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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN SLOVAKIA AFTER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN 1998¹

Daniel Klimovský²

Abstract:

The public administration reform implemented in Slovakia after the parliamentary election of 1998 was in fact the second wave of reform in Slovak public administration. After the successful overthrow of the communist regime at the very end of the 1980s and early 1990s, an authoritarian style of public policy-making represented by the Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar was operated from 1994-1998. Centralization, instead of decentralization, was the priority of his government, and Slovakia was excluded from negotiations for

¹ Abbreviations used in the article: ANO (Aliancia nového občana) – Alliance of the New Citizens; DS (Demokratická strana) – Democratic Party; DÚ (Demokratická únia) – Democratic Union; HZDS (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko) – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia; KDH (Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie) – Christian Democratic Movement; SDK (Slovenská demokratická koalícia) – Slovak Democratic Coalition; SDKÚ (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia) – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union; SDL (Strana demokratickej ľavice) – Party of the Democratic Left; SDSS (Sociálno-demokratická strana Slovenska) – Social Democratic Party of Slovakia; Smer-SD (Smer – Sociálna demokracia) – Direction – Social Democracy; SMK (Strana maďarskej koalície) – Hungarian Coalition Party; SNS (Slovenská národná strana) – Slovak National Party; SOP (Strana občianskeho porozumenia) – Party of Civic Understanding; SZS (Strana zelených Slovenska) – Green Party of Slovakia; ZRS (Združenie robotníkov Slovenska) – Association of Workers of Slovakia; NKÚ (Najvyšší kontrolný úrad) – Superior Controlling Authority; NRSR (Národná rada Slovenskej republiky) – The National Council of the Slovak Republic; ROH (Revolučné odborové hnutie) – Revolutionary Trade Unions; ÚMS (Únia miest Slovenska) – The Union of Towns of Slovakia; ZMOS (Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska) – Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia.

² Daniel Klimovský, PhD. is lecturer and researcher at the Department of Regional Science and Management, Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Košice, Slovakia. He is also a director of the NGO Slovak Political Institute. He deals with both public policy-making at the local and regional levels and public administration with special regard to local and regional governments. Contact: daniel.klimovsky@tuke.sk, daniel.klimovsky@spinstitut.sk.

membership in the EU and NATO. However, the party of Vladimír Mečiar moved into opposition after the parliamentary election of 1998, and the new ruling party began with a few ambitious reforms including the second wave of public administration reform. It was built on the principles of decentralization as well as modernization. This article is aimed at this second wave of public administration reform in Slovakia. Its author evaluates its content and impacts.

Key words: public administration reform, Slovakia, decentralization, regional government, local government, local state administration

Introduction

Public administration reform was a popular buzzword and program of nearly all governments in the post-communist countries during the 1990s. External pressure exerted by such organizations as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, European Union etc. led these governments in many cases to formulate decentralization policies and public administration reforms. The reforms vary in terms of their extent as well as quality, and Slovakia implemented its public administration reform, or more precisely its second wave of reform, quite late in comparison with other post-communist countries.

This article explains why public administration reform was implemented in two waves, and why the second wave – i.e. the one implemented after the parliamentary election of 1998 – was very important. Relevant secondary statistical data are utilized in order to support the arguments of the article.

The parliamentary election of 1998 as a turning point

The communist institutions were removed practically immediately in the former Czechoslovakia. The replacement of these institutions by a new system of (especially political, administrative, and economic)

institutions was problematic rather than trouble-free³. One of the most visible uncertainties in this replacement was related to its tempo. The new system's institutions were (in comparison with the removal of the so-called old principles) developed very slowly, and moreover, they were developed quite often in a chaotic and non-strategic manner.

Political parties, which came into existence at the beginning of 1990, were not professional enough, did not go through a lengthy process of ideological profiling, and often faced inner disintegration processes. In the context of public administration reform, and especially decentralization, two main stages can be distinguished, as pointed out by Nižňanský (2006). The first lasted from 1990 to 1991 and was associated with a renovation of local self-government units, i.e. communes. The second began in 1998 (or more precisely in 1999) and was halted in 2006 when a new government decided to discontinue decentralization processes.

