

Conference

Spreading Standards, Building Capacities: European Administrative Space in Progress

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The Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee) held its 24th annual conference in Zagreb, from 18 to 21 May 2016. The host and co-organiser of the conference was the Faculty of Law in Zagreb. The Organising Committee included Professor Ivan Koprić (president), Assistant Professor Goranka Lalic Novak (vice president), and Professor Davor Derenčinović, Professor Slaven Ravlić, Associate Professor Gordana Marčetić, Assistant Professor Vedran Đulabić, Assistant Professor Frane Staničić, Assistant Professor Ksenija Grubišić, Assistant Professor Tereza Rogić Lugarić, and Assistant Professor Jasmina Džinić (members). Professor Koprić was also president of the International Programme Committee appointed by NISPAcee.

The conference was attended by over 220 members of the academic community and experts from 35 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Croatia, Italy, South Africa, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Macedonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, the United States, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, and Great Britain.

Placing the theme of European administrative space and administrative convergence in focus of this year's conference has symbolically linked the venue with the Croatian EU membership, which has been effective for almost three years. The conference theme is of great importance, as the adoption of European standards of governance and strengthening the capacity of public institutions is a path to building a reliable, legitimate,

professional, and efficient public administration, able to respond to the complex challenges of modern societies. The Republic of Croatia, negotiating its EU accession, is precisely the country that underwent the strictest monitoring in terms of its administrative capacity. The OECD Sigma alone prepared forty detailed reports for the European Commission on the status of the Croatian public administration, and these contributed to the administrative reform and modernisation of the Croatian administration, both during the course of preparation and the subsequent analysis.

The research and analyses presented at the conference on the factors, influences, and importance of the European Administrative Space (EAS) spreading throughout Europe and its neighbouring areas have offered some answers to the problems of the perception and reception of European administrative and legal standards, faced by all the countries involved in a similar way at all levels of governance, and have enabled an exchange of knowledge about administrative capacities and ways of strengthening these in the countries of the NISPAcee region.

A one-day workshop for doctoral students was held on Wednesday, 18 May, preceding the conference. The participants presented and discussed drafts of their research at the workshop and their work was facilitated by renowned professors in the field of administrative science (Michiel de Vries, Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands and Iwona Sobis, University of Gothenburg, Sweden). Ten participants from various countries attended the workshop.

The conference was officially opened on Thursday, 19 May. Speeches were held by NISPAcee President Marius Proftiroiu, Rector of the University of Zagreb Damir Boras, and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Law in Zagreb Ivana Grgurev. They were followed by presentations by the Croatian Minister of Public Administration Dubravka Jurlina Alibegović, Croatian Information Commissioner Anamarija Musa, and UNDESA representative John Marya Kauzya.

The keynote talk was given by Professor Herwig Hofmann, University of Luxembourg, on the future of public law and integrated administration in Europe. Professor Ivan Koprić gave a talk on the occasion of the Alena Brunovska Award reception, and the participants were also addressed by Riin Savi, University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia, upon reception of the Mzia Mikeladze Award for the best doctoral dissertation. Finally, the panel of the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation closed this session with presentations by C. Michelle Piskulich of Oakland University, Rochester, the president of the US National Associ-

ation of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) and Peter Marks of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, discussing trends in education for public administration.

The main conference theme *European Administrative Space as a Framework for Public Administration Reform* was led by Professor Ivan Koprić and asoc.prof. Polonca Kovač from the Faculty of Administration, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. The exceptionally rich conference programme included presentations and discussions in several sessions and panels and 10 working groups: I. Local Government, II. E-Government, III. Public Administration Reform, IV. Regional Development and Inter-Regional Cooperation, V. Public Finance and Public Finance Management, VI. Public Policy Development Issues VII. Public Administration Education, VIII. Local Services and Infrastructure, IX. Transition, Change, and Uncertainty, and X. Non-Governmental Organisations. Each working group had 2-6 panels. Research questions were directed at administrative reforms, capacity building, and dissemination of the principles of good European governance; transparency and openness of public administration and security in the use of public data; decentralisation and rationalisation of public finances; the development of the administrative system of education; the creation and implementation of evidence-based public policies; the causes and context of the decentralisation policy; regional development through networking and cooperation; and local self-government capacity and quality of local public services.

Several other panels were held. One of them was the panel on Transparency and Open Government: Effective Public Communication and the European Administrative Space. Another one was the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) panel on Building Capacity for Sustainable Governance: European and International Perspectives. There was also the EUROPA panel (Entretiens Universitaires Réguliers pour L'Administration en Europe / Regular Academic Discussions on Public Administration in Europe) – How does the EUROPA Association Contribute to the Construction of a European Administrative Space? The EAPAA Dean's panel on the Key Issues in the Management of PA Programmes requires a mention as well. The conference was closed by the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) panel.

The closing conference panel gathered regional PA experts – Professor Ivan Koprić, Croatia; Fatos Mustafa and Zorana Gajić, ReSPA; and Tony Verheijen, World Bank, Belgrade, Serbia. The panel was chaired by Anamarija Musa from Croatia, and Jadranka Đurković from Montenegro.

The achievements of public administration reforms in the countries of southeast Europe and their harmonisation with European administrative principles and standards were discussed. The EU has developed various standards and legal regulations in this area, which now relies on the right to good administration guaranteed by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and some other principles of European law.

Each year NISPAcee honours several award recipients in different categories for research and teaching contributions to public administration. This year the Alena Brunovska Award for achievements in teaching excellence and contributions to the practice and applied research of public administration was given to Professor Ivan Koprić, who delivered a presentation entitled *Decentralisation as a Precarious Component of Contemporary European Governance*. The Mzia Mikeladze Award for the best doctoral thesis, *The Impact of Fiscal Crisis on Public Administration: Cutback Management and Changes in Decision-Making*, was received by Riin Savi of the University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia. The award for the best graduate student paper, *Administrative Aspects of Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution in the EU, Slovenia, and Croatia*, went to Urša Jeretina of the Faculty of Administration, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. The award for the best comparative paper, *Fiscal Crisis and Expenditure Cuts: The Influence of Public Management Practices on Cutback Strategies in Europe*, was received by prof. Ringa Raudla, prof. James W. Douglas, prof. Tiina Randma-Liiv, and Riin Savi of the University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia. The Merit Award, given in recognition of those who actively collaborate with NISPAcee and contribute to the achievement of its objectives, mission, and development, was given to Dr. Tony Verheijen of the World Bank.

The participants also enjoyed three special social events: a welcome evening and reception by the Mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandić, at the Dverce Palace, an Art Deco Retro Party, and a sightseeing trip to the town of Samobor.

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