

Accountability instrument or annual show featuring the mayor? Political accountability in Polish municipalities

Kolomycew Anna

Rzeszow University, Institute of Political Science, Rzeszow, Poland

Abstract: Reforms implemented in the local governance system, including in particular the direct election of the municipal executive body, resulted in the emergence of a strong mayor in the Polish local government model. The prominent growing position of the mayor has caused an imbalance between the municipal's executive and legislative bodies. Consequently, the legislator began to take various measures to strengthen the position of the municipal council vis-à-vis the mayor. One of the significant changes introduced in 2018 was a new instrument - the debate on the report on the municipality's state. The introduction of this instrument into Polish legislation was accompanied by the belief that it would strengthen the council's position and increase its control powers over the mayor's actions. The new mechanism consists of two elements, i.e. a) a report on the state of the municipality prepared annually by the mayor, b) a public debate on the report, and c) a vote on the report, which ends with a vote of confidence in the mayor or not. Failure to obtain a vote of confidence (in two consecutive years) can lead to the council initiating a referendum to recall the mayor.

The mechanism mentioned above for holding the municipal executive accountable is considered an instrument of political accountability. The solution adopted in Poland is in line with the assumptions of accountability defined by M. Bovens as 'a relationship between an actor [mayor] and a forum [municipal council and citizens], in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences' (Bovens, 2007, p. 450).

The presentation aims to show the challenges related to the new accountability mechanism implemented in Polish municipalities. The main research method is multiple case studies to analyze the report and debate, considering the context and results of its application throughout the term (2018-2024) of local authorities. Fourteen municipalities were selected for the study. The presentation draws on the results of qualitative research conducted within the project Accountability of Local Authorities framework. The report and debate on the state of a municipality as a tool for accountability (no. 2022/45/B/HS5/00084) financed by the National Science Centre Poland.