Administrative convergence in some Balkan states.
A socio-empirical study

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Abstract
In the context of the European administration development, the Balkan states are shaping a distinct area, determined both by specific traditions and administrative culture, status of the European integration and influences of New Public Management, “weberian” administration etc.
The current study reveals the outcomes of a socio-statistic survey concerning the perception and impact of the administrative convergence processes, deriving from the administrative reforms in some Balkan states: Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia and Romania.
The survey is based on the Administrative Convergence Scale (ACS), conceptualized and used by authors in the framework of multilateral research programmes, and it highlights the specificity of the administrative convergence processes in the Balkans.

Keywords: administrative convergence, scale, European Administrative Space, administrative reforms

1. Introduction
“Administrative convergence” is a concept that at first glance is clear, agreed upon and understood; yet convergence towards a common model imply a reduction of the variability and disparities in the administrative agreements (Pollitt, 2002).
Pollitt (2002) argues upon the complexity of this mechanism that makes possible the operationalisation of the European Administrative Space (EAS), and points out towards the difficulty of introducing similar administrative practices when several durable differences in the public management reform occur.
Continuing these ideas, Olsen (2003) discusses two competing, or supplementing, hypotheses: a “global convergence” hypothesis and an “institutional robustness” hypothesis. These approaches are valid for a general model of convergence; when discussing the European administrative convergence several arguments that derive from the process of creation and enlargement of the EU may be brought into debate.

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Still, in the general context, recent developments in public administration have been interpreted by means of two generic models: the “classical” or weberian public administration and the “New Public Management” (NPM) (Matei, 2001). A favourite diagnosis has been a paradigmatic shift “from Old Public Administration” to “New Public Management” (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). Regardless the standards, NPM stands in contrast to the idea of a unique European convergence. It actually suggests that convergence is global, or at least common to several countries. It also assumes an “inevitable shift rather than a temporary fad and that the change represents progress toward a more advanced administration” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

The vision of a global convergence supplements or may compete with the so-called institutional robustness hypothesis (March and Olsen, 1989). Here the basic assumption is that the two others overestimate the likelihood, extent and speed of convergence, and that Europe and the rest of the world are likely to continue with a variety of administrative models. Furthermore, both models – the classic one and the NPM, portray the administration as a tool for an external principal - a branch of government controlled by the legislative and judicial branches, or by shifting external circumstances. In contrast, the robustness hypothesis assumes that the administrative institutions are powerful actors in public policy making and administrative change. Likewise, public administration is a collection of partly autonomous institutions with identities, traditions and dynamics of their own.

Global convergence then can follow if administration is a context-free, technical activity with a single best solution, and if the global environment is currently dominant. European convergence can follow if the most important context in the matter is the European one, dominant both within the administration and outside it.

Differently, the institutional robustness appears if context is dominant, and the administration has the same degree of autonomy as other different environments and established arrangements. An important issue regarding the convergence is the distinction between attractiveness, where convergence emerge because one model is generally seen as superior, and imposition, where a model is preferred by a winning coalition and dictated to others.

The Balkan states administrations have been developed inspiring from various models of the European public administrations, models adapted to the specific traditions and administrative culture. The closer or far away perspective of the European integration poses to those states not a single model of public administration but a series of principles and standards, for assessing their progresses, following the implementation of national strategies of administrative reform.

EAS synthetises and operationalises those principles and standards, becoming a genuine non-formalised “acquis” of the national public administrations developments of the EU Member States or accessing countries.

In the context described, the current paper presents the outcomes of a socio-statistic survey, aimed to highlight the characteristics of the administrative convergence processes for some Balkan states: Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Greece (GR) and Romania (RO).

2. Survey design

The empirical research was carried out during May – June 2011 among the most important civil servants and public employees in the mentioned states.

2.1. Administrative Convergence Scale (ACS)

The instrument was conceived and developed by authors (Matei, 2011) in the framework of a multilateral research programme, comprising representatives of prestigious universities involved in the administrative research from the mentioned states.

The theoretical and empirical resources used for ACS conceptualization consist in the studies and analyses from the field literature concerning:
• conceptualization and evolution of the European Administrative Space as informal standard of the changes undertaken in national public administrations further the European integration process.
• behaviour and organizational culture specific for the public organizations and revealing, within their framework, the characteristics of “Weberian administration”, precisely those concerning the administrative rationality, meritocracy, career predictability, impartiality and political equidistance;
• internalization by the public administration organizations of the principles of New Public Management and best practices deriving from their functioning as well as of the processes of institutional adaptation and functional change specific to the new organizational theories;
• general framework and essence of the strategies of the reform of national public administrations promoted in the last decade in most states that accessed to the European Union or have the status of acceding countries.
• herewith we refer mainly to the “pillars” of these strategies concerning decentralization, civil service reform and public policy implementation.

