

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN A GLOBAL CRISIS

PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION IN TIMES OF GLOBAL CRISIS

Martin Potůček¹, Charles University, Prague

Abstract

This text examines the tensions that economic globalization is generating for national governments when addressing their traditional tasks. The last two decades of the twenty-first century have been full of new challenges generated by crises at the global level. Although their impact on the situation of individual countries is not uniform, they affect everyone in one way or another.

Key words: *crises; economic globalization; public policy; administration.*

This text examines the tensions that economic globalization is generating for national governments when addressing their traditional tasks. It focuses on the situation in those countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which, after liberating themselves from the yoke of power of the former Soviet Union, have decided to follow the path of democratic policies and administration.

Where are the days when the advanced Western European countries were able to harness the predatory power of the market with a strong welfare state? In the first three decades of the second half of the twentieth century, this success was conditional on efficient public administration at the national level and extensive taxation and subsequent redistribution of resources, mainly within the boundaries of national economies.

The last two decades of the twenty-first century have been full of new challenges generated by crises at the global level. Although their impact on the situation of individual countries is not uniform, they affect everyone in one way or another. Such challenges are global warming; the malfunctions of the global economy, accentuated by the operation of tax havens and unprecedented inflation in 2022; migration waves that are difficult to control; the Covid-19 pandemic; the global security, threatened by growing tensions between the main actors in the rivalry of great powers and flagrant violations of international law; the danger of nuclear catastrophe. The world is in a state of multidimensional, never-ending global crisis. Humankind cannot govern itself, and efforts to manage it have been failing.

Historical attempts to manage crises at the global level have never been very successful. The League of Nations, established after the First World War, ended up in the debris of a tragic

¹ Prof. Martin Potůček, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic, potucek@fsv.cuni.cz. Martin Potůček is a Czech social scientist and researcher with wide international recognition. His research work focuses on the processes of formulation and implementation of public policies; the interactions of social actors; the processes of building and use of human potential; health policy. He has published over 20 scientific monographs and three textbooks.

world war it could not prevent, twenty years later. The United Nations Organization, which was set up in its aftermath in the hope of faring better, did manage to prevent many partial threats to security and contributed its share to the unprecedented economic development of the planet; nonetheless, it proved to be toothless where the power interests of the permanent members of its Security Council were concerned. Nevertheless, we can cite some successes. Following pressure from the scientific community, the production and use of greenhouse gases that generated the dangerous ozone hole over our planet have been banned worldwide. International treaties on nuclear arms limitation between the US and the Soviet Union were concluded and adhered.

There are influential international and supranational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and the International Labour Organization. There are also informal groupings of the world's most powerful countries, such as the G7 or the G20. However, none of them has the economic and legal strength powerful enough to be able to deal with global crises – whether individually, let alone as a whole. NGOs such as Transparency International, Greenpeace, and Doctors without Borders are also participating in and influencing the discourse on global crises. Their influence on real decision-making by nation-states and international organizations is limited, though.

The European Union has been so far the most successful attempt to integrate nation-states economically and politically. Its strength, but paradoxically also its weakness, is the outright nodding to the integration of the economies of its member states and their gradual integration into the world economy. Jacques Delors, who chaired it from 1985 to 1995, hoped that economic integration would eventually lead to political integration through internal dynamics. However, this vision of his has not materialized, and we have recently witnessed not only the departure of Great Britain from this community but also the inability to deal effectively with the consequences of global crises at the European level. The three reasons for this failure of the European Union can be attributed to the wording of the Treaty of Lisbon, which in some cases requires the consent of all its members, to the contribution of only about 1% of the national budgets of individual members to the common budget, but also to the absence of a strategic dimension to governance in the perspective of future decades.

What is nowadays the situation of the political representations and national public administrations in those countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have chosen to join the European Union after being liberated from the yoke of the former Soviet Union? A path that has already been successfully followed by most Western European countries. It was a path that was all the more attractive the more efficient their economies and living standards were.

Let us return to the situation before the enlargement of the European Union. Its demands on the candidate countries at that time can be summarised broadly in three key requirements: democratize your political system, open your economy to the European (and thus to the global) market, and adapt your public administration to the administrative requirements and legal framework of the European Union.

However, hardly anyone realized in those years that the integration of the global (mediated by European) market was taking place in a situation when the ideology of neoliberalism was being fully advanced in the world, i.e., in a simplistic way, the instruction to politicians: the more the market and the less the state, the better. Inexperienced local politicians and

bureaucrats often got carried away by this euphoria and privatized many institutions that served important public interests in the area of health care, education, employment, social services, or public infrastructure networks. All the more so as the European Union traditionally leaves a decisive part of the Welfare State still in the hands of national representations.

The socially oriented market economy, which was successful in the Scandinavian countries and continental Western Europe, has not found fertile ground in the new Central and Eastern European Member States of the European Union. Instead of the classical robust welfare state, today there are, if anything, feeble, rather rescue-oriented, but leaky social networks. Thus, more than thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Eastern Bloc, sympathy for authoritarian political parties and movements persists or is being revived in the minds of many citizens.

It has to be fully acknowledged that the disproportionate tension between the functioning of the global economy and regulation at the level of nation-states will be irremovable in the perspective of the next few decades. The only option will be to mitigate it. How? At the national and international level, by strengthening the institutions of anticipatory strategic governance and administration. By active participation of national representations in international institutions, even if the imperfect ones such as the European Union or the United Nations. By a systematic expert study of the causes of the global crisis and searching for ways how to solve it. By supporting and cooperating with such international, national, or local NGOs that have proven competent to participate in its solution.

SOURCES

Dror, Y. (2001) *The Capacity to Govern*. London: Frank Cass.

Lindblom, C. E. (1977) *Politics and Markets*. New York: Basic Books.

Potůček, M. (2018) Economic globalization and the role of the EU social policy as challenge (not only) for Central and Eastern Europe. *Social Work and Society* 16(2).

Potůček, M. et al. *Public Policy* (2017) Prague: Karolinum Press. Available in printed and electronic version at <https://www.cupress.cuni.cz> or <https://www.press.uchicago.edu>

Potůček, M. (2009) *Strategic governance and the Czech Republic*. Prague: Karolinum Publishing House.

Ringen, St. (2013) *Nation of Devils: Democratic Leadership and the Problem of Obedience*. Yale University Press.

Ringen, St. (2016) *The Perfect Dictatorship*. Hong Kong University Press.