution of decentralised public administration. She also reminds that continually grows also the need for improving and developing of the educational level of the citizens, and it is also necessary to draw attention to the issue of protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, protection of fundamental rules of civil coexistence, stability and level of relations among people. Further development of the public administration system also depends on how we will manage to cope with the growing trend towards individualism. According to **E. Kováčová** it is also necessary to strengthen control mechanisms and accountability of public administration execution in all areas, enhance transparency, citizen participation and the quality of decisions in order to improve governance at all levels. The

question which remains is, of course, how to do it.

As can be seen from the above, the textbook provides a basic overview of public administration in the Slovak Republic. The author reflects from a number of literary sources, such as monographs, anthologies and various documents related to this issue. The result of the elaboration is a publication which is primarily intended for students in study programs focused on public administration and its individual aspects, possibly also for students in related fields. Its content has its relevance also for the general public, interested in the subject. In addition, simple and transparent elaboration of basic questions, appropriately filled with tables, charts and graphs, makes this textbook to become one of the tools which could serve the above-mentioned increase of the educational level of citizens in order to enhance civic participation.