The transformation of the territorial structure of government was considered an essential task in the process of rebuilding political and administrative systems in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (Illner, 1999: 7), and Czechoslovakia was not an exception. Before 1990, only state administration had existed there. Even though the lower bodies of this state administration system dealt with all administrative and political issues and had the right to establish various committees in which citizens could be involved, in fact (primarily because of existing strict subordination) it was not possible

³ A good example of such was the change involving social dialogue or employment negotiations. While in the pre-November 1989 period, there were virtually no employers' organizations (the state was almost the monopoly employer), furthermore, the freedom and rights of the trade unions were represented by the ROH, which was also controlled by the state. After the abolition of the ROH in the spring of 1990 new trade union organizations and organs were established by the bottom-up method (Čambáliková, 1996: 191). However, negotiating activities were complicated not only because of actors' lack of experience with social dialogue under the conditions of a market economy but also due to the unwillingness or incapability of some actors to respect the requirements or proposals of other actors.

to speak about territorial self-government in that time. Moreover, legislation defined national committees as “state organs with self-government character” which proved their special character.

The communities obtained self-governing status in 1990 and their prime function became an execution of public affairs administration in those matters that were not the function of state administration. In this way the Slovak communities became fully-fledged policy-making actors at a local level. In the same year, the system of national committees was abolished and new state administration authorities were established. Another important point in terms of policy-making processes (and more precisely policy-making actors) is the fact that this process of abolition also related to the regional level of state administration because all regional state administration bodies were abolished.

The next stage of reform was affected, very markedly, by political tensions that occurred between the highest political representations of both the Czech and Slovak parts of the ČSFR. After a series of unsuccessful political negotiations, the 1992 parliamentary election became a turning point. The impatient winners of the election – Prime Minister Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic, and Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia – were able to agree only on the division of the common state into two independent states, and on the 1st January 1993, Czechoslovakia was dissolved.

As has been pointed out by Szomolányi (2004), in the case of the Slovak Republic (SR), democratization was anything but a simple and straightforward process. During the mid-1990s, the Slovak political situation was characterized by the absence of a consensual elite, reflected in the polarisation of society. Although levers had already been created for the public to access the policy-making process in the early 1990s, the strengthening of public participation was not really a priority. In this period the policies of the government were met with disapproval by a significant share of the population which participated in demonstrations, organized by opposition parties and civic associations, in Bratislava as well as in other cities in the SR

(Mesežnikov, 1997: 19). Moreover, in 1995-1997, during the era characterized by a “struggle over the rules of the game” and political instability, the idea of a consolidated democracy in the SR was considered more uncertain than just “a variant of an unstable regime”⁴ (Szomolányi, 2004: 9); the main impression within the frame of policy-making processes. The so-called “Slovak way of transformation” pursued from 1994 onwards by the governing coalition, was characterized by: a long-standing conflict between the highest state executive officials (especially between the President and the Prime Minister); antagonism between the ruling coalition and the opposition; the adoption of legislative and administrative measures designed to concentrate all political power and to eliminate room for the competitive interplay of political forces; the use of authoritarian methods to solve social conflicts; the repression of political rivals (including the illegal involvement of the secret service); political and economic cronyism; conflict between the state (executive power) and the representatives of civil society, and; mounting tension between executive officials and ethnic minorities (Mesežnikov, 1999: 13). Paradoxically, as mentioned by Klimovský (2005), such a complicated political situation activated the third sector, with many NGOs which deal with political issues coming into existence in this period.

It is not surprising that the government did not have a genuine concern about decentralization in such a political situation. With regard to reforming public administration, the government fulfilled only two of its pledges. One involved a “horizontal” integration of the national government system, which reduced the number of local offices of the national government. The other was the creation of a

⁴ As stated by Mesežnikov (1997), the government coalition did not only completely eliminate the ability of the opposition to influence who would occupy key functions in the state administration but also filled these posts with its own members or adherents (the most important information about every candidate was his/her political affiliation). Thus, personnel changes within the system of public administration after December 1994 had the character of cadre purges, and the ruling coalition’s activities relating to occupancy of free public functions signified the cynicism and arrogance of the coalition toward the opposition as well as its scorn for professional and moral quality.

new administrative structure which divided the country into 8 regions and 79 districts. The effect of these measures was not to streamline the system but in fact to make it more inefficient, as the number of government offices and state officials and the level of public expenditure all increased (Kling, Nižňanský and Petráš, 1999: 108). This tendency to strengthen state administration in the period 1994-1998, shown for example by the number of central state administration staff increasing from 4735 civil servants in 1993 to 8022 civil servants in 1998, resulted from the political situation or more precisely from the government's policy.

