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**Article**

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## FOUR RIDERS OF THE APOCALYPSE OF THE POLISH BUREAUCRACY

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**Abstract:** This article was originally published in Polish as: Witold Kieżun, *Czterej jeźdźcy apokalipsy polskiej biurokracji*, *Kultura*, No. 3/630, Paris 2000. The Literary Institute (publisher of the “Kultura” monthly) expressed its interest in and consent to the publication of an English-language version of this article. Professor Witold Kieżun also gave his consent to the translation of his text and its posting in the pages of the journal *Foundations of Management*.

The text was written in 1999 and introduced subsequent to January 1 of that year, regarding the reform of the administrative division of Poland, which involved, among other things, three-stage structure of territorial division and the introduction of counties as administrative units (editorial note).

**Keywords:** arrogance of power bureaucracy, corruption, gigantomania, luxuryomania, pathology, praxeology, public administration.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse of the bureaucracy are very common pathological phenomena: gigantomania, luxuryomania, corruption and the arrogance of power.

1) The basic feature of the transformation process of public administration is the systematic increase in employment, and its scale can be described as gigantic. Recall that the central administration in the period from 1990 to 1998, inclusive, increased almost threefold from 46,000 to 126,200 employees. Also, far-reaching tendencies of growth have been demonstrated by the local government administration, which increased from 83,400 employees in 1990 to 142,100 in 1997.

It is amazing that this enormous increase in the central administration took place during the transformation of the system into a free market, with the development of the privatization process and the radical reduction of the state economic sector, and with the official announcement of the idea of subsidiarity and the civic state. It is also astonishing that the subsequent changes in the party coalitions have not changed this tendency in any way.

The example of a four-level organizational structure in Warsaw with 779 councilors is undoubtedly a peculiarly negative world record.

One hundred and twelve ministerial positions in the government, a gigantic extension of the president's office and the prime minister's office, and county

reform forming several thousand attractive positions and expanding the size of the public administration are further examples of a gigantomania that is unjustified by the scale of the economic development (the first two years of independence were characterized by a negative national income, and at the same time, an increase in the central administration of 42,600 employees). The degree of pathology in the organization and the waste exceeding the limits of social acceptance are extremely high.

The construction of the powiats is similar. Against the background of the structures of the European Union countries presented in the European Statistical Table at the 2nd level of the so-called local government NUTS 3, the Polish districts are laughable.

In light of comparison with the EU structures, the concept of Polish county is a fundamental deviation from a rational structure subject to the rules of fitness. A typical Polish county is made up of a city with a population of 30,000 and a population of 50,000 in eight communes.

This small unit is directed by a governor, a deputy-