

Chapter 3

Why and When Countries Implement Local Public Administration Reforms: A Long-Term View of Reform Dynamics in Slovakia, 1990–2015

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Abstract Public administration reforms are among the most typical expressions of societal progress from the point of view of governments and the public sector and more often than not have impacts on the institutional frameworks of urban governance. Debates and considerations on reforms are almost permanent, but their conversion into real terms and implementation requires much stronger motives. An overview of development in Slovakia from a longer term perspective shows that local public administration reforms usually need more complex stimuli. A combination of less positive indicators of social and economic development (induced by post-Communist transformation, or economic and financial crisis), need for progress in the field of local public administration and local development (democratization, decentralization, modernization), as well as the capacities of central governments and leading political parties, plays a primary role. Reforms have a better chance if there are stable (more electoral terms in central government) and well-established political elites. On the other hand, there are also factors that were influential only in a particular period and later on their impact decreased, or their nature changed. This is, for example, the case with administrative traditions and policy legacies. The modernization argument for reform has also changed—now strongly moved in favour of its technological and managerial meaning in Slovakia. International influences lost their strength since the time of pre-accession processes, although many piecemeal policy transfers are permanent. Surprisingly less reform calls and practical recommendations have been generated from within local public administration. Its elite is less compact and cohesive in generating larger scale proposals, although they are quite efficient in protecting previous reform achievements and in minor improvements to the public administration system.

Keywords Public administration • Reform • Local self-government • Implementation factors • Urban governance • Long-term view • Slovakia

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3.1 Introduction

Slovak local public administration has undergone many reforms and has adapted to numerous minor changes within the last 25 years since 1990. We can observe the need to build a new non-Communist local public administration, which emerged immediately after the Czechoslovak “Velvet Revolution” in 1989. This was later replaced by a different but still very challenging situation for the building of a new state after 1993, including the search for a new method of organizing local public administration. Transition and transformation process complications, combined with ambitions to join the EU in the near-future, generated pressure for a new wave of reforms at the turn of the millennium. Stabilization after joining the EU (in 2004) and a positive phase of the economic cycle were replaced by the “crisis years” leading to a reconsideration of local public administration functioning once again under the pressure of related fiscal consolidation.

Long-lasting reform efforts substantially changed the nature of local public administration in Slovakia, compared to the period before 1989, as well as the role it can have in urban governance processes. Manifold reform processes have included many processes such as decentralization, modernization, territorial reorganization, not mentioning modifications in public services delivery. These have had the most visible outcomes—the introduction of local and regional self-government that substantially influenced the nature of the country’s government. They were part of the complicated transition processes across all sectors of society. While earlier stages of local public administration reforms in Slovakia have been quite extensively covered by scientific literature, this is not the case with the latest reforms. The attempts at longer term and more complex evaluations are also missing. Less attention has been paid to explain the timing of reforms, as well as a deeper consideration concerning factors supporting or limiting reform implementation in the field of local public administration.

Local public administration reforms within one country and in the long-term perspective are quite a frequent theme of scientific inquiry. Good cases represent, e.g., Wollmann’s (2000) study on administrative reforms in Germany, Capano’s (2003) study on reforms during the 1990s in Italy, or Alba and Navarro’s study (2011) on administrative traditions and reforms in Spain. An interesting case focusing on Greek reforms within the context of the economic crisis was offered by Ladi (2014). Many reform-related issues covering a European comparative framework were done also by Kaczmarek (2005). In Slovakia, such longer term evaluations are missing. Nevertheless, particular stages of public administration reforms in Slovakia have been exposed by numerous studies prepared either by Slovak scientists (e.g. Buček 1993, 2006; Slavík 1997; Nižňanský 2002; Búšik 2005; Slavík et al. 2013), or by foreign scholars (e.g. Bryson 2008; Demmou and Price 2015). A more general context of reforms implemented during post-socialist

periods in Slovakia, including an EU context, has been presented by, e.g., Mathernová and Renčko (2006), O'Dwyer and Kovalčík (2007), Bouckaert et al. (2011) or Buček (2012).

The main goal of this chapter is the search for relationships among local public administration reforms and the set of factors influencing their implementation and timing. Why and when countries prepare and implement public administration reforms is a considerable issue. Among the factors influencing reforms we must consider the role of administrative traditions and political legacies. Reform dynamics also reflect the international situation and integration ambitions. Modernization is an important part of reform motivation. More detailed attention is paid to the conditionality of local public administration reforms on macroeconomic development and the public finance situation. Within the political framework, we focus on the role of central government, its political composition and duration in holding power, as well as political priorities and the role of political parties. We also perceive reforms as governance-based output, with many actors involved. Of course, dealing with reform experience in one country means particular limits in generalization. Nevertheless, it provides some interesting knowledge for countries considering reforms, e.g., during more turbulent and transitional periods of their societal development, or offer a knowledge base suitable for comparative studies. It also contributes to the understanding of reform approaches under the dual model of local public administration (with separate lines of state administration and self-government adopted in Slovakia since 1990).

In Slovak case, we focus on local public administration, integrating the separated lines of state administration (operating on various sub-state levels) and self-government (local and regional self-government). Nevertheless, with respect to the diminishing role of state administration over time, more attention is paid to the institutions of territorial self-government (we primarily focus on local self-government due to its longer functioning). As a general framework, we take into consideration Central East European experiences with public administration reforms; however, within the framework of global trends, public administration has been facing over the few last decades. In this study, we do not pay broader attention to such aspects of reforms as civil service reforms, or reforms in central public administration (e.g. central government ministries, or specialized state agencies). The main sources of information include important public administration reform documents and legislature, supplemented by documents and comments prepared within the legislation process. We also use available studies, as well as statements by the important actors (e.g. representatives of particular governments, or important associations). The reliable long-term macroeconomic and public finance data needed for the evaluation were taken from the databases of OECD, the Slovak Statistical Office and the Slovak Central Bank—National Bank of Slovakia.

3.2 Conceptual Background: Factors Influencing the Reasons and Timing of Reforms

Local public administration reforms are prepared and implemented within a wider framework of other spheres of social life (political, economic, cultural). The understanding of driving forces and their temporal circumstances can contribute to revealing why and when reforms have more chance of being adopted and successfully implemented. Such knowledge can be achieved by applying more interconnected concepts. As a key approach, we were inspired by historical institutionalism, including the impact of critical junctures, frequently applied in the study of long-term changes in societies (e.g. Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Steinmo 2008; Hall 2010; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). We focus on institutional changes perceived as changes in rules and organizational framework concerning the sub-state level of public administration. Complementary concepts taken into account are those relevant to the study of key reform processes such as democratization, self-government introduction (local and regional) and decentralization as general tendencies in managing public affairs in Slovakia after 1989. Transition studies are also a useful conceptual framework, in which the establishment of self-government and its development is considered as an important segment of the overall transition from Communism. Within this transitional framework, important roles were played by reform theory studies. Several authors have written about post-Communist reforms, stressing the importance of various sections of reforms (e.g. Fidrmuc 2003; Mathernová and Renčko 2006; Myant and Drahokoupil 2013), or paying more attention to public administration reforms (e.g. Péteri and Zentai 2002; Verheijen 2007). From interpretation point of view we also were inspired by coincidence method (e.g. Bothe 1955), focusing on linkages among simultaneous event-related conditions.

Public administration reforms, including those focusing on the local level, are important societal innovations that are the frequent subject of scientific inquiry. Among the key starting points, we have to explain is: What kind of changes in local public administration institutional framework can be considered as reforms? It is usually the case of large-scale changes in local public administration, accompanied by a cluster of new (or amended) legislation, in some cases including even constitutional changes. Reforms contain at their core, e.g. the launching of a new level of political organization, changes in the scope of local autonomy, transfer (redistribution) of important powers (administration, services), extensive changes in financial flows and related rights (e.g. in the field of taxation, budgeting) and the transfer of property (e.g. linked to particular powers). Major reforms often intervene in spatial issues, primarily in the form of spatial reorganization (e.g. in territorial administrative division, amalgamation), or the relocation of offices. We can observe more “strategic” and complex reforms that substantially reorganize the public administration system and initiate major changes, as well as more narrow-oriented

managerial and technical reforms. Selected cases of public administration reforms classifications have been summarized by, e.g., Kaczmarek (2005). Countries usually oscillate between periods of major reforms (which are rare in well working public administration systems) and periods typified by less extensive changes, following the practice of incremental changes to an already existing institutional framework (spread over many years). Such minor “piecemeal” and isolated modifications to an existing system we do not consider as reforms. We take into account the scope of changes and not if they have been formally declared as reforms (e.g. by the government elite).

Any attempt at the evaluation of longer term reforms requires more attention paid to time aspects, closely related to the preparation, management and implementation of reforms. The dynamics of reforms influence also the attitudes of leading political and social actors, those working in public administration, available expertise and public perception. It is not easy to characterize precisely a particular period as a radical/shock reform period, a period of gradual/incremental reform, or a stable period without any significant changes (no reform). We have to be aware that public administration reforms (depending on the scope of reform), often concern many years, have more stages and represent more demanding cases of policy-making processes. Almost each reform has its preparatory stage typified by analytical works, strategies elaboration, search for political support, preparation of executive and legal documents and so on. Reforms have their most visible stage during the implementation period, including the solution to important practical issues (implementation management, its organization, financing, staff and so on). Each reform change leads to subsequent evaluation after introduction into practice. Reforms need to be assessed after a certain amount of time, as well as often inevitable post-reform adaptations based on post-reform practical functioning experience. So it is a matter of careful consideration how to take into account all stages, or focus on a particular stage. Reforms are usually evaluated as a unity of more phases, although with a larger emphasis placed on period of their factual implementation.