The first years of the second wave of public administration reform

Although the results of the parliamentary elections of 1998 indicated an ongoing strong position for the party of Vladimír Mečiar within the Slovak political scene, because of the zero-coalition potential of this party, a new ruling coalition had to be created. The main problem, as well as the weakest point, of this ruling coalition was the inconsistency of its internal program.

A key reason for the collaboration of the different parties stemmed primarily from the previous government's style of policy-making and hence from an identification of a common political enemy in the controversial Prime Minister of the previous government: Vladimír Mečiar. Moreover, the party discipline of the ruling coalition's parties sometimes malfunctioned, which was associated not only with differences in the priorities of these parties but also with the fact that the SDK was an artificial political party comprised of several independent parties⁵. Thus, although the government approached the

⁵ The amendment to the Law on Parliamentary Election was a tool in the hands of the then-ruling coalition to weaken the opposition in general and individual opposition groupings in particular. It required that each individual party in a coalition secured at least 5% voter support to be given seats in parliament, and the main reason for inclusion of such an element was the fact that it would prevent then-opposition parties from forming standard pre-

preparation and implementation of reforms, the intensity of these reforms was limited by the political composition of the government, and their character was quite selective (Mesežnikov, 2004: 63-64).

In spite of political differences and the other contexts mentioned above, every member of this ruling coalition declared a willingness to start a large-scale reform of the public administration system that would lead to its modernization, and a stronger orientation towards citizens' needs. Such declarations were included in the program proclamation and had connection with Slovakia's effort to become a full member of the European Union.

The activities of the government between November and December 1998 focused on analyzing the current state of affairs in the country and in government ministries, and on creating conditions for the swift rectification of the flawed pieces of legislation adopted by the previous government. A detailed analysis of the situation in which the previous government had left the country was published in February 1999, in the so called Black Book (almost every ministry published its own Black Book) (Mesežnikov, 1999: 25).

The government declared the transfer of the responsibility for public administration reform to a Government Commissioner (Plenipotentiary) for Public Administration Reform, and Viktor Nižňanský, who was at that time the director of the economic think-tank M.E.S.A. 10, was consequently appointed in February 1999.

election coalitions and thereby using the full potential of individual coalition members in the election (Mesežnikov, 1999: 15). Therefore the representatives of KDH, DÚ, DS, SDSS, and SZS, parties which had started to co-operate together in 1997 as a standard election coalition, in 1998 started to discuss openly the organizational setup of the SDK in order to find an optimum form of participation in the parliamentary election. In this way they united five political entities of various sizes and ideologies out of a desire to preserve democracy; by attaining sufficient electoral support to reverse unfavorable developments and creating a broad-based coalition of democratically-oriented political parties (Mesežnikov, 1999: 42). Finally, in March 1998, the SDK was registered by the Ministry of the Interior as an independent political party.

However, under pressure from the two coalition's left-oriented member parties (SDL' and SOP), regarding the aforementioned transfer of responsibility, the ruling coalition had to change their declared plans. Finally, the responsibility was divided among eight officials (four Deputy Prime Ministers, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Finances, the Head of the Office of Government of the Slovak Republic, and the original choice, the Government Commissioner for Public Administration Reform), which can be seen as an embarrassing situation. The absurdity of this decision, and the chaos it sowed in the responsibilities of the various actors, was apparent as early as December 1999, when the SDL' accused the Government Commissioner for Public Administration Reform of not having carried out sufficient preparation for the reform of public administration. This party also demanded that a single person be made responsible for preparation of the reform, and proposed that the entire agenda be transferred to the Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation (this position having been over by a representative of SDL') and to the Ministry of the Interior⁶. But it was soon apparent that SDL's demands and its attempt to gain control of the management of the reform flowed from its partisan interests – this party objected to the extent of decentralization proposed and to the structure of local state administration offices as well as to the swiftness of the reform (Kňazko and Nižňanský, 2001: 107). The Draft Conception of Decentralization and Modernization of Public Administration was approved by the government on the 11th April 2000.

In May 2000, the Parliament passed the Law on Unrestrained Access to Information. The entire legislative process was accompanied by a support campaign led by NGOs under the slogan "what is not secret is public" (Mesežnikov, 2001a: 19). This act created a broader political space and more possibilities for the involvement of the public in policy-making processes.

