Conclusions:
TED Dialogue on Politico-Administrative Relations

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The 1.5 days of discussion around the evolution of politico-administrative relations in Europe and neighboring countries reaffirmed the diverging paths of the "old core" of Europe as compared to the Central, Eastern and Southeastern European states ("new Europe" in the remainder of this brief article).

Studying formal and real relations between civil servants and politicians (and the hybrid space in between) has been a feature of public administration and political science for decades, with a focus on different European traditions (Southern Europe, Anglo, Dutch-Scandinavian, German) as well as those in other OECD countries.

While the effective management of the politics-administration nexus is a critical condition for the design and delivery of public policies and services, much of the academic work around this issue has, until recently, bypassed transition countries and countries in development. A lack of access to data and information, a focus on other priority issues and limited analytical interest and capacity can help account for this, regardless of the fact that the role of the public sector, and in particular senior civil servants, has been identified as a critical factor to the success and failure of political transition processes, in particular in the work of Juan Linz and Guillermo O'Donnell in the 1970s and 1980s. In their reading, bureaucratic continuity or discontinuity in transition processes largely depends on whether bureaucracies were "instruments of suppression" under previous regimes.

Transition types and public administration: explaining the fundamentals behind different European paths

Linz (1990) reviewed in detail the different scenarios of constitutional and institutional evolution depending on the regime type that preceded the transition. He draws a distinction between transitions from authoritarian rule (with the military

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and police as the main instrument of suppression) and transitions from totalitarian rule (where the public administration and intelligence services are the main instruments of suppression. This then juxtaposes transition cases like Spain, Portugal and Greece, examples of the first type of transition, with Central and Eastern European states, examples of the second type, and managed by a system coined as "Polit-buerokratie" by Jozsa (1988) and others. This helps explain why, unlike in Southern Europe and Latin America, public-administration systems in Central and Eastern Europe became a key target for the new regime (hence creating high turnover and instability), and why the politics-administration nexus became so contested.

In hindsight, therefore, the very different pattern of evolution of public administration systems in Central and Eastern Europe, compared to the transitions from authoritarianism in Southern Europe, should not have come as a surprise: where Portugal, Spain and Greece modernized existing systems, Central and Eastern European systems were characterized by instability and flux, due, at least in part, to the role public administrations played as an instrument of control under the previous regimes. This then accounts for the different evolution of systems in the first decade after the start of the transition and before EU membership.

It was against this background, and the realization that the instability of the politics-administration nexus was negatively influencing the institutional evolution of the then still "new democracies", that first efforts to study the evolution of the politics-administration nexus in Central and Eastern Europe were made in the late 1990s.

When this work was initiated in 1998, as part of the NISPAcee Working Group, it was based on the assumptions that i) formal-legal arrangements would be a good predictor of the real functioning of these systems and that ii) systems would converge towards a form of management comparable to that known in European OECD countries. The latter became an assumed given, even more so after the definition of European Public Administration Principles and the related baseline for assessment of public-administration systems of EU candidate states in the early 2000s.

Taking stock 30 years on: still diverging models?

Two decades on from the initiation of the NISPAcee working group research project, realities in the two parts of Europe look rather strikingly different. Discussions during the Bratislava sessions revealed the relative stability and continuity in "old" Europe, with some exceptions (such as the role of young advisers disrupting traditional patterns of political cabinet formation in France) which nevertheless confirm the rule of continuity. In addition, the opening up of data and information on public officials have allowed researchers to engage in detailed mapping work on who se-

nior civil servants are, what their political orientation is and how this does, or does not, influence appointments and relations with politicians.

An entirely different picture has emerged for SEE and CEE countries, though also here there is no homogenous picture. The assumptions that were made in the late 1990s (convergence to a form of the dominant EU member state models and formal legal solutions helping stabilize relations) were overtaken by a somewhat unexpected dynamic: After EU membership, we have seen a departure from "mimicking" EU country models towards a different model of politico-administrative interface, which is still evolving. This was captured by Meyer-Sahling in his work for the OECD (2009) and later also by other authors (e.g. Boerzel et al. 2017).

A few striking key features of the post-accession context include: i) the "islands of excellence" in CEE administrations, which managed the EU accession process, dissolved, with many of the talented staff moving to EU institutions or into politics; ii) formal legal systems of managing politico-administrative relations were rapidly dissolved in many countries, leading to a return of high turnover at the top of civil-service systems and weak professionalization; iii) subsequently leaving the remainder of the administration relatively autonomous with limited oversight (and with high levels of perceived corruption). This appears to be (as per Meyer-Sahling's 2009 conclusions) part of an evolution of different value systems in the two parts of Europe. As an important caveat, this is not a homogenous picture, as countries like Estonia (and based on discussions in Bratislava also the Czech Republic) have converged towards more "traditional" European models. However, these appear to be the exceptions.

Finally, there is an issue of "flying blind": compared to their "old" Europe colleagues, researchers focusing on Central and Eastern Europe do not have the same access to data and information, both due to a closing of political space (in many countries), traditional notions that "information is power" and, as discussed during the meeting, proactive data-protection activism that prevents the sharing of information on public officials. Hence, whereas trends in countries like Sweden, Norway, Germany and others can be tracked based on survey-based research (which includes the possibility of tracking the influence of political affiliation on appointments, like in Sweden), evidence in CEE and SEE states often remains relatively anecdotal.