The decision to make any public administration reform adoption and implementation depends on the various factors and their role in particular circumstances, including the rising impact of exogenous context. The impact of such factors motivating reforms is diverse, and some of them are also internally structured. Some factors influence the nature of the reforms, while some also strongly influence their timing. Reflecting on international experience and taking into account the factors usually mentioned (e.g. Wollmann 2000, 2012; Illner 2003b; Baldersheim 2014) as those standing behind changes in local public administration, we are focusing on the role of:

- administrative traditions and policy legacies,
- modernization,
- international political environment and integration processes,
- macroeconomic development,

- public finance development,
- central government and policy priorities,
- political parties,
- governance and other actors.

Local public administration reforms usually have to take on the administrative traditions and policy legacies of particular states (e.g. Meyer-Sahling 2009). Some of these are deeply rooted within the society and have their strong advocates. Among the basic settings influencing reforms, we have to mention the historically developed settlement system (e.g. its fragmentation, Swianiewicz 2010), population distribution characteristics, territorial division and institutional traditions. In CEE countries, among the important determinants we can mention memories of the practice of public administration from the interwar period (e.g. in Czechoslovakia), or even traditions based on the previous centuries of local government functioning (e.g. from the long-lasting Austro-Hungarian administration). There have been great expectations based on the simple transfer of historical experiences, often fragmented, without detailed knowledge and less suitable for practical implementation in the present. Such feelings had been expressed enthusiastically concerning the “return” of older “rights” to the local level after 1989 in many CEE countries.

Long-term approaches cannot avoid thinking about historical influences within the path dependency framework (e.g. Pierson 2000). Within the post-Communist framework, we cannot overlook the influence of public administration practices applied during communist period that had not been so easy to overcome (e.g. Illner 2003a). Such path dependency cannot be underestimated at least in some post-communist countries. Waiting for commands for and solutions to local problems “from above” had been quite a frequent approach in the early years of local self-government functioning. Traditions, the Communist legacy and their proponents had an important impact on the willingness for reform, its framework, phasing and the dynamics of implementation. Another issue is to what extent new decisions have generated new path dependencies and have influenced the next stages of reforms. They can mean a burden that limits progress in particular fields of government.

It is usually accepted that in many cases reforms are driven and modified by the relevant international political framework in general, as well as by specific policy transfers (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). These were the experience of Western European countries that were applied in Central Eastern European public administration reforms (e.g. Baldersheim 2014). One very important aspect was the effort to harmonize public administration system with models and principles working in Western European countries. This feature was particularly important during the effort to join the EU. “Europeanization” had a big impact on changes in public administration throughout the CEE (Grabbe 2001; O’Dwyer 2006; Kovács 2009). The ambition to satisfy expectations, conditions and standards of the EU mobilized activity in reform preparation and implementation. It was typical, especially during the second half of the 1990s and at the beginning of the next decade, in many CEE countries, sometimes referred to as the “pre-accession wave” of reforms (Bouckaert

et al. 2011). It is also important to mention large-scale policy transfers, inspiration or even policy imitations concerning local government that reflected the practice in well-developed local governments in Western countries. The nature and speed of reforms in many CEE countries were also related to the leading role of neo-liberal approaches within policy transfers at the end of the twentieth century (and the weaker role of other alternatives).

Modernization, in various meanings, is among the usual drivers and reasons for changes in public administration. In its very general sense, modernization as a progress can be considered a permanent factor of change, when “new and better replaces the old”. It has been frequently used as one of the key arguments within main reforms, or it has been used to describe less extensive innovations in public administration. Many reforms in developed countries had been implemented as modernization reforms, with the ambition to provide a better public service (e.g. Connaughton 2008 on Ireland). Beside a possible extensive philosophical debate on modernization in public administration (e.g. Illner 2003a, b), we can apply a more pragmatic approach. Modernization is mostly perceived in its political (democratization), administrative/managerial and technological concept. Undoubtedly, the public administration system in CEE countries needed manifold modernization after the change of regime. By far the most urgent was the democratization that started immediately after the change of regime in most CEE countries. Modernization, from a more narrow view, has usually focused on administrative and managerial innovations—dealing, e.g., with efficiency, accountability, better services provision, transparency and staff training. For a long time, modernization in public administration was also strongly linked to the concept of new public management (e.g. Wollmann 2012). Public procurement, contracting out, privatization of previously public services, public-private partnership and customer orientation had become more frequent, although applied later and in a fragmented way also in CEE countries (e.g. Bouckaert et al. 2011).

Within the last two decades, a more challenging aspect of modernization has been the application of information and communication technologies (ICT), as a shift towards digitization, e-government and technologically based participation and communication with citizens, e.g. in local development planning (e.g. Brown 2005; Dunleavy et al. 2006; Silva 2010). This technological meaning of modernization is very influential in current scientific discourse as well as in practice concerning local public administration. It is often represented by a series of incremental changes and innovations implemented at all levels of public administration, with many innovations generated by individual local governments, or induced by the available technological advancement. The governmental sector has the ambition to be compatible also technologically with development in other parts of society, which is reflected in public administration reforms.

Risk and benefits related to public administration reform implementation have to be evaluated from a macroeconomic perspective. Local public administration reforms as important policy decisions are adopted in a particular macroeconomic situation, related to major macroeconomic policies, as well as social and economic development at regional and local levels. We have to take into account such

relations, although they are not so simple or easy to identify (Péteri and Zentai 2002). The economic context of public administration reforms cannot be ignored. Political cycle literature confirms the serious concerns of politicians/political parties about economic performance and extensive exploitation of macroeconomic policy (e.g. Hibbs 1977; Potrafke 2012). Reforms can touch an important section of the economy under the direct control of public bodies, or be regulated by the central state. Good social and economic conditions can lead to a “no reforms” approach, or on the contrary, are suitable for reforms whose implementation require, for example, higher costs and a wider acceptance of reforms. A bad macroeconomic situation can also initiate debates on inevitable complex changes that can also extensively influence the local public administration system. A typical case is the situation during economic crises, when governments intervene extensively not only into the economy, but also into public policies and public administration. The regional and local social and economic situation can also have a diverse impact. A worse situation in many regions can multiply calls for reforms. New institutional arrangements can improve their prospects for future economic growth. On the other hand, any attempts at reforming can be evaluated according to their impact on the regional and local economic and social situation. The need for other reforms (e.g. economic) can lead to postponement or the inclusion of public administration reforms into a wider package of reforms. In the CEE situation, inevitable post-socialist transition reforms could influence the timing of public administration reforms. Among the usual indicators of a social and economic situation taken into consideration, we can find GDP growth, unemployment rate, inflation and interest rates.

Strongly related to the macroeconomic reasons for reforms is public finance development. A worse macroeconomic situation (e.g. caused by an economic crisis) and a too unbalanced budgetary policy (e.g. public budgets deficits accumulating) can have a devastating effect on public finance. The need to solve a bad public finance situation can lead to various reform measures focusing on public finance savings, including those addressing local public administration. This is true that despite an already widespread application of fiscal decentralization and a certain level of local fiscal autonomy. Besides quite often contradictory studies analysing local governmental austerity policies in crisis situations (e.g. Bakota 2014; Buček and Sopkuliak 2014; Ladi 2014; Silva 2014), a suitable knowledge framework for debating the impact of public finance on reform efforts is provided by consolidation studies. They analyse experiences with public finance consolidation in many countries, often in the long-term and with a comparative perspective (e.g. Blöchliger et al. 2012; Dellepiane-Avellaneda and Hardiman 2015). According to Perotti (1998), fiscal consolidation has the features of policy reform because it is, for example, reforming the budget process, it might involve changing the government’s employment policies and the structure of public transfer programs. Typical for consolidation periods are measures focusing on public budgets and public debt reduction. Under such a regime of financial scarcity, measures can address not only central state institutions, but can induce important changes for the sub-state governments as well (see e.g. Rodden and Wibbels 2010). Local budgets are an important part of public budgets in general. A successful consolidation effort

requires a coordinated approach across the entire public finance sphere, including fiscal consolidation at lower levels of government (e.g. Molnar 2012). Nevertheless, all reformers must be aware that reforms also have their own costs. Part of the costs can later return via less costly functioning in the future. The usual indicators studied under such a situation are public budget deficits, public debt (e.g. towards GDP), including local budget deficits and local public debt.

Central government composition, its internal stability, duration and leadership efficiency affect progress in public administration reform. The key justification of its position is related to the usual centralization of an administrative reform effort and its dependency on central state leadership (see e.g. Aucoin 1990). Political environment development and electoral preferences are important for the formation and composition of central governments and their approaches to reforms. Preparation and implementation of reforms can be easier under a single party central government, if they are really interested in reforms. However, in Central Eastern European countries, single party central governments are quite rare (e.g. Müller-Rommel et al. 2004; Conrad and Golder 2010). The prevailing electoral results have led to coalition central governments responsible also for initiation and implementation of local public administration reforms. This aspect of central government party composition can play an important role in the scope, speed and efficiency of reform activity. Too many parties and/or too diverse governmental coalitions can influence reforms in general by diverse or even contrasting approaches and can lead to less extensive or compromising reform outcomes, or obstacles in implementation. A government composed of similar parties can more efficiently prepare and implement reforms. Diverse and less clearly identifiable political parties influence another aspect of reform potential, which is government stability and duration. Stable coalitions and a full electoral term or even better—a stable central government holding power for several terms, can support the completion of reforms. A re-elected reform government can complete all the details of reform objectives, including eventual corrections. Among other factors we can mention leadership of a government coalition and their interest in reform. The leader of a coalition must have an interest in implementing reforms (including the influence of the prime minister, or other strong cabinet member of). Another part of the central government is the central state bureaucratic elite, which is often less interested in many aspects of reform, including decentralization (less powers and resources under its direct control).