Inspired from the descriptions of similar survey tools by Evans and Rauch (1999), Hyden et al. (2003), Matei et al. (2010) or Lovelless and Rohrschneider (2011), ACS has as variables: rule of law (q1), openness towards the citizen (q2), self-responsibility of the public administration (q3), economic public policy making (q4), recruitment and careers (q5), salaries (q6), civil service exams (q7), decentralization and institutional adaptation (q8) and strategy of the administrative reform (q9).

2.2. Sampling
The target group of the empirical research comprises four South-Eastern European states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Romania, relevant for the developments recorded in the administrative and public sector reforms. Their status related to the European Union represents the most relevant perspective for the current research.
The above group comprises older EU Member State (Greece), new ones (Bulgaria and Romania) and an acceding one (Croatia).
The experts who achieved the empirical investigation are teaching staff or researchers from New Bulgarian University (BG), University of Rijeka (HR), University of the Aegean and European Public Law Organization (EPLO) (GR), National School of Political Studies and Public Administration (NSPSPA) (RO).
The questionnaires were distributed to high civil servants and representatives of central governmental authorities in various decentralized structures in regions of the states analysed.
Table 1 presents the structure of the target group, the experts used and the number of the responders.

Table 1. Structure of the target group

| State     | ID | Experts used | Number of questionnaires applied |
|-----------|----|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Bulgaria  | BG | 2            | 14                              |
| Croatia   | HR | 3            | 34                              |
| Greece    | GR | 4            | 33                              |
| Romania   | RO | 3            | 35                              |
3. Results
The evaluation of the administrative convergence for the mentioned states was confined to the analysis of the variables on EAS principles (q1-q3). In this respect, we find detailed analyses in Matei and Matei (2012), with special focus on the public administration from Romania. Table 2 presents the characteristics of the questionnaire.

Table 2 Characteristics of the questionnaire

| Variable | Major topics surveyed | Number of close questions | Number of primary variables | Open questions |
|----------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| q1       | Rule of law           | 5                         | 20                          | 1             |
| q2       | Openness towards the citizen | 4                     | 27                          | -             |
| q3       | Self-responsibility of the public administration | 6                     | 41                          | -             |

The construction of aggregated variables of second and third level was achieved by using the statistic mean. The same procedure was used for the aggregated variables of fourth level, calculated for every state.

\[
q_{\alpha} = \frac{1}{3} \sum_{i=1}^{3} q_{i, \alpha}
\]

\[\alpha = \text{Bg, Hr, Gr or Ro}\]

The characteristics of the latter variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Statistic characteristics of the variables of convergence

|         | Minimum Statistic | Maximum Statistic | Mean Statistic | Std. Deviation Statistic | Skewness Statistic | Std. Error of Skewness | Kurtosis Statistic | Std. Error of Kurtosis |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| q_Bg    | 2.15              | 2.24              | 2.1858        | .02261                   | 1.117             | .597                   | 2.688             | 1.154                  |
| q_Hr    | 1.81              | 2.95              | 2.2290        | .26864                   | .754              | .409                   | .371              | .798                   |
| q_Gr    | 1.81              | 2.67              | 2.1541        | .26757                   | .511              | .491                   | -1.025            | .953                   |
| q_Ro    | 1.06              | 3.61              | 2.1885        | .63041                   | .325              | .398                   | -.192             | .778                   |

Thus it results that the statistic mean of the social perception, internal to the public administration is situated in a relative small interval [2.15, 2.23] and anyway under the symmetric mean of the normal distribution. For all states, concerning the Skewness coefficient (S), S>0, it results the right skewed distribution where most values are concentrated on left of the mean, with extreme values to the right. At the same time, for Kurtosis coefficient (K), K<3, it results a platykurtic distribution where the probability for extreme values is less than for a normal distribution and the values are wider spread around the mean. The analyses of statistic correlation (Table 4), using the same aggregated variables reveal weak or inverse correlations, fact which does not support the idea of a high convergence for the analysed national public administrations.
Table 4 Pearson statistic correlations

|        | q_Bg | q_Hr | q_Gr | q_Ro |
|--------|------|------|------|------|
| q_Bg   | 1    | .132 | -322 | .112 |
| q_Hr   | .132 | 1    | -324 | -.110|
| q_Gr   | -322 | -324 | 1    | -.318|
| q_Ro   | .112 | -.110| -.318| 1    |

Greece represents the only state for which all the correlations are inverse while Bulgaria has positive correlations both with Romania and Croatia.

Conclusions
The above analyses emphasise interim results due to their focus only on the first three variables concerning the internalization of EAS principles.

In this context, the following issues are representative for the administrative convergence process:

- low level of EAS principles internalization, creating major difficulties in the European administrative cooperation;
- except Bulgaria, the level of spread for options is relative high, unable to highlight a focus of options towards superior values of perception;
- a more detailed and extended analysis could emphasise a correlation between the “seniority” in EU and different levels of convergence. Table 4 reveals, even if not so clear, three levels of convergence, corresponding to the moments of accession into the EU;
- influence of administrative models and cultures, expressed in the various analysed states, which certainly may diminish the level of administrative convergence.

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