Do politico-administrative relations really matter: a practitioner view

Why does all this matter in practice? From the perspective of development practitioners, concerned with impact (read effective policy and program implementation), a dysfunctional politics-administration nexus is a serious impediment to the possibilities of obtaining results.

Effective implementation, both of investment projects and of economic reforms, is extremely hard to achieve if politico-administrative relations are characterized by revolving-door approaches, frequent changes of political leadership and mutual suspicion, something that is particularly damaging in transition contexts, where workloads related to policy and legal reform are particularly large (and timelines short), and where the smooth operation of politico-administration relations is additionally important.

Going back to the earlier distinction between previous regime types and transitions, administrative continuity was one factor in explaining the relative success in economic transformation in Spain and Portugal in the 1970s, while instability in senior management in the public sector was identified in the mid-1990s as a key impediment for progress on meeting economic EU membership requirements in CEE countries (Verheijen 1995, 27–28). In my current work in the Maghreb, we can see similar distinctions between economically better performing countries that have a functioning senior executive service, while high turnover and limited trust have hampered reform in others.

Finally, in a world where comparison and rankings (Doing Business, Competitiveness Index, Human Capital Index etc.) have become a significant factor in driving investment decisions, weak implementation capacity and ineffective bureaucracies become a direct impediment to economic growth.

Globalization, which in the development of civil-service systems is seen mostly through a combination of i) the impact of global rankings and scorecards, ii) the growing importance of international organizations' bilateral partners in the national policy dialogue, and iii) the permeation of standards of access to information and open government, makes the politics-administration nexus and its management an ever more important feature of the study of the policy-delivery system. This, in itself, will be a subject for further research, starting with ongoing work on select MENA countries (Verheijen, Staronova, O'Meally and Lefebvre, 2021), where transition processes have created dysfunctionality in delivery systems.

TED dialogue issues and follow-up research

Coming back to the TED dialogue discussions, a few points stand out.

First, as already mentioned, there is a striking difference between "old" and "new" Europe when it comes to access to data and information; whereas previously closed systems in continental Europe have opened up to follow traditionally open systems in Scandinavia and Finland, the closing of political space in many CEE and SEE countries have had the opposite effect there. The implication of this is that doing cross-European research is becoming increasingly difficult. There are exceptions, like Estonia and possibly the Czech Republic (while at the same time Austria of the "old" group has seen a closing of space when it comes to the availability of

data and information), but overall the two parts of the continent appear to be travelling in different directions.

This makes evidence-based research on why politico-administrative systems are characterized by frequent changes and instability (and a lack of permanency in the civil service) extremely hard to do. Finding a way forward is important, but working within the constraints of the data-protection act, overly zealous data-protection commissioners and politicians who do not favor open government methods this is a serious challenge. This is a challenge that goes beyond academic research; even reform efforts like the development of civil-service management database tools are hindered and constrained by data-protection concerns. There are no easy solutions to this, but it still is an issue to be discussed and explored further.

Second, the issue of values and value systems is one to be explored further. A further area where trends in different parts of Europe are diverging is on what drives and motivates especially younger people to join the civil service. Younger talented staff appear to be more interested in a short-term experience working at the top of the public sector, close to political leaders, as part of a rapid and steep career track, than in a long-term engagement in public service. While these are trends that are visible also in more traditional systems like France (with Macron's "young kids" cited as an example), this has been a tendency in CEE countries for a longer time, including those that worked in the EU accession islands of excellence in the years leading up to EU membership. One part of a research agenda would be to conduct an assessment of what motivates and drives this group of "non typical public officials" and whether this is part of a trend that we see in other parts of the world, where public and private-sector values are seen as increasingly converging (especially in English-speaking OECD countries).

Third, the question of accountability remains a primary issue. While in the past accountability was understood to be about the relations between elected politicians and appointed civil servants, driven largely by legal norms, today's accountability patterns are very different. Direct accountability to citizens (through freedom of information acts, publicly available performance records, technology-based feedback mechanisms), the impact of global rankings and scorecards (which are tools in the hands of civil society and interest groups), direct relations with the EU, IFIs and other development partners, including in policy dialogue, have all combined to make mapping accountability (and who influences whom) complex and challenging. If anything, this seems to be an area of major opportunity for research, and one that still seems underexplored.

The work of the Aiddata (Parks et al., 2015) project at Williamsburg (https://www.aiddata.org/ltl), for instance, has been useful in understanding the extent and impact of dialogue between national officials and development partner institutions on policy formulation and implementation. A targeted survey on EU accession candidates and neighboring countries building on a similar approach would help build

a deeper understanding on how this impacts accountability. The same could go for more qualitative research on how business associations and other interest groups use international rankings and ratings to push for greater accountability for results on business climate reforms and related issues.

In the same way, the study of how policy advice is produced and managed, and by whom, is critical. The role of national and international think tanks and advisory companies, the provision of non-demanded advice, and other factors appear to have combined to marginalize top civil servants when it comes to the provision of policy advice. The extent to which senior officials still play a role in providing and filtering advice is another interesting and worthwhile research area, especially also to answer the question who has influence in the market for policy advice?

The politico-administrative nexus remains very important for governability and delivery of public policies but is clearly significantly more complex to analyze today than it was two decades ago. Based on the discussions in the TED dialogue, getting to a more granular understanding of trends, especially in countries and systems that have stopped "mimicking" "old Europe", is an important area of research that has value for academic researchers and policy practitioners alike, most of all, because insights from transition states in CEE and SEE could hold important lessons for other transition cases globally. For that, however, some of the challenges discussed in this brief introduction would need to be overcome.

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