

MARTIN ŠVIKRUHA (ED.): TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGES OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN THE COUNTRIES OF VISEGRAD GROUP.

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Former Soviet bloc states underwent a substantial and deep transformation after the socio-political changes in 1989. A shift in a political system from socialistic regime to democracy was not only a turning point in terms of human rights, but it was a complex transformation of the whole political system and the system of government in all aspects of the state and public authority. These changes were noticeable in the heart of the Central European region, among the states of the so called Visegrad Four, or the Visegrad Group. Namely, in Czech and Slovak Republic which formed together a federative republic until 1993 (Czech and Slovak Federative Republic), Hungary and the Republic of Poland. Cooperation of these countries dates to 1991. However, it traces its origins to significant historical events when back in 1335 the then Polish, Czech and Hungarian rulers met at Visegrad castle and agreed upon a cooperation.

The author of an introductory chapter grippingly portrays important historical events which had an impact on the present-day cooperation of these states and on the overall development of their political systems. Yet, a team of authors of the university textbook *Transformácia a premeny politických systémov v krajinách vyšehradskej skupiny (Transformation and changes of political systems in the countries of Visegrad Group)* did not focus only on a description of the historical events which led to the formation of the informal alliance of these countries as such. The publication offers to its readers, students as well as professionals working in public administration, very specific and enriching comparisons of exercise of powers of state in practice – legislative, executive, and judicial. For example, in chapter no.3 the author accurately defines acting in a legislative capacity in countries of the Visegrad group. Even though they have a parliamentary democracy in common, the acting of legislative authority and its organisation differs significantly. The author points out the differences both in structure and position of the parliament, or rather legislative bodies, as well as the differences in terms of the relation to a head of the state and legislative processes in these countries.

Peter Horváth, the author of the 4th chapter of the textbook - *Výkonná moc v krajinách Vyšehradskej skupiny (Executive power in countries of Visegrad group)* points out the fact that it is the executive power that is the most important pillar of power as it manages the running of state. Author refers to a certain dualism

of executive power which is represented by government and by president in all countries of the V4. A comparison of government and presidential competencies in these countries offers a very good fundamental overview of the differences and mutual features of executive bodies. Judicial power forms a part of the system of separation of powers, which has certain specifics. Mainly, it is that judicial power is separated from other branches of government. Bystrík Šramel, the author of the 5th chapter, divides the judiciary into two groups: the constitutional judiciary and the general judiciary. In principle, this division is characteristic of all countries, although their court systems also have certain differences, as for example, the position of the Supreme Administrative Court in the Czech Republic, the position of the Constitutional Tribunal and the State Tribunal in Poland, as well as the existence of military courts in this country.

An extensive part of the textbook consists of a chapter dealing with state administration in the countries of the Visegrad Group. Ján Machyniak, the author of this chapter, defines a concept of state administration, as well as functions that fall under state administration. In Slovak Republic the execution of state administration is realised at the central and local level, i.e. central government authorities and local government authorities. The author of this section briefly and clearly describes the function and position of central government bodies in Slovak Republic. Parallely, he outlines the basic characteristics and overview of central government bodies in other countries of the Visegrad Group. The exercise of public authority is closely related to local government, to which a separate chapter of the textbook is devoted. Again, we find certain common features in the organisation of local government in the countries of the Visegrad Group. One of which is a multilevel organisation - local (municipal) government and regional government (self-governed regions, counties). Poland is the exception, where a local government is three-levelled and is divided into municipalities, districts and provinces.

In addition to local government, the textbook contains a chapter dealing with local government of the capital cities - Bratislava, Prague, Warsaw, Budapest. The capital cities of states usually differ from other cities and villages, they have an exceptional position; in general, they are not only the seat of central government bodies, parliament and government, but also of the foreign representations and of international organizations. A separate chapter devoted to the subject of main cities is thus in place and has its justification.

The textbook offers to students of social and human sciences a very good overview of common features, as well as of natural differences in the exercise of official authority in the countries of the Visegrad Group. A simple overview of the transformation of political systems in different countries, summarized in one comprehensive and relatively complex work, can also help employees of state and public administration, as well as representatives of specific branches of government.

They can thus compare the political system they represent with the system and manner of exercising of official authority in other, immediately neighbouring countries. The textbook is organised logically. It begins with an explanation of the historical events related to the emergence of the so-called Visegrad Group, continues with chapters dedicated to specific branches of government, it deals with the electoral system in each country of V4, which is closely related to politics and political parties, to which a separate chapter is devoted. Further it is followed by chapters on public administration - state government, local government and, as mentioned above, by a separate chapter on subject of capital cities. The final chapter - *Geopolitics of the Visegrad Group countries* gives the textbook a broader and trans-regional dimension.

The contribution of the reviewed university textbook thus lies primarily in its comprehensive focus on specific aspects of public authority and public administration, as well as in its practical applicability in the field of public administration and state government, not only in the learning environment at universities.

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