⁶ Ironically, it was SDL' along with SOP that had most vehemently opposed the idea of leaving preparation of the reform up to an individual government commissioner, and had demanded that various ministers be given responsibility for it (Kňazko and Nižňanský, 2001: 107).

At the same time the government was deciding on the establishment of regional self-government units and their bodies. Members of the government debated the division of the regions into 8 or 12 units in June 2000. With the exception of two ministers from the SMK, all members voted on the 12 unit variant⁷. An integral part of public administration reform should also mean a reduction of regional, as well as district, state administration. However the ruling coalition, in the first half of its term of office, had diametrically opposing opinions on the transfer of state property to the self-government units, according to Kňažko and Nižňanský (2001). Even the state bureaucrats (i.e. highly senior civil servants) and some of the ministers (particularly those from left-wing parties, i.e. the SDL' and SOP) were jealous of surrendering property related to the devolution of powers and wanted to retain their influence over that property. This was in direct conflict with the principles set out in the Strategy of Public Administration Reform. In this context, in September 2000, the SDL' utilized the right of veto in order to stop a proposal on the abolition of regional and district state administration authorities with general competences and on their replacement by the regional or district state administration authorities with specialized competences.

An evaluative report of the European Committee consequently criticized the government in November 2000 due to fact that the approbation of concrete acts associated with public administration

⁷ This result, as given by Kňažko and Nižňanský (2001), was somewhat surprising. In 1999 the SDL' preferred the 3 + 1 model (three regions, i.e. Western Slovakia, Middle Slovakia, and Eastern Slovakia, + Bratislava), and was willing to accept a maximum of 8 regional self-government units, but in June 2000 SDL' ministers supported the aforementioned proposal. The behaviour of the two government members representing SMK reflected a dissatisfaction of this party with the government disapproval of the establishment of the so called "Komárno župa" (SMK requested an establishment of an independent regional self-government unit that should have involved six districts which are characterized by a high share of citizens with Hungarian nationality and are situated in the South-West part of the SR) as well as with the government decision to divide these districts between two regions. The SMK later restricted its demands, and asked for the incorporation of all these districts into one regional self-government unit.

reform, as well as the approval of an Act on Civil Service, were delayed (Kling and Nižňanský, 2001: 208).

As stated by Demeš (2001), the NGOs did not remain passive in this situation and began to be much more active in relation to public administration reform. After the conference entitled “Civic Vision of Slovakia: The Third Sector on Public Administration Reform” (Občianska vízia Slovenska: Tretí sektor o reforme verejnej správy), organized by the S.P.A.C.E. Foundation in January 2001 for all relevant political actors, they started a campaign called “For a Real Public Administration Reform” (Za skutočnú reformu verejnej správy) in March 2001, which was supported by petition activities. Consequently, activists from more than 300 Slovak NGOs published a public appeal called “Accomplish What You Have Promised, Make Terms, and Revive a Real Public Administration Reform” (Splňte, čo ste sľúbili, dohodnite sa, oživte skutočnú reformu verejnej správy).

In such an atmosphere, during its special session on 1st April 2001, the government agreed on two draft laws regarding the establishment of regional self-government units and their bodies. The government approved a decision on the creation of 12 parallel regional units and bodies – 12 regional state administrative authorities and 12 regional self-government units, i.e. a 12 + 12 model (although the SDL and SOP did not support this variant, they did not use the right of veto) even though there was extensive resistance against this model from some political actors⁸; for instance the ZMOS also preferred the

⁸ The government proposal of the 12 + 12 model was under the pressure of criticism especially from opposition political actors. The HZDS preferred the variant of 8 regional state administration authorities and parallel 8 regional self-government units. The SNS advocated 3+1 or 4 regional territorial units (Bratislava, Eastern Slovakia, Middle Slovakia, and Western Slovakia). Its representatives emphasized that such a territorial division would be optimal in terms of balancing the state budget. Probably the most criticism concerning public administration reform came from the Smer-SD: at the beginning of 2001 its representatives criticized public administration reform as such. For example, Boris Zala stressed that it would internally disintegrate the state, which would lose its control function and cause many serious problems related to the functioning of state administration as well as