Political parties and their interests have an important impact on administrative reforms. The reform initiation and implementation responsibility is in the hands of political parties and structures of government under their control. Their position is predisposed also by the electoral system and electoral cycle, the political parties' system and its stability. Political parties' opinions on the nature, scope or timing of reforms are crucial. Nevertheless, their opinions have been diverse, depending not only on the traditional right-wing and left-wing divide. Major debates can concern, e.g., their opinion on the scope of centralization and decentralization, or the position of particular levels of government, or scope of regulation (e.g. in Péteri and Zentai 2002; Illner 2003b, Klimovský 2008). A fragmented political system with many new

political parties, with the absence of solid and stable support, and an unclear ideological background (left/right divide is less useful at least in some countries for particular period), can complicate progress in reform processes. This is especially the case in countries with “young” political parties and less balanced political systems missing deep democratic political traditions, especially during the early phases after a change of regime. Less stable and internally less cohesive parties can have a less clear position concerning local public administration organization, or opinions on necessary change. It can influence the search for the stable support of reforms or threaten their implementation. The willingness of political parties to support reforms can be influenced by their ability to achieve a significant position within particular levels of government (e.g. depending on the situation in their local party structures). It has also been mentioned that for the post-socialist situation, it is the centre that has better control, with an unwillingness to lose control at the local level by the dominant parties. The opinions of key political leaders can also influence the direction of reforms, as well as the efficiency of their implementation. The direct support and involvement of leaders can have a positive impact on their final implementation.

Democratization after 1989 offered freedom of activity to many new societal actors. This trend was supported by penetration of governance as a new principle in public policies adoption (e.g. Peters and Pierre 1998). Under new conditions, any substantial change in institutional settings under a democratic regime requires an agreement among the important societal actors (e.g. Hall 2010). Administrative reform is in fact a wide-scale co-ordinated collective action. Besides the dominant role of political parties, or representatives of large segments of society, those most directly influenced by changes in the local public administration system have an increased role. It is also multi-level governance activity. Much larger roles are held by the rising strata of local and regional leaders, as well as their representative associations. They represent an important segment of society, disclose opinions from regions, reflect their social economic conditions, administrative capacity and general willingness to implement reforms. We also cannot underestimate the role of bureaucracy at all levels that can also be influenced by reforms. Their acceptance or rejection of reforms can be important in the speed of their implementation. It is especially important if we think about reforms with objectives in decentralization, reorganization and deeper modernization (e.g. also with a reduction in the number of staff).

3.3 The Slovak Local Public Administration System and Its Reforms in Brief

The main feature of the Slovak local public administration system is its dual nature consisting of separated lines of state administration and self-government (not answerable to one another). This model, adopted in 1990, has influenced all reform

intervention into the public administration system. Both lines underwent more reforms during the post-socialist period after 1989. They could be parallel, as well as separate. They could have different timing, as well as priorities. The reform periods in Table 3.1 outline the years with major changes, including major conceptual documented elaboration, as well as reforms implementation. It documents the concentration of major reforms at the beginning of the transition period, at the turn of millennium and prior to joining the EU and after the financial and economic crisis and its transposition into the public sector.

Long-term separate development under a dual model of public administration has had consequences for their diverse organization. Currently, there are two levels of self-government under the central state. The lower level known as local self-government (in Slovak—*miestna samospráva*) was established in 1990 and is now composed of 2891 units (average size is below 1900 inhabitants). The upper level—eight regional self-governments (in Slovak—*regionálna samospráva*), was introduced in 2002 (the first regional elections were held in 2001). The situation within the sub-central state administration was more complicated with more levels and spatial units used after 1989 (e.g. “old” larger and “new” smaller districts, higher territorial units with a regional dimension, or specific regions with respective offices of specialized state administration). Sub-central state administration is currently organized primarily at the district level with 72 district offices (in 79 statistical LAU1 districts in Slovakia, including urban districts in Bratislava and Košice).

3.3.1 Local Self-government Reforms

Renewal of local self-government on the basis of already existing local administrative units was one of the key features of the changes after 1989. It reflected calls for immediate democratic changes at the local level, based on the tradition of self-government, e.g. from the interwar period. Its role had been increasing thanks to more phases of major reforms, as well as from frequent minor adjustments after 1989. The major reforms were typified by more extensive changes—with important legislation changes, including changes in the distribution of power and resources. Among the major reforms, we can observe numerous incremental changes (technical and managerial changes, clarifications and improvements to previously adopted legislation). Besides the reforms that were implemented, there also were reforms which were not adopted. For example, this was the case with so-called communal reform (in Slovak—*komunálna reforma*), addressing the problem of the large number of small local self-government units in Slovakia, or related attempts for more efficient provision of important powers, such as territorial planning and urban development. Even the adopted reforms were the subject of disputes and had been modified before final adoption in the Slovak Parliament.

The first cluster of major reform changes in local self-government we can characterize as early transition reforms in 1990–1991. This was focused on

Table 3.1 Main periods of local public administration reforms—schematic outline of years with reform

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Self-government	x	x								x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x				
State administration	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x			x					x	x	x	x

Source Own interpretation

breaking up old administrative structures, introducing democratic local self-government and its institutions, allocating selected fundamental powers, transferring property, as well as formulating the basic administrative and regulatory framework for local self-government (e.g. Acts No. 369/1990, No. 517/1990, No. 138/1991 Coll). Besides this, abolition of the old regional level of government (four regions, in Slovak—*kraje*, *krajské národné výbory*) was also very important. In fact, the extent of self-government had been limited. The scope of powers had been limited, when most power was in the hands of the state administration. They also suffered a worse financial situation, with little real independence as far as resources were concerned (e.g. Bryson 2008). During this introductory period, local self-governments paid attention to the building of their democratic functions, formation of their administrative capacities, seeking possible ways to manage allocated powers and consolidating their own property. State-building processes and other transition processes did not allow their strengthening after the first years following the change of regime.

The second important reform concerning local self-government was put into practice during the late-transition period in 1999–2005. It was a longer reform period due to the fact that it was the key decentralization reform, which also included extensive conceptual preparatory activities. The central government adopted two strategic documents (Strategy of public administration reform in the Slovak Republic, 1999; Concept of decentralization and modernization of public administration reform in the Slovak Republic, 2000). The intentions behind the reform had been extensively debated with local self-government representatives and the public (e.g. Nižňanský 2002). This quite complex reform included the introduction of regional self-government (Act No. 302/2001 Coll.), the sequential transfer of a large number of powers and property from state administration to self-government, respecting the absorption capacities of local self-governments. Another large-scale change was the financing of local self-government, thanks to fiscal decentralization introduced into practice in 2005. This reform substantially strengthened the role and resources administered by local self-government. Nevertheless, as Buček (2006) outlined, the decentralization was not a one-directional and unconstrained process. There remained important delegated and shared powers with a large state administration involvement. New powers or resources were balanced by rules not applied previously (e.g. stricter budgetary rules, restrictions on borrowing).

The third cluster of changes in local self-government can be considered as being unplanned (without clear “reform document”), permanently negotiated, less complex, less extensive and a more-or-less forced “counter-reform”. This was induced above all by the global financial and economic crisis and its later shift to the public sector. Reform period started by signing memorandum on cooperation among Slovak central government and Association of Towns and Communes of Slovakia in 2009 (see e.g. Buček and Sopkuliak 2014). Its different nature confirmed intervention into previously adopted central-local relations and the scope of local autonomy primarily in the field of local finance and budgeting (the most typical expression of this period is frequent changes in budgetary rules Act No. 583/2004,

Constitutional Act No. 493 adoption in 2011, Income Tax Act 595/2003 amended in 2011 and next memorandum signed in November 2012). Such development significantly influenced various aspects of local life and the activities of local self-governments. This post-crisis reform with main decisions adopted and changes implemented in 2009–2013 can be considered as “interim” and consolidation related, as it has been incorporated into the public finance consolidation efforts of the central government. It was reduced in its impact upon self-governments as the situation in public finance improved during 2014–2015. This period of development ceased further progress in favour of local and regional self-government strengthening and their activities in local and regional development. This period is considered as being specific, with less changes having a long-term character.

3.3.2 State Administration Reforms at the Local Level

The dual model of public administration has meant that besides more general administrative reforms, part of the reforms has concerned only local state administration. This line of public administration is easier to intervene in, being directly subordinated to the central government. It has resulted in more frequent changes, including those of a technical and managerial nature. In fact, local state administration development faced instability, changing approaches, an absence of a longer term vision, oscillations between separatist-sectoral and integrative approaches, not mentioning subordination to the political interests of the central government political parties. We identify four main phases of state administration until now—1990–1993, 1995–1996, 2002–2007 and 2012–2015.

The early transitional reform was parallel to local self-government, although it was longer (1990–1993), due to state administration adjustment into the new situation of the new state and its needs. The main inevitable changes were introduced after 1991. Local state administration had operated in 38 district offices and 121 area offices of state administration. The creation of an additional lower level of administration (area office) was soon considered as being useless. A specific feature of the state administration had been the formation of many networks of specialized state administration, operating mostly on the sectoral principle as field offices of particular ministries (e.g. labour offices, environmental offices, tax offices). This process was uncoordinated and inefficient (see e.g. Slavík et al. 2013). Particular networks were diverse in the horizontal, as well as vertical, dimension. Local state administration became very fragmented and complicated for citizens.

