

MARTIN ŠVIKRUHA: 20 YEARS OF REGIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN SLOVAKIA: THE OPPORTUNITY SEIZED?

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The 20th anniversary of the existence of self-governing regions in Slovakia initiated an interesting opportunity to reflect many fundamental issues and questions of the regional level. Is the current model suitable and convenient? Are the regions divided correctly? Have the regions met their expectations? After twenty years we realize that the development of the complete regional reform has been problematic and influenced by many political impacts. Furthermore, have they truly helped the citizens and improved their lives after two decades? Have they reduced regional disparities? Perhaps a slightly more critical issue – does Slovakia need a higher regional level at all? All of the mentioned questions still evoke frequent disputes and countless times we have heard it in the speeches of politicians, the literary publications of public administration experts, or we have observed various deficiencies in the analyses of specialist in various fields of science. Without any doubts, the self-governing regions are an inseparable part of the public administration in modern and democratic countries including the Slovak Republic. Regional institutions play a significant role, what we have been convinced, for instance, in the current pandemic period. Except the healthcare or crisis management, the regional authorities interfere with their scope in many key segments of public life as a secondary education, transportation and regional roads administration, social services, culture, tourism, and eventually sports. Therefore, after two decades, the topic of the scientific monograph is still accurate and relevant, and the author selected the ideal opportunity to evaluate the whole process of region establishment and their current role as a political actor.

The scientific monograph consists of three main chapters. The first section reflects the theory of regional self-governments, the greater dimensionality of the topic towards the institutions of the European Union and points

out to the position of the regional level in several European countries as well. The genesis and the complete development of Slovak regions from the political point of view is described in the following chapter. The tertiary section is truly important for a reader, and it points to possible suggestions for the future model and functional meaning of all the regional self-governments in Slovakia. Consequently, from a methodological point of view, the monograph is truly well-structured, the individual sections and subchapters are proportionally balanced and logically follow each other perfectly. Through the textbook, the author used several different methods that made the monograph truly educationally and comprehensible. The book is written legibly and transparently, the content is contiguous, and readers are able to understand and memorize all the knowledges to some extent simply. The author searched a large number of domestic and foreign literary sources, what could clearly help readers to improve their understanding of the research and points to the views and opinions of overseas writers as well. However, we were able to find some sources, but the publishing date is slightly older. On the other hand, this may not always cause a problem if the facts are still relevant. In addition to the book sources, the author in an interesting way cuts through acts, strategic documents and especially tachygraphic records from sittings of the parliament. This may refer to the real attitude of politicians and repeatedly help the reader to understand this kind of regional genesis issues as well. An impressive data source was also the reference to external research, which was presented at scientific conferences. Moreover, the name and factual register also helps readers to guide them in the scientific monograph.

The first chapter of the monograph provides an insight into the theoretical framework concerning the self-governing regions. In this direction it could be positively evaluated that the author, in addition to a really deep explanation of self-government even pointed out the issue concerning the regions somewhat from a historical, geographical and economic point of view. In general, it is eligibly emphasized that the complete theory of self-government has an interdisciplinary character. Furthermore, the author mentioned the decentralization and transfer of competencies, what represents one of the leading fundamentals associated with creating of the self-government levels. Even though the author mentioned in the last subchapter of the first section that comparison with foreign models of regional government is not the leading purpose of the monograph, we must evaluate this part of the monograph as a relatively important and informative indeed. It may incredibly help students, specialists, lecturers or just ordinary readers interested in the public administration to better understand the complete realization and principles of regional policy. They may acquire key knowledge that there are different models, regions provide contrasting public services to their citizens, or they

could be enriched by regional experiences from foreign countries. Therefore, in our opinion, this subchapter does pose a truly beneficial part of the monograph as well.

The beginning of the second chapter of the book is discussed about historical developments and changes in regional formats and patterns. As the author has remarked on several occasions through the textbook, any historical, geographical or demographic aspects in Slovakia were observed and ruptured. Subsequently, we were able find a precisely processed subchapter about the political aspects behind the establishment of the self-governing regions. Readers are able to gain knowledge about what was in the past or what is the current attitude of individual politicians and political parties towards regional policy. In general, the views or opinions of political actors have not always been found in monographs regarding the local or regional self-government. We may assess that it provides a comprehensive and complex explanation of how the regional units work and what the approach of Members of Parliament has been. With literal expressions and statements the author brings real arguments about how much politicians have influenced the complete process of establishing the regional self-governments in Slovakia. Therefore, we are able to evaluate that this chapter brings substantial kind of added value for the monograph and readers in general as well.

The last section could be characterized as a final summary of the theoretical definitions, practical cases, where the author focuses on suggestions and proposals for future improvement of the self-governing regions. It contains current models and the divisions of responsibilities between various foreign countries and their regional authorities. The author appropriately mentioned, for example, Scandinavian states, as they dispose with effective self-governments and a particular scope only in selected segments of public life. Furthermore, the author introduces his proposals for the functioning of the regional level in Slovakia. The proposals were truly specific and the author added several remarks about the advantages and disadvantages of the models, the probability of individual regional patterns implementation, or very detailed principles of the division of competencies and public revenues between levels of the public administration. That repeatable enriches the readers' practical and applied knowledge. Additionally, the subjective opinions of the author are interesting and beneficial.

The monograph is excellent for reading and truly contains a massive amount of instructive information. It is consisted of many theoretical definitions and countless practical cases. The author has created a comprehensive textbook by combining a large number of literary sources. The main purpose considered by the author is the analysis of the development of the regional self-government in Slovakia since the inception and origins until the present

time. We could safely state that the author fully fulfills this objective and extends the final benefit of the monograph with pointing out many secondary topics and expressions.

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