original government proposal declared in the official public statements presented by its representatives. However, these drafts were not supported by all the political actors of the ruling coalition (the left-wing parties, i.e. the SDL and SOP, did not vote on their approval in the proposed versions⁹) during the parliamentary discussion on them (on 4th July 2001), and therefore their approved versions varied from proposed ones. Finally the NRSR approved three important Acts that were influenced by the mentioned events: the Law on Self-Government of the Superior Territorial Units (the Self-Government Regions); the Law on Bodies of Self-Government Regions Election; and the Law on the Devolution of Some Competences from State Administration Bodies to the Communities and Superior Territorial Units. As far as the competences are concerned, these were transferred from the sub-system of state administration to the relevant territorial self-government units (i.e. communities and superior territorial units) over several different periods¹⁰. The reason why such a periodical approach was decided upon was an the necessity to provide an adequate time for both the superior territorial units and the communities to prepare themselves for the proper execution of these competences. However, even if the transfer periods had been longer, it would not have been possible for the most of communities to be

territorial self-government. The chairman of Smer-SD, Róbert Fico, characterized this reform as an “organized diffusion of chaos” and as “mafia way to divide a territory, influence and money” (Mesežnikov, 2001b: 105). However, critical comments on public administration reform, and primarily on territorial division, came from the side of the ANO as well, as it demanded a model of 16 regional self-government units.

⁹ These two coalition partners behaved in opposition to the proposal that was approved by the Government of the SR (Government Decrees No. 23/2000; 491/2000; 293/2000), the Council of the Government of SR for Public Administration, the Economic Council of the Government of SR, the Council of ZMOS, the Congress of ZMOS, and the ÚMS. This was paradoxical because they had representatives in all of the aforementioned bodies and had supported the proposal there.

¹⁰ For instance, there were five different periods for the transfer of some competences from state administration units to communities under the rule of the Law on the Devolution of Some Competences from State Administration Bodies to the Communities and Superior Territorial Units: as amended per January 1st, 2002; per April 1st, 2002; per July 1st, 2002; per January 1st, 2003; and as per January 1st, 2004.

prepared. The problem is that there are too many very small communities, especially in the countryside of Eastern and Southern parts of the SR. To exemplify this with two statistics, nearly 70% of all Slovak communities have less than 1,000 inhabitants, and only slightly more than 16% of the total population of the SR lives in these small Slovak communities. To select an example, the smallest Slovak community called Príkra has only 7 inhabitants but, under the rule of the Law on Local Governments as amended, it has the same competences as the biggest Slovak community with a one-level communal self-government¹¹ – Prešov, which has more than 90,000 inhabitants.

The most unaccountable point linked with the political activities concerning approbation of these acts was the focus on the details of the regional division of Slovak territory, instead of a complex appraisal of the quality of this aspect of public administration reform. Immediately after the decision of the NRSR, Viktor Nižňanský resigned from the position of government commissioner, and Ivan Mikloš, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economics, refused to guarantee the form of public administration reform. The representatives of ZMOS, various NGOs, and communities protested against the approved territorial division and likened it to a violation of democratic principles or political failure. ANO even requested the suspension of public administration reform in its entirety, and its main argument was linked to the weak legal preparation and vaguely defined competences of superior territorial units' bodies. However, nothing came of this protest and the question of the continuation of public administration reform was overshadowed by an election.

¹¹ Bratislava and Košice are the biggest Slovak communities (there are more than 450,000 inhabitants in Bratislava, and 240,000 inhabitants in Košice) and, under the rule of the Law on the Capital of the Slovak Republic Bratislava as amended, as well as the Law on the City of Košice as amended, they use the so called two-level communal self-government. This is where one level is represented by the city as a unit with its self-governing bodies, and the second one involves parts of the city (Bratislava is divided into 17 city parts, Košice into 22 city parts) with their self-governing bodies.

The continuation of the second wave of public administration reform

After the parliamentary election in 2002, a ruling coalition of right-centrist (conservative as well as liberal) political parties – SDKÚ, SMK, ANO and KDH – was created. From the viewpoint of program orientation, these parties promoted market-oriented policies in the social-economic fields and adhered to basic liberal democratic values. The government program of this coalition presented an ambitious plan of sectoral reforms concentrated within a short period of time (Mesežnikov, 2004: 64).

There were three important turbulences within the ruling coalition formed after the parliamentary election in 2002 which, in the end, led to the shortening of the government's term of office (i.e. in 2006). However, in spite of these crises, the government was able to push ahead several important reforms¹², even in a period at the very end of its term of office,.