After the interim stabilization and some short-term preparation, a larger scale and separate state administration reform was introduced in 1996 (Acts No. 221 and No. 222/1996), without any widespread public discussion. This was a serious change in the organization of the whole state administration system, accompanied by the introduction of new district and regional state administration offices, with a new territorial administrative division of the country (79 districts and 8 regions). It also accompanied the partial integration of fragmented sectoral state administration

offices (e.g. Búšik 2005). This reform can be also considered as part of the state-building processes of that period's central government. This reform lacked mutual agreement across the political spectrum and many aspects of it were disputed (e.g. the territorial administrative division of the country).

The next reform had been logically parallel and integrated with the self-government and mainly reflected the transfer of powers from state administration in favour of local and regional self-government during 2002–2004. Wide-scale decentralization led to the elimination of district offices of the general state administration in 2004 (Act No. 515/2003). They lost a substantial part of their previous powers. As a result, a network of new area offices was established, and certain networks of specialized state administration also came into existence. For similar reasons (after a successful takeover of power), the next reorganization of state administration cancelled the regional offices of general state administration in 2007 (Act No. 254/2007). Their powers were taken over by area offices in regional centres.

A new wave of changes was implemented under the influence of public finance consolidation in 2012–2015. The main legislature was adopted in 2012–2013 (Act 345/2012 and Act 180/2013), while implementation continued over the next few years. Among the main reasons for reform was the expected extensive savings in public administration costs (at the beginning this was estimated at EUR 700 million between 2012 and 2016, Pravda 2014). This reform was announced under the name “ESO Programme” (in English, stressing efficient, reliable and open state administration). It again focused on the lower level and a network of 72 integrated district offices was established. It integrated previously disbanded field offices of state administration based on the sectoral principle into one office (see e.g. OECD 2014). Regional offices of specialized state administration were also cancelled. It included technological modernization (more information technologies were introduced), with a more customer-oriented approach. This reform and its cost demanding segments (hardware, software for e-government, buildings' reconstructions) was possible to implement mostly thanks to the extensive use of EU funds. It resulted in opening a network of one-stop-shop-type client service centres covering all citizen agendas in one place.

3.4 Factors Influencing the Implementation of Local Public Administration Reforms in Slovakia, 1990–2015

3.4.1 Administrative Traditions and Policy Legacies

Traditions influenced public administration reforms in a diverse way in Slovakia. While on the one hand they allowed the quick application of models inspired by positive historical experiences, on the other hand discussion about “traditions”

limited progress in some fields of public administration reforms. There are also signs of path dependency that influenced public administration reforms. Old legacies were still valid, e.g. in the case of the large number of small local self-governments, or territorial division of ethnically mixed territories. The transfer of staff from state administration to self-government had a similar impact, which limited the application of new approaches at least for a short while. It is also questionable, if the new territorial division at the regional level introduced in 1996 would develop into a new path dependency factor circumscribing progress at this level.

The existence of well-known traditions was important for the quick introduction of local self-government in 1990. The early stage of the reform had not been extensively planned. There was a lack of time for deeper scientific and political debates, so inspiration taken from previous eras was spontaneously adopted. There were also tradition-based proposals, e.g. concerning the regional level of government (e.g. territorial division), but such proposals were rejected as being outdated. Institutional traditions later faced a more consolidated political environment and a different phase of social and economic development with changing opinions on the possibilities to implement a historically justified approach. A historically reasonable approach was adopted, e.g., in the field of returning old municipal property back to local self-governments (property they had owned before the Communist period).

One kind of path dependency we can observe in the case of inherited administrative-territorial division at the local level typified by the large number of units. The number of local self-government units increased during the first years of the transition period as a part of the freedom that returned to the local level. Nevertheless, it limited progress in decentralization and also in the present it influences the efficiency of local self-government (administration, services delivery). Debates on the too fragmented network of local self-governments are on-going (e.g. Slavík et al. 2013; Klimovský 2014). The specific arrangement concerning the territorial administrative division of ethnically mixed territories in Southern Slovakia (e.g. as “petrification” of old districts) had a similar impact. Specific path dependency influenced the limited progress that public administration had with the simple transfer of staff from the previous state administration to self-government (e.g. during the early years of regional self-government). They took with them their previous practices of state administration officials.

As a new path dependency formation, we can consider decisions concerning spatial division at the meso-level adopted in 1996. Territorial division which does not respect any clear rational requirements, or traditions, with an absence of regional identity, is in a fragile position. It faces less respect among political strata, as well as among citizens (see e.g. Buček 2011). It leads to a weaker position of regions and their representatives within society. It is a matter of future development if this path dependency burden will be satisfactorily resolved.

3.4.2 *Modernization*

Modernization has been a common argument in favour of reforms in Slovakia. It is not surprising that after decades of a Communist regime, it has been repeatedly declared as part of the general effort for inevitable progressive development. We can observe all the crucial meanings—democratization, decentralization, managerial and administrative modernization, as well as information-communication and technological modernization. Although they are intermingled, there are periods during which particular meanings prevailed in reforms' implementation.

There was a strong need for democratization felt immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime. The collapse of communism also opened the opportunity to introduce influential neo-liberal principles of capitalism, including the preference for rapid “shock” reforms implementation. A strong emphasis on economic reforms (as privatization and a market economy were introduced) limited interest and capacities for parallel deeper administration reforms immediately after 1989, besides democratization. A more extensive meaning of democratization expanded later, within the next reform periods, focusing on, e.g., a more participatory government, better information access and transparency in public policy.

More explicit pressure for public administration modernization was explicitly included in the key 2002–2005 reforms. This had been indicated already in reform preparatory documents elaborated since 1998. Modernization had been one of the primary goals expressed within *Concept of decentralisation and modernisation of public administration* adopted by the central government (Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2000). It focused on managerial, administrative (civil service principles), staff training and ICT meanings of modernization.

Management and administration modernization focused primarily on improvement of efficiency, quality and transparency in local public administration (primarily in self-government). A more visible penetration of various new practices in administrative and managerial fields had been observable already since the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, it was multiplied after the key decentralization reform came into effect. It was a reaction to the demand to build a more efficient, better organized and initiative self-government. Partly, it had been inspired by the principles of new public management (well visible e.g. in ESO state administration reform). It concerned, e.g., performance measurement, programme budgeting, public procurement, customer orientation, public-private partnerships (e.g. Malíková et al. 2013). One specific issue had been the improvement of the quality of staff, its legal status, with pressure on better training and education of staff working at all levels of public administration.

Greater attention to the “technological” meaning of modernization within reforms (with many headlines changing over time, such as informatization, electronization, digitalization) also started after the year 2000 (they were progressing also before, but as uncoordinated activities, e.g., of individual self-governments, or separate lines of state administration). It focused on preparation of strategic and legal framework, pilot projects and fragmented applications. Later on, interest

shifted to integration of fragmented segments of information infrastructure and already developed applications. The role of ICT in the improvement of decision-making and a better service for citizens has been generally recognized. Despite progress in this field, it has been considered as being less sufficient compared to in other countries. As a result, since 2008, the modernization effort in this field has increased and has shifted in fact into the core of reforms. A specific strategic and conceptual reform document focusing on informatization in public administration was adopted in 2008 and amended in 2015 (Národná koncepcia informatizácie verejnej správy, Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2008, 2015). Progress in this field led to improvement of e-government in Slovakia by a set of incremental improvements and also thanks to great support provided by EU funds (with delay to the end of programming period). It would be the technological aspects that would prevail in the reform effort if consolidation pressure did not press for other reform steps. Dominance of information technological aspects in reforms confirmed plans to establish the Council of the Government for Public Administration Digitalization (Slov. Rada vlády Slovenskej republiky pre digitalizáciu verejnej správy, Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2015). Besides representatives of public administration, it should include also representatives of the IT sector (e.g. associations active in this field).

3.4.3 International Policy Environment and Integration Processes

The international policy environment we can consider as a source of important external influence in general. This has been especially true in the case of smaller countries, with open economies and strong integration ambitions. An effort to have a standard local public administration system comparable with other EU or OECD countries was combined with the goal for dynamic social economic development in Slovakia. While policy and good practice transfers work almost permanently, EU integration ambitions strongly affected the timing of reforms and pressure for their implementation. Slightly different was the situation during the global financial and economic crisis. Although it was primarily an “imported” crisis (e.g. Buček 2012), with less internal sources of crisis in Slovakia, economic turbulences and rising public debt led to consolidation policy adoption, which influenced local public administration. Nevertheless, despite various international influences, we can still say that the local public administration system still has numerous country-specific features.

Public administration reforms in Slovakia were influenced by the experiences and traditions of selected Western countries at the very beginning after 1989. They concerned countries closer geographically, with a similar historical background, administrative traditions and good experience in public administration, with important influence of German–Austrian local government tradition. Of course,

there has always been inspiration from reforms in other post-socialist transforming countries, primarily the Czech Republic (until 1992 in one state), as well as Hungary and Poland. The Slovak Republic carefully observed their reform activities in the field of public administration, with the goal of not staying too far behind them in these kinds of reforms (good local public administration is often perceived also as an important aspect of competitiveness). Later on, external environment impulses were related to the integration of Slovakia into the EU, OECD and NATO (end of the 1990s). The most influential role was “Europeization”, typified by the European Union conditionality and recommendations prepared, e.g., by OECD. They were often included in argumentation within reform documents and legislation preparation in Slovakia, as well as in other countries (in the case of Portugal, e.g. Magone 2011). These integration ambitions also had real-time influence and sped up reform activities in the field of local public administration. Thanks to integration process-related policies and “harmonization”, many innovations were introduced also in the field of local finance (e.g. programme budgeting), services provision, ICT application and so on.

