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**Panel: PUBLIC SECTOR COORDINATION IN CEE AND BEYOND**

*Call for papers*

**Chairs:**

**Dr. Külli Sarapuu**, Associate Professor, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia; [kylli.sarapuu@ttu.ee](mailto:kylli.sarapuu@ttu.ee)

**Dr. Katarína Staroňová**, Associate Professor, Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia; [katarina.staronova@fses.uniba.sk](mailto:katarina.staronova@fses.uniba.sk)

Public sector coordination has become one of the key issues in contemporary public administration discourse. Governments worldwide have used a variety of instruments to address perceived coordination problems and to foster collaboration between public agencies whose focus is on specific clients, functions or policy fields. Although such specialization is necessary for developing expertise and determining accountability, it also feeds the need for harmonization. Consequently, new coordination arrangements have been introduced to counteract 'siloization', integrate different parts of the public sector, to foster joint problem-solving across organizational boundaries and to increase government capacity (Lægreid et al. 2014). Coordination has been acknowledged as a key asset in governments' policy capacity (Painter and Pierre 2005).

According to Bouckaert et al. (2010, 16), public sector coordination manifests itself in instruments and mechanisms that 'aim to enhance the voluntary or forced alignment of tasks and efforts' of organizations dealing with public policies. Such instruments for achieving coordination can cover specific cross-organizational policy fields (for example, internal security, environmental problems or public health) as well as administrative systems in their entirety (for example, the government program or a macro-level strategic plan). The expected result of coordination can be described as 'an end-state in which the policies and programs of government are characterized by minimal redundancy, incoherence and lacunae' (Peters 1998, 296). In other words, coordination is about the harmonization of the duties and actions of different actors in order to achieve the maximum synchronization of public policies and their implementation.

A specific issue related to public sector coordination is the role of core executives in fostering such harmonization in the public sector, and, more specifically, the capacity and levers of central institutions such as the Prime Minister's Offices, Government Offices and the Ministries of Finance, which act as central leadership hubs in facilitating co-ordination and collaboration across public administrations (OECD 2014). This key coordination function becomes manifest in supporting the decision-making by the head of government, in policy-

coordination across government, in monitoring the progress of policy reforms, in tasks related to strategic planning, in handling government communications, in managing executive's relations with the legislature, in preparing the government work program, and other (OECD 2014). It has been noted that the centers of government have transformed considerably recently (Dahlström et al. 2011; OECD 2014). The change factors embrace electoral changes, the new economic or social circumstances, including the international financial crisis, the perceived fragmentation of the public administrations, and the Europe 2020 strategic process in the EU context.

Whereas the international trend seems to be towards (re-)strengthening the centers of government and introducing new coordination arrangements, in different contexts these processes have been different. The surrounding political and administrative environment is vital in understanding why different coordination practices are set up and how they function (Lægreid et al. 2014). However, the available studies on public sector coordination and core executive dynamics mostly come from long-established democracies, Western Europe or countries with Anglo-American administrative tradition. There is considerably less knowledge available on public sector coordination and core executive functioning in other traditions and countries. Among the less covered regions, there is a limited number of studies available on coordination in the NISPAcee area. Although the coordination issues have been discussed in several NISPAcee working groups, especially the working group on politico-administrative relations (see for example Connaughton et al. 2008), there is a noticeable gap in covering the more recent developments.

At the same time, Peters (2008) has noted that the challenges related to the core executives and public sector coordination may be especially relevant in post-communist countries still going through institutionalization of their politico-administrative systems. When summarizing the state of governing after a decade of post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Goetz and Margetts (1999, 426) argued that CEE core executives were, 'largely unable to perform the coordinative tasks that were commonly associated with Prime Minister's Offices and Cabinet Offices in the literature on consolidated Western democracies' (see also Goetz and Wollmann 2001). They described the CEE core executives as 'solitary centers' that operated largely detached from their political and institutional environments. Zubek and Goetz (2010, 8) noted also a decade later that there was little evidence for increasing central coordination capacity inside the CEE executives and their centers of government continued to operate as 'technical government registrars'. This confronts with the expectation that the accession to and membership in the EU would act 'as a powerful centralizing force within the executive' and a pressure to increase policy capacity in some parts of the region (Goetz and Margetts 1999, 447; see also Dimitrova 2002).

Consequently, the dynamics of public sector coordination and the evolvement of core executives in the NISPAcee region and other less studied countries deserves closer attention. The panel aims to provide this consideration and calls for papers that widen our understanding on coordination issues in the region and beyond, either as case studies or by comparative design. The papers may address, for example:

- the role and evolvement of core executives and centers of government;
- the levers of core executives in enhancing horizontal coordination;
- coordination of crucial horizontal issues such as civil service, top officials, strategic planning, state budget, RIA, administrative reform, ICT or EU affairs;

- devising and implementation of government work program and horizontal policy programs;
- coordination of actors in dealing with complex policy problems across sectors and policy fields;
- the impact of accession to the EU, EU membership or international cooperation and consultancy on public sector coordination;
- coordination through different collaborative bodies like committees, task forces, joint teams or networks;
- coordination through special positions or appointments like program directors, 'tsars' or network managers;
- specific budgeting solutions inducing collaboration.

The panel is mostly interested in an organizational or structural view on public sector coordination, but other perspectives are also welcome. The papers should aim to study how coherence and harmonization is achieved in the public sector in dealing with problems that cross organizational and sectorial borders (or why the attempts to coordinate fail), what is the role of central institutions in horizontal coordination, how different coordination instruments and institutions have evolved or how greater coherence is pursued through collaboration with internal and external actors. Longitudinal studies on the evolvement of different coordinating institutions are especially welcome.

The paper selection will be based on the submitted abstracts, which have to define the objectives and research questions of the prospective studies as well as to describe the research methods and potential findings or conclusions. The authors are encouraged to add points for practitioners or policy lessons to their final papers. In order to stimulate debate and feedback in the panel sessions, every paper presenter is expected to be ready to act as a discussant for one another paper. Depending on the quality of the papers and the motivation of the participants, the panel may lead to further collaborative effort, symposium in a scientific journal/application or special journal issue application.

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