The poll linked to the second regional self-government election in 2005 was characterized as political disillusion; approximately 18% of the electorate voted in the first round, however the vote in the second round was only slightly over 11%. Empirical data derived from various surveys or political analyses (Klimovský, 2006a; Klimovský, 2007;

¹² The second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda was (and still is) very often characterized as rightist-oriented one. As Javůrek (2004) pointed out, the majority of Slovak citizens, under the influence of various mass media and opposition parties considered it as a rightist government and therefore all its reforms received the title of "rightist" too. But such approach is too simplified. Videlicet, most of the realized reforms had only an anti-collision character, and public administration reform was not an exception. Therefore, any attempts to create a causal connection between its shape and rightist-oriented government are incorrect and imprecise. Many of the implemented changes were necessary, and it was a coincidence that there was no sufficient political willingness to put them into practice earlier. Such a connection caused public opinion on public administration reform to become connected with public opinion on the government and its other activities.

Mesežnikov, 2006) that were developed before this election support a hypothesis about a low degree of citizens' awareness and interest in the activities of regional self-government bodies within the period of their first term of office¹³.

Concerning the public administration system, the government implemented fiscal decentralization and put into practice some substantial changes concerning state administration (particularly at its sub-national levels).

The government decided and parliament consequently approved a huge reduction of general state administration in 2003. The most visible part of this reduction, from the citizens' point of view, was the abolition of all district state administration authorities and a re-establishment of state administration authorities at the borough level. The main driver of this was a governmental effort to reduce generalized state administration (because of the large transfer of competences from the regional or district state administrations to the regional or local levels of self-government), and vice versa, to strengthen its specialized aspects. As stated by Kling and Pilát (2003), the reduction of civil servants in the period of years 2002 and 2003 was slower than that planned and proclaimed by the government: as an example, 770 civil servants should have been withdrawn by 1st May 2003, but their term was prolonged until the 1st July 2003, and only 382 civil servants were in fact withdrawn.

Since 1989, all ruling coalitions have endeavoured to influence policy linked to the system of state administration. Some of them hid their own agendas, but some acted openly and without any regard for public opinion. There were even ruling coalitions which criticized their predecessors whilst their own activities were the same if not worse. A typical example, cited by Láštic (2004), is the replacement of numerous district authority principals who were politically affiliated to the SDL' or SOP by others who politically linked to the parties of the ruling coalition (i.e. ANO, KDH, SDKÚ or SMK) at the end of 2003. It

¹³ However, this low awareness of citizens persists (Klimovský, 2009a).

occurred even though it was officially decided on the 5th November 2003 by the Law on Regional Authorities and Borough Authorities, that these district authorities would be abolished and replaced by borough authorities as per the 1st January 2004.

The issue of fiscal decentralization became a true “hit” in the public debate on public administration reform and its continuation. All major political parties pledged to decentralize power over public money, and all advocated accumulation of the self-generated revenues of self-government units (Kling and Nižňanský, 2003: 195) at both the local and regional levels. Viktor Nižňanský, before its implementation, stated that many political actors as well as common people automatically connected fiscal decentralization to higher revenues in local and regional self-government budgets. It seemed difficult to explain that fiscal decentralization should play “only” the role of a suitable tool which shifts decision-making processes regarding fiscal tools or instruments (mainly taxes, i.e. tax policy) from the central level to lower levels (Manca, 2003: 3).

Fiscal decentralization was not implemented at the same time as the decentralization of competences, and because it was implemented later, some serious problems occurred. Of course, it interfered with basic principles of the division of political power and responsibility: because the sub-national self-government units remained dependent on the central government’s decisions, there was no motivation to utilize their own potential and remove the disconnection between the delivering of public services and tax payment, or low responsibility for public dues.

Although fiscal decentralization was primarily viewed with apprehension by the self-government units and their associations, after a relatively short period their representatives complimented its impact¹⁴. However, because of the mechanism of fiscal

¹⁴ Pilát and Valentovič (2006) mention that according to ZMOS's internal research, only 11 towns lost due to fiscal decentralization and its compensation mechanism in 2005. For that reason ZMOS supported it.

compensation, the representatives of the biggest towns (for example Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava or Žilina) were not as satisfied as the smaller communities. As a consequence of this situation an internal tension in ZMOS occurred, for example the representatives of the above mentioned larger towns threatened ZMOS with a suspension of their memberships.