Many important policy innovations transferred from abroad entered into the basic principles of the reforms. Among the most important external influences, we can consider the key ideological and conceptual shift. We can observe the penetration of influential concepts such as decentralization, subsidiarity, new public management, governance, not mentioning strong a neoliberal background (sometimes in fragments). They were transferred by various means. It included rising participation in international bodies, for example, in the Council of Europe. The Slovak Republic signed the European Charter of Local Self-government in 2000 (selected Articles) and in 2007 (in full extent). Many new policy innovations penetrated thanks to rising decentralized international cooperation (twinning, sister-cities, cross-border co-operation), especially into policy-making and services delivery practices of self-government. Such external “policy shopping” is permanent and plays an important complementary role in domestic approaches in shaping the final goals of public administration reforms.

3.4.4 *Macroeconomic Development*

The Slovak economy has experienced quite successful development during the last 25 years (Fig. 3.1). Nevertheless, this development has not been straightforward and interim turbulences have emerged as well. The relationships among macroeconomic development, economic policy and public administration reforms within the state have been important. Post-socialist countries such as Slovakia had been concentrated on reforming their fragile economies for many years. We have to be aware that public administration was not considered a priority within the main transition processes (e.g. Verheijen 2007). Market economy formation and related economic reforms dominated political discourse. Within the economic transition policy, preference had been given to “shock therapy”. Inside this economic

framework, public administration reforms had been considered as a secondary issue during the 1990s, although still important. At the turn of the century, the public administration reform position changed. It was integrated into mainstream economic and social reforms induced by significant economic stagnation of the country in this period (see Figs. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4). Public administration reform was once again included in the responses to an economic decrease during the economic and financial crisis and afterwards. It shows that public administration reforms are induced also by worse economic development in a country. Such a situation provides great opportunities to build a wider consensus on changes also in this field, under the pressure to adopt inevitable and deeper changes within society. The Slovak case shows that it makes sense to make reforms, because a better phase of economic and social development follows their implementation.

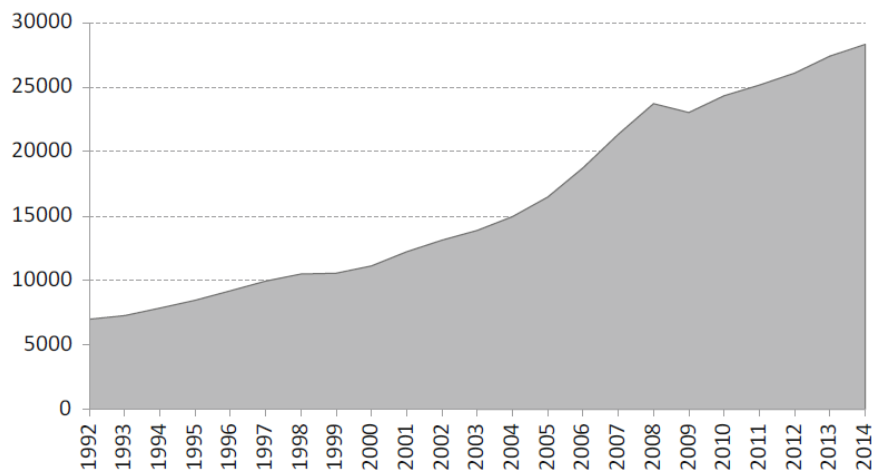


Fig. 3.1 GDP per capita development 1992–2014 in Slovakia (in USD). *Source* OECD 2015 (1992–1994, 2014—estimation)

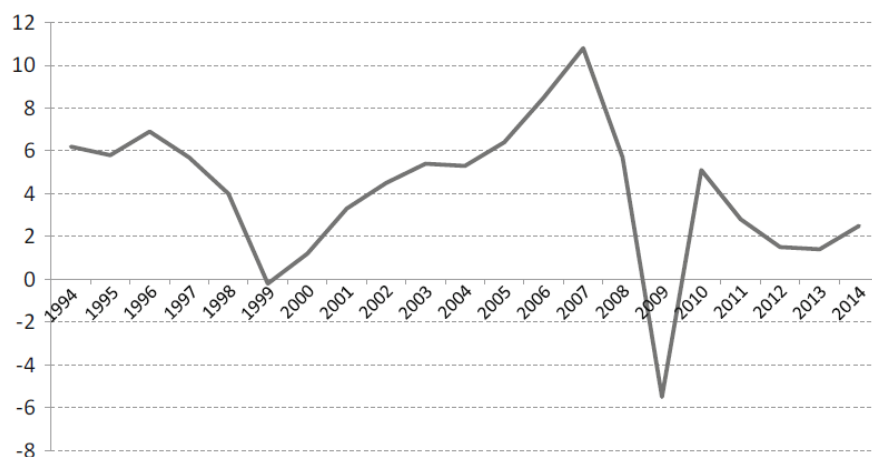


Fig. 3.2 GDP growth in Slovakia 1994–2014 (year to year change in %). *Source* OECD (2016) (1994–1996, 2014 estimated)

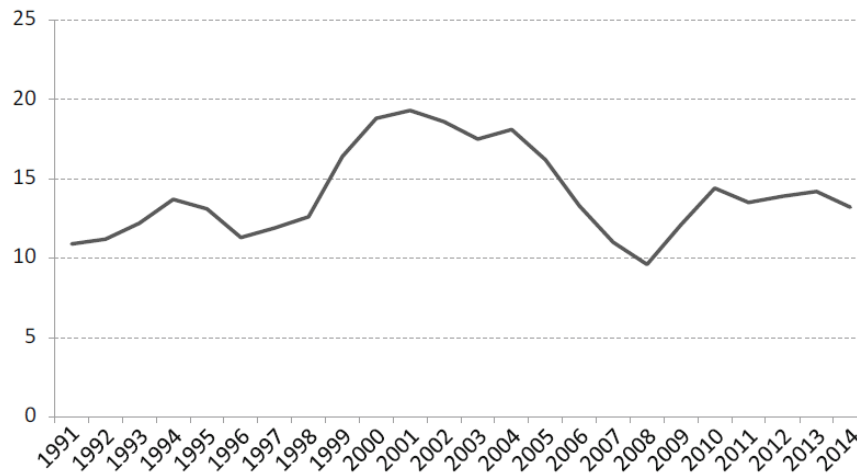


Fig. 3.3 Unemployment rate in Slovakia 1991–2014 (in %). *Source* OECD

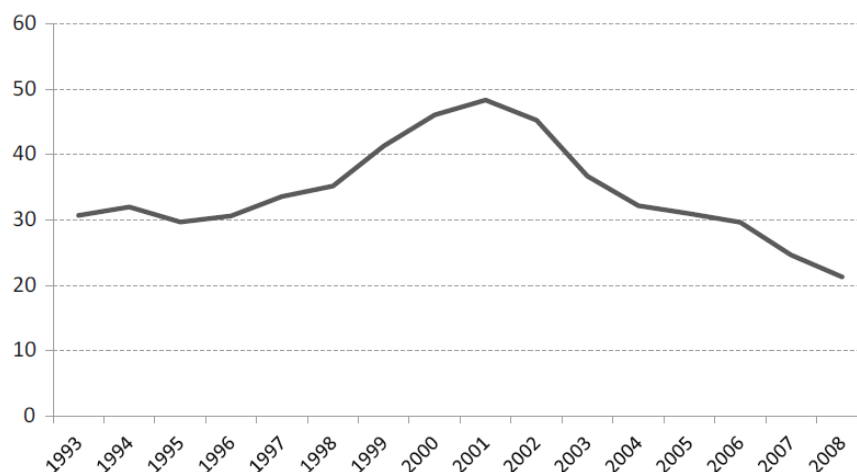


Fig. 3.4 Exchange rate SKK (Slovak Crown) to USD. *Source* NBS 2015

We use a set of longer term basic economic indicators (GDP growth, unemployment and exchange rate development—Figs. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) to document the economic and social development context of public administration reforms. The brief view indicates many phases of economic growth and economic slowdown, or even economic decline. Early transition public administration reforms had a limited scope and were implemented in a less transformed economy and had a more democratizing nature. The macroeconomic situation worsened in the mid-1990s (e.g. Marcinčin and Beblavý 2000). The economy lost its dynamics, which was visible in the higher unemployment rate (1994–1995) and GDP growth decline. Short-term renewal of economic growth was achieved only thanks to increased state involvement in the economy, with rising external and internal debt (e.g. MESA 1998). Real economic restructuring and reform was absent and economic imbalance expanded. In such a situation, only state administration (de-concentration) and territorial division-based reform were implemented. Bad economic development

and many other factors caused the fall of the government in 1998 parliamentary elections.

The Slovak economy situation during the years 1998–2001 was one of the most complicated in its history. The entire economic and social environment had been disrupted. New political garniture recognized that the only way out of this situation was in wide-scale social and economic reforms. Such an inevitable reform drive also had support among citizens and key societal actors. Public administration reform was incorporated into the main package of reforms. The new economic institutional framework also required changes in public administration (e.g. to implement fiscal decentralization). Decentralization, as one reform priority, included the introduction of regional self-government, which had also been considered as a tool for a new approach to development within the country. The previously prevailing dependency on central state activity in regional and local development needed to be replaced by more powers and resources allocated to the sub-state levels of government. It should motivate them for a more initiative approach to development of their territories. After this period, local self-governments (e.g. in large cities) and regions started to be more active actors in the economic and social development of the country.