Despite strong opposition from ZMOS, on 27th September 2005 the Parliament approved an amendment of the Constitution of the SR and introduced an external control, realized by the NKÚ and its organizational units, with respect to territorial self-government (until this period, external control could have been exercised only in cases of the execution of delegated state administration tasks). ZMOS considered it as providing an opportunity for needless state interference with self-government issues, but the majority of experts – e.g. Pilát and Valentovič (2006) – considered it a meaningful and necessary element which reflected an increase in the importance of territorial self-government.

Besides the changes mentioned above, several interesting and in some cases also rational proposals concerning territorial self-government were drafted in 2004 and 2005 Klimovský (2008). First of all there was a document entitled Communal Reform which had been elaborated by Viktor Nižňanský, the Government Commissioner (Plenipotentiary) for Decentralization of Public Administration. This document involved, besides other elements, justification and proposals for an amalgamation of units on a communal level of territorial self-government. Viktor Nižňanský was inspired by the amalgamation processes in several European countries (for example in Nordic countries, Poland, and some German states) and proposed two possibilities for an elimination of the too highly fragmented local government system in Slovakia. As he emphasized, the Slovak communities should be amalgamated in one of two ways: either in an area-based way which would be connected with abolition of amalgamated communities (amalgamated communities would create defined and fixed number of municipalities with their own legal personalities); or by the establishment of communal unions

(associations) which would be connected with the preservation of amalgamated communities (a communal union would be a territorial self-government intermediary, and a fixed number of such unions would not be defined). The representatives of ZMOS, and especially its chairman Michal Sýkora, stressed that communal reform was necessary but that amalgamation is possible only if the principle of spontaneity is adhered to. Besides this proposal, some experts as well as politicians called for a re-arrangement of the regional division of Slovak territory. While the creation of more regional territorial self-government units in the Eastern part of the the SR (for instance Region Spiš or Region Zemplín) was supported mainly by the regional political actors, the issue of independence for Bratislava (with its position of a self-government region) was supported not only by Bratislava's representatives but also by many experts. A very interesting debate appeared within the context of the self-government of Košice. As mentioned, although this city only had slightly over 240,000 inhabitants, it is divided into 22 city parts, which is both unusual and inefficient because the largest (Košice – Západ) has more than 40,000, and the smallest (Košice – Lorinčík) less than 400, inhabitants. Last but not least, there was a proposal related to the possibility of a temporal unification of territorial self-government elections (i.e. communal self-government elections as well as regional self-government elections). Its proponents argued for an *ad hoc* prolongation of the terms of office of those superior territorial units' bodies that were established by regional self-government elections in 2001. On the contrary, the opponents of this proposal reasoned that its impracticality lay in a danger of setting a precedent which could be misapplied in the future. However, all these proposals failed to attract broad political or public interest and support. For example, as far as communal reform is concerned, a new government elected in 2006 did not refer to it in its manifesto; in the case of Košice, on account of strong resistance from smaller city zones, this debate lost its way; and with reference to the prolongation of regional self-government bodies' term of office, the points emphasized by its opponents turned the tide.

Conclusion: the most important outcomes and expectations

The second wave of public administration reform in Slovakia was not as essential as the first wave, when the communist regime had been removed by completely new democratic institutions, but its impact is significant (Klimovský, 2006b). In spite of turbulences within the ruling coalition, it was able to implement several important measures, namely:

- the establishment regional self-government;
- extraordinarily widespread administrative and political decentralization including both regional and local levels;
- reduction of the local state administration (including not only the number of institutions but also the number of civil or public servants), and;
- fiscal decentralization that led to the stabilization of local and regional budgets.

Obviously, it is impossible to say that the second wave of public administration reform in Slovakia solved all of the problems associated with inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the public administration system. Furthermore, in the period of 2006-2010 the reform efforts have almost stopped, and therefore there is a question as to whether the new government which was created by the parliamentary election in June 2010 will be able to re-join in those efforts. Inter alia, so called communal reform (or more precisely the consolidation of local government structures and amalgamation of the smallest communities), the implementation of a higher level of e-governance (with special regard to the digitalization of public procurements and information instruments), and the continuation in reductions of state administration are awaited with huge expectations¹⁵.

¹⁵ See also Nižňanský (2005), Klimovský (2008), Klimovský 2009b, Klimovský 2010a, and Klimovský 2010b.

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