Positive macroeconomic development after successful reforms, combined with a general positive economic cycle, finished with the start of the financial and economic crisis in 2008–2009. The extremely open Slovak economy could not avoid the consequences of this global crisis, despite limited internal sources of crisis phenomena. The economic crisis that hit a set of important economic sectors was later converted into a public finance crisis (Buček 2012). The effort to cope with the crisis led to excessive budget deficits and increased public debt. Originally negotiated minor adaptation and short-term measures with a limited impact on local and regional self-government (2009) turned into longer term serious interventions into previously functioning local self-governments (e.g. Buček and Sopkuliak 2014).

3.4.5 Public Finance Development

Worse economic development and too expansive government spending can cause a voluntary or forced public finance consolidation policy. Such development puts into question many reform achievements or has changed the nature of reforms under the pressure of necessary measures initiated by public finance development. It has been a very sensitive field for local self-governments' functioning and local development in general. The Slovak case indicates that the main packages of reforms responded also to worse public finance development. The public finance framework had been important already during the early transition years' reforms. These early reforms addressed primarily the need for democratization at the local level, but the unpredictable transitional public finance situation limited any deeper reforms, e.g., leading to more extensive decentralization. The reform that started at the end of 1990s was more complex and progressive (e.g. increased financial capacities at the

local level), while reform steps after the economic and financial crisis were more “restrictive” measures (partly interim), with “counter-reform” features (e.g. limited financial autonomy at the local level). Public finance consolidation measures in this case diminished the effect of previous reforms and circumscribed more progress in reforms, although selected modernization steps could be taken.

Public sector savings or an increase in taxes (as well as tax collection improvement) is usually at the core of a consolidation effort. It can result in larger scale public administration reforms, or at least interim consolidation fiscal measures. Primary goals usually include reduction of public debt and at least the freezing of public administration expenditures. If we take the public debt rise, e.g. compared to GDP, we can observe two key periods with a quick and extensive rise in Slovakia after 1990 (Fig. 3.5). The first period culminated in the years 1998–2000. A longer period of public debt decrease from 2000 to 2008 reflected positive economic development and many reforms were introduced, including public administration reform. This was a very progressive reform period also from the public finance point of view (e.g. banking sector consolidation and privatization, tax reform), with an increase in fiscal capacity at the local level (fiscal decentralization, but including limits on local borrowing). This successful consolidation period followed several years with more vigorous public finance, influenced by effort to meet Eurozone criteria.

A new wave of public debt growth emerged in 2008. As OECD (2014) outlined, high budget deficits and growing debt have created the need for fiscal consolidation. Without additional policy interventions, general government debt would continue to increase rapidly. As a result of its public finance development, the Slovak Republic has been included in the Excessive Deficit Procedure under the EU Stability and Growth Pact. The crisis years meant increased instability, less predictability and more subordination of sub-state public finance to national public finance priorities. As Buček and Sopkuliak (2014) revealed—many of the measures induced by the financial and economic crisis and later on induced by fiscal consolidation focused on local and regional self-governments. It included a decreased



Fig. 3.5 General government debt to GDP development in Slovakia (in %). *Source* OECD (2016)

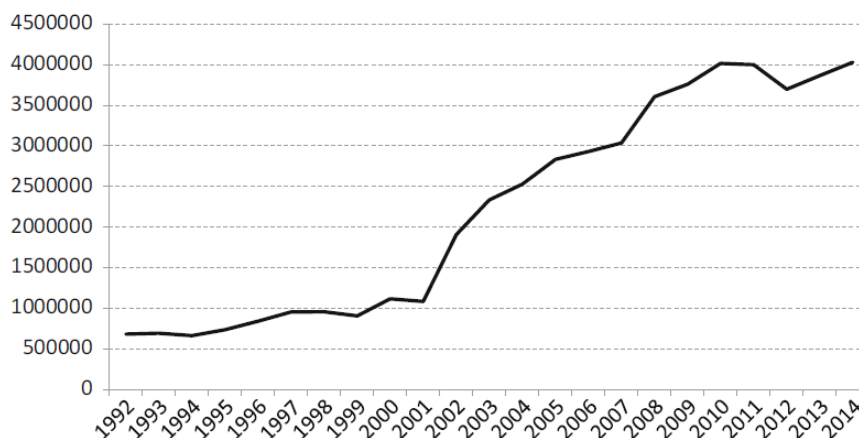


Fig. 3.6 Total revenues of local self-governments in Slovakia (th. EUR). *Sources* Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic (2016)

portion of shared taxes (in favour of the central state), voluntary savings compared to previous budgets, pressure to reduce debt financing (borrowing, other external forms of financing). They were incorporated into public finance consolidation measures that were, in fact, of a counter-reform character. The main state subvention flows were stable, e.g. for education. Nevertheless, this consolidation effort was successful (including the withdrawal of Slovakia from the Excessive Deficit Procedure), also thanks to positive macroeconomic development. Many measures of a counter-reform nature were later mitigated, and a pre-crisis framework was re-established for 2015–2016. It included a return to better shared tax distribution formulas strengthening the position of self-governments.

The specific context of reforms at the local level from the public finance point of view is shown in Fig. 3.6. While reforms after the year 2000 had a very positive impact on local finance, “defensive” reforms decided on during post-crisis public finance consolidation had a contradictory effect with a slowdown of development at the local level (2011–2013). The absence of a local prodevelopment base of this reform started to be restored by a return to the pre-crisis framework in 2014–2015.

3.4.6 *Central Governments, Leading Political Parties and Main Policy Priorities*

The role of central governments in local public administration reforms has been very influential in Slovakia. Short-term duration, instability, internal diversity and competing policy priorities of central governments reduced the chances to prepare more elaborated public administration reforms during the first half of the 1990s. They have not been able to adopt a serious decision, e.g. concerning decentralization, or the meso-level of government (besides limited progress within early transition reform). All central governments worked only for short periods (see

Table 3.2)—during the first 4 years 1990–1994, the governments of Prime Ministers M. Čič (transitional—December 1989–June 1990), V. Mečiar (June 1990–April 1991, Mečiar I), J. Čarnogurský (May 1991–June 1992), again V. Mečiar (June 1992–March 1994, Mečiar II) and J. Moravčík (March 1994–December 1994) were in power. They were also coalition governments with an absence of strong internal cohesion. Many governments announced plans for reforms, established special bodies and initiated various analytical and conceptual works on the future of public administration (e.g. two documents focusing on the new organization of local public administration and concerning new administrative and territorial division in 1993). The instability of central government and their changing approaches and priorities led to a slowing down of reforms, or short-term changes (mainly in reorganization of state administration with signs of de-concentration, see e.g. Slavík 1997).

The next central government of Prime Minister V. Mečiar (1994–1998, Mečiar III.) governed a full 4-year term for the first time in Slovak political history. However, V. Mečiar was a controversial, strong leader with his own visions concerning public administration and its reform (reflecting also the centre-left and nationalist party composition of this government coalition). His government focused on stronger state administration as an inevitable part of its perception of new state-building processes. Although, there were possibilities to discuss reforms proposed during this government, the final decision was primarily political and partly unexpected. It reflected the opinions and interest of the governing coalition. The reform introduced in 1996 was criticized in many fields. It was an especially vague strategy concerning the division of powers and political decisions on territorial administrative division (without a search for a larger consensus). The main obstacle had been the strong emphasis on state administration and de-concentration, without a clear relationship towards decentralization (which had been promised for the future). According to Mesežnikov (2002), this government focused on strengthening its own position, including strengthening the position of its own supporters (their political parties' regional and local elites).

The governments of Prime Minister M. Dzurinda (1998–2002 Dzurinda I. and 2002–2006 Dzurinda II.) represented a democratic coalition that defeated V. Mečiar. It had a strong mandate for reforms. The central government was formed by a group of political parties representing centre-right (SDK and SMK) as well as centre-left (SOP) and left parties (SDL) during the first term, while the coalition during the second term had a more centre-right profile. These two governments we can consider as the most reform-oriented in Slovak history until 2015. They prepared and realized more complex reforms, including the most important public administration reform at the sub-state level. As far as public administration reform was concerned, it obtained political priority, including the introduction of the post of governmental plenipotentiary for public administration reform and decentralization. This government considered the previous reforms of state administration as being incomplete (1995–1996), too costly, in many features outdated, and with need of serious modification. A strong driving force was the process of EU integration (Slovakia joined the EU in 2004) and related conditionality. However, due

Table 3.2 Central governments and their composition in Slovakia 1989–2016

Prime minister	Duration	Political parties	Profile
M. Čič	1989–1990	VPN—Public Against Violence Movement	Transitional
V. Mečiar (I.)	1990–1991	VPN—Public Against Violence Movement, KDH—Christian Democratic Movement, DS—Democratic Party	Centre-right
J. Čarnogurský	1991–1992	VPN—Public Against Violence Movement, KDH—Christian Democratic Movement, DS—Democratic Party, MNI—Hungarian Independent Initiative	Centre-right
^	1992–1994	HZDS—Movement for Democratic Slovakia, SNS—Slovak National Party	Centre-left
J. Moravčík	1994	DÚ—Democratic Union, KDH—Christian Democratic Movement, SDL—Party of Democratic Left	Centre-right
V. Mečiar (III.)	1994–1998	HZDS—Movement for Democratic Slovakia, ZRS—Association of Workers, SNS—Slovak National Party, RSS—Slovak Farmers Party	Centre-left
M. Dzurinda (I.)	1998–2002	SDK—Slovak Democratic Coalition, SDĽ—Party of Democratic Left, SMK—Party of Hungarian Coalition, SOP—Party of Civic Understanding	Centre-right
M. Dzurinda (II.)	2002–2006	SDKÚ—Slovak Democratic Christian Union, ANO—Alliance of New Citizen, SMK—Party of Hungarian Coalition, KDH—Christian Democratic Movement	Centre-right
R. Fico (I.)	2006–2010	SMER—Social Democracy, SNS—Slovak National Party, ĽS-HZDS—People's Party-Movement for Democratic Slovakia	Centre-left
I. Radičová	2010–2012	SDKÚ—Slovak Democratic Christian Union, SaS—Freedom and Solidarity, KDH—Christian Democratic Movement, MOST-HÍD—Bridge—Civic Party	Centre-right
R. Fico (II.)	2012–2016	SMER—Social Democracy	Centre-left

Slovak usual abbreviations are combined with full English names of parties

to the inconsistency of the governmental coalition, not all intentions were achieved as planned (e.g. in the field of territorial administrative division). Centre-left and left parties limited further progress in some parts of the reform (mainly during the end of the 1998–2002 term). They were motivated by fears concerning the weakening of their position in local public administration. Thanks to the re-election of the leading political parties of this coalition (2002), major changes were implemented, including fiscal decentralization applied after 2005. Focus on implementation of this wide-scale reform limited preparation of further stages of local public administration reforms, including growing tensions within the governing coalition in 2005–2006 (with the political parties Alliance of New Citizen and the Christian

Democratic Movement). Despite preparation of a reform document focusing on reorganization of local self-government for public discussion (Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2004), it lost priority and went into the background of this government's agenda.

The primarily centre-left (SMER—Social Democracy) government of Prime Minister R. Fico (2006–2010) did not continue previous reforms. The main effort of this government was fulfilment of the criteria for joining the Eurozone (Slovakia joined the Eurozone in 2009). During the prevailing positive phase of the economic cycle, it could also realize a more typical social democratic policy focusing on unemployment and the better social situation of citizens. Later on it dealt with the impact of the financial and economic crisis in 2009–2010. Measures adopted in 2009 worsened the financial situation of local self-governments and many of them had to adopt their own preventive measures (Buček and Sopkuliak 2014). This government did not show any interest in any kind of deeper reform. Another major change was the further reorganization of state administration, including elimination of regional offices of general state administration. In the field of local self-government, this internally diverse government concentrated on maintaining the existing framework with minor changes incorporated under the “headline” of modernization (mainly ICT application expansion). During the second part of its term, the central government initiated preparation of a new concept of reform of self-government, which had been submitted in its final form in July 2009 (Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2009). It included the intention to focus on more efficient public administration (including joint offices for more self-governments), human resources improvement, information technologies application and better monitoring of local self-government. More costly tasks would be financed by the resources of the EU Operational Programmes 2007–2013. The end of the electoral term stopped further progress and this government was not re-elected.

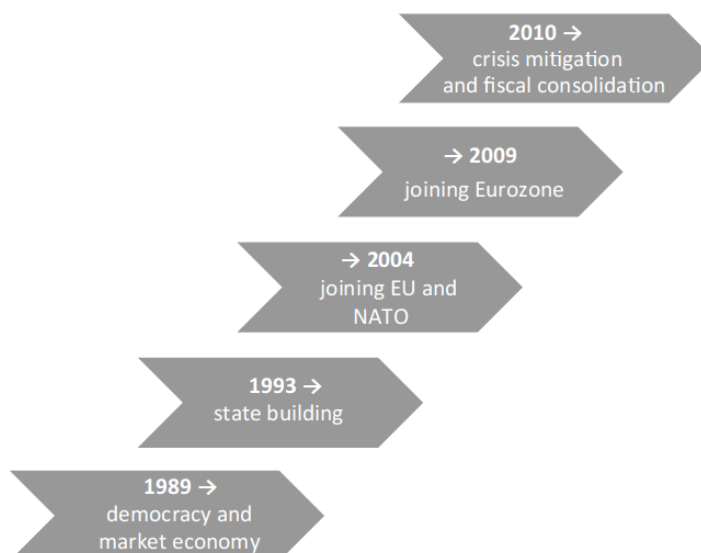
The centre-right government of PM I. Radičová (2010–2012) was deeply involved in formulating anti-crisis measures also concerning local self-government, e.g., cuts in spending, decrease of their share of PIT yield, limits on their debt. Nevertheless, this government declared its support for further reforms in public administration in its government programme manifesto. It included certain features usually mentioned within repeated attempts to prepare “communal reform” (e.g. more motivating conditions for voluntary inter-municipal co-operation, joint administration of selected powers, or even amalgamation of small local self-governments, Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2010). This government started again with preparation of a conceptual document for reform. Despite the fragments of this concept, it was not completed due to the early fall of this government. Nevertheless, this government expressed interest in deeper reforms, with many reform proponents from years 1998–2006 in important political positions at the central level.

The second government led by PM R. Fico (2012–2016) as a “single colour” government had a great opportunity for more extensive reforms. Nevertheless, it focused on reforms of state administration known as the ESO Programme, focusing

on improving the delivery of administrative services, with their strengthened quality, better access (as “one-stop shops”), improved cost-efficiency and savings and integration of dispersed specialized state administration offices. The large-scale audit of public administration finished without a clear policy outcome. This government declined any deeper reform of self-government. Its effort in this field focused on modernization changes. Despite a declaration (Office of the Government of the Slovak Government 2012), no substantial progress had been made in the field of “joint offices” serving more self-governments. This government was more successful in its support of e-government activities within self-government. This government concentrated more on fiscal consolidation issues at all levels and lines of public administration and a more typical social policy. It is well documented by the speech of the PM R. Fico at the 25th ZMOS Congress in June 2014: “*Ladies and gentlemen, as I already said, during 2012, 2013, and unfortunately also during the first half of 2014, in our society only one word dominated—money. Finance, sustainable finance, public order, consolidation, these are words and slogans, which are the most frequent ... Words, which are painful for the state sector, as well as self-governments*” (Obecné Noviny 2014, p. 8).

When considering public administration reform, we cannot underestimate the influence of policy priorities of central governments (see Fig. 3.7). Key critical junctures were 1989 as the fall of the Communist regime, 1993 as the origin of the Slovak Republic as an independent state, or the year 2004 when Slovakia joined the EU and related processes. Policy priorities strongly influenced the willingness and capacity to prepare and implement public administration reforms. Administrative reforms were not always necessary to implement political priorities successfully in a particular period. From the point of view of self-government, the most important reform periods according to political priorities were the introductory democratization period and the period prior to joining the EU. Other periods were less reform progressive, or focused more on state administration reforms.

Fig. 3.7 Policy priorities in Slovakia after 1989 (own elaboration)



The concentration of central government capacities on political priorities and related changes has limited the ability to move ahead with local public administration reforms. It is natural especially if implementation of particular policies is strongly linked to particular sections of the public administration system (that should be stable to remain efficient enough to implement changes). Many reforms do not always require deeper changes in local public administration. For example, there was little attention to public administration reform after joining the EU and later during the effort to join the Eurozone, combined with an orientation towards administrative capacities, e.g., on EU funds absorption, or administration processes innovation such as programme budgeting in local self-governments. We can also observe periods with less reforms, focusing on adaptation to previous changes and eventual minor improvements that are sometimes needed (after experience with reform outcomes).

The impact of political parties has been crucial on the direction, scope and timing of reforms in Slovakia. As various political parties have had access to central political power, they also differently influenced the dynamics of reforms. Parties had different opinions on the level of centralization or decentralization, or the role of state administration and self-government within public administration, territorial administrative division and so on. Besides the composition of the central government, especially during later stages of the post-socialist transition, another important interrelated aspect was the duration of central governments. Short-term governments and single-term governments were less able to prepare and implement reforms, especially those concerning self-government. Such reforms require more than one electoral period. The implementation of reforms was concentrated on in the second periods (Dzurinda II, Fico II—in this case after the short-term break 2010–2012, and to a certain extent also Mečiar III).

There were established political parties, usually active for a long time in political life, repeatedly participating in central governments that put into practice more extensive local public administration reforms. This reflects the need for existence, capacities and leadership of large and influential political parties, although in practice operating often in a coalition with smaller parties. Such a scale of reform is not an easy task and more capacities are needed, including necessary respected professional capacities available in well-established parties with experience in participating in central government and in managing changes. It also needs the capacity and willingness to build a larger consensus across many segments of society.

It is less simple to summarize the ideological orientation of political parties and their reform inclination. Experience from the last 25 years indicates more willingness to prepare and implement reforms by centre-right governments in Slovakia. Centre-left governments paid less attention to these issues. It also seems that centre-left and left political parties (Mečiar III, Fico I and Fico II) focused more on reform of state administration, and a less decentralized and stronger state. It is easier to implement, with less preparatory works, and less extensive coordination with social partners and public consultations. Nevertheless, in this we have to be careful, having less time for evaluation and drawing far-reaching conclusions.

3.4.7 *Governance and Other Actors*

Slovak society and its development are no longer dominated exclusively by central government. The central state has been consulting its intentions with other actors active in social, economic and political life to a growing extent. It means that final decisions concerning any reforms are debated not only in central state institutions and within governing political parties. A certain level of consensus or compromise in reforms had been achieved after 1998. In the case of local public administration reforms, representatives of local self-government associations held a key role, but other actors also have much to say (trade unions, representatives of employers, third sector bodies). The governance structures include official bodies like the Economic and Social Council of the Government, or special governance-based bodies affiliated to particular ministries. Until 2011, among the key institutions related to reforms was the Council of the Government for Public Administration (as an advisory and consulting body), with representatives also outside state administration.

Since the early period of post-socialist transition, we can observe the influential and growing role of representatives of local self-governments. A key partner of central governments is primarily the Association of Towns and Communes in Slovakia (in Slovak ZMOS—Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska), representing about 95 % of all local self-governments (one of the most influential policy actors outside of central government and political parties in Slovakia). This association actively negotiates in favour of its members (e.g. including very small communes). Similar associations—Union of Cities (in Slovak—Únia miest), as well as the Association of Self-governing Regions (in Slovak—Združenie samosprávnych krajov), are less influential, although respected. Nevertheless, while ZMOS, in the early stages of transition had been a strongly proreform-oriented actor, later attitudes have documented a less enthusiastic approach. Its considerations fluctuate mostly within the local self-government framework achieved during reforms implemented during the first half of the decade after 2000. It focuses on protection of already obtained positions and seems less open to new reforms, especially more radical ones—like amalgamation (which could threaten the position of many mayors), or obligatory or forced co-operation in the case of smaller local self-governments. However, this large association with large internal diversity is not easy to move forward into general acceptance for more advanced reforms. It is also less active in generating its own larger reform activities, working mostly on improvements to the existing framework for local self-government. On the other hand, in many cases, representatives of local self-governments were able to stop or moderate reforms they strongly opposed, e.g. transfer of particular powers, changes in the tax yield distribution system (e.g. Buček and Sopkuliak 2014).

During the last 25 years, many other institutions participated in the reform effort in various ways. For example, many experts from Slovak universities participated in analytical and conceptual works (e.g. Slavík et al. 2005). Important contributions were made by the non-governmental sector. While immediately after the change of

regime this sector only just started to grow, the vital non-profit non-governmental sector already existed during the second half of the 1990s (partly as opposition to the then central government of PM V. Mečiar). Among the NGOs that had a long-term interest in public administration reform we have to mention the MESA 10 think tank (e.g. Mikloš et al. 1998), which was influential especially by its involvement in decentralization reform preparation. Representatives of this NGO later directly participated in reform implementation after 1998. There are also other current NGOs still advocating public administration reforms primarily based on inter-municipal co-operation and amalgamation (following the ideas of municipal reform), or evaluating the effects of previous reforms. This is the case with the M.R. Štefánik Conservative Institute (Slov. Konzervatívny inštitút M.R. Štefánika) and the Municipal Research and Advisory Centre. Together with academic institutions, they provide many interesting source materials (e.g. Sloboda 2010; Komunálne výskumné a poradenské centrum 2014) contributing to the shaping of potential future reforms.

3.4.8 Coincidence of Events and Factors Influencing Local Public Administration Reforms

Coincidence of main reforms periods, key social and political events, factors development and their linkage provides good opportunity to get closer to answer main research question—Why and when local public administration reforms are prepared and implemented? Brief overview of selected factors provides coincidence matrix (Table 3.3). As “critical junctures” influencing reforms dynamic and scope, we can consider fall of Communist regime in 1989 and joining EU in 2004. They induced the most important reforms (after 1989, and prior to 2004). As secondary events with minor influence, we can also add Slovak Republic origin in 1993 and joining Eurozone with weakening effect on reform effort in local self-government (after 1993, prior to 2009).

Due to the dual model of public administration applied in Slovakia, we can observe reform dynamics that are different between local self-government and local state administration. Reforms are implemented in parallel, as well as in a separate way. While reforms in state administration are more permanent and incremental, reforms in self-government are implemented in more identifiable stages (e.g. after 1989, at the turn of the century, or induced by the financial and economic crisis). A reform of state administration is easier to prepare and implement within central government’s own decision-making framework. On the other hand, reforms of self-government need more governance-based decision-making with a long-term search for consensus on changes in wider scale.

If we want to evaluate the role of factors that influence local public administration reforms, we have to mention their different strength. Some of these appear to be very significant and substantially influenced motivation for local public

Table 3.3 Coincidence matrix of selected events and factors development

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Reform of																										
Self-government		o	o								o	o	o	o	o	o	o						o	o	o	o
State administration		o	o	o	o		o	o			o	o	o	o	o	o	o		o					o	o	o
Key events																										
Year of event*	o				o											o					o					
Central government																										
Centre-left				o	o	o	o	o	o	o									o	o	o	o		o	o	o
Centre-right		o	o	o		o				o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o				o			
Government second/third period						o	o	o	o	o				o	o	o	o	o	o					o	o	o
Macroeconomic and public finance indicators																										
GDP growth**											o	o										o			o	o
Unemployment rate***						o	o				o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o				o	o	o	o
Public debt to GDP****											o	o	o	o	o	o	o						o	o	o	o

* Key events: 1989—fall of communist regime, 1993—origin of the Slovak Republic, 2004—joining EU, 2009—joining Eurozone, start of economic and financial crisis in Slovakia (e.g. for 1989 only key event is mentioned)

** GDP growth—below 2 % year to year, according to OECD [2016](#)

*** Unemployment rate—above 13 % according to Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2015

**** Public debt—above 45 % of GDP according to OECD [2016](#)

administration reform (besides internal needs for reform, e.g., as modernization). Macroeconomic development and public finance are core factors that influence the motivation for reform. Nevertheless, it seems that under economic and fiscal pressure we can expect administrative reforms of various kinds—more sophisticated deeper reforms with a long-term positive impact, and less sophisticated (disappearing after some time)—narrowly focusing, for example, on expenditures savings in the short-term view. To the core factors, we can also add interrelated factors combining the role of central governments and political parties. It seems that political stability supported the chance of successful reforms. Reforms have a better chance if there are stable (more electoral terms in government) and well-established political elites. Besides early transition public administration reform, subsequent reforms were performed by the governing coalition with a clear leading party (SDKÚ), and/or by a single party government (SMER–SD). They had the capacity to prepare and implement reforms, having had longer term experience in central government participation and leadership. Reform capacities and vision seem better developed in the case of centre-right parties (following a liberal agenda), and less developed in the case of centre-left parties (putting into question the situation concerning the development of leftist thinking in this part of Europe). They have different political priorities and they have paid different attention to local self-government comparing to local state administration.

On the other hand, some of the discussed factors were influential only in a particular period and later on their impact decreased, or their nature changed. This is, for example, the case with administrative traditions and policy legacies (but they can always return into discussion). The modernization “argument” for reform has also changed—now strongly moved in favour of its “technological” and managerial meaning in Slovakia. International influences also lost their strength since the time of pre-accession processes, although many piecemeal policy transfers are permanent. Surprisingly less reform calls have been generated from within local public administration, including more autonomous local self-government elite. This elite lack ability in generating larger scale proposals, although they are quite efficient in protecting previous reform achievements and in proposing minor improvements to the public administration system. Compared to large associations, other NGOs are less influential, although they provide important knowledge and alternative solutions.

3.5 Conclusions

Reforms in general are an immanent part of any societal progress. Public administration reforms are among the most typical expressions of such development from the point of view of governments and the public sector. Although there are constant debates on the weaknesses and strengths within local public administration, and on needed improvements and modernization, it is often not enough for larger scale reform implementation. A previous overview of development in Slovakia from a

longer term perspective shows that reforms usually need more complex stimuli. A combination of need for progress in the field of local public administration and local development (democratization, decentralization, modernization), less positive indicators of social and economic development (such as during post-Communist transformation, economic and financial crisis), as well as the capacities and selected characteristics of central governments and leading political parties, plays a primary role.

If we attempt to evaluate the long-term trend in reforms, we can see respect paid to the continuity, progress and moderate modifications of previous reforms in Slovakia. Despite the contradictory positions of political parties during the various local public administration reforms, there were not any serious interventions into previous self-government reforms after changing political parties in government. Although modifications emerged, no dramatic irreversible counter-trend has been observable. It reflects a certain kind of consensual approach, partly caused by the coalition nature of most central governments and a more extensive consultation on such changes with other societal actors in Slovakia (with the respected position of representatives of local and regional self-government). Even in the case of intervention into certain local self-governments' rights and resources allocation adopted during the period of fiscal consolidation, promises that after stabilization of public finance the "rules of the game" would be returned to the previous state are fulfilled (e.g. since 2016 in selected measures). Nevertheless, changes in the field of local state administration are less unidirectional.

Preparation and implementation of any kind of future reforms within Slovak local public administration (and especially in local self-government) are more complicated issues. The current mode of governance in managing important multilevel political issues limit quick progress in building a consensus around any new round of reforms. Nevertheless, it is also clear that at least one deeper local self-government reform is still needed. Local self-government reform is behind the changes in state administration, it is fragmented, and many tasks cannot be provided efficiently by small local self-government (e.g. ICT application in local self-government units below 200 inhabitants). Integration or a joint service provision base seems inevitable. It looks like the applied incremental changes to the present are not able to solve a serious part of local self-government problems. Among the more serious obstacles, we can consider only the slowly changing opinions of local self-governments expressed by their leading association (ZMOS). It is based on internal solidarity with the interests of small local self-governments in mind. It limits progress in the most serious issue concerning the future of small local self-governments. This association, which has played a progressive role in many other issues, is moving only very slowly in finding a more efficient and flexible solution to the problem of small local self-governments. Nevertheless, it is a very influential actor and any progress in reforming local self-government will not be possible without changing their attitudes. As a result, as a first midterm scenario, we can expect minor gradual reforms focusing on improvements in the functioning of local self-government, including a potential further slow transfer of powers and related resources in favour of local self-governments, which will have impacts on

urban governance processes. The less probable second midterm scenario is that long-term public pressure reflecting the inefficiencies on the functioning of existing local self-government, combined with a rising political will for reform, can lead to more extensive reforms in the field of self-government focusing on local as well as meso-level of self-government.

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Local Government and Urban Governance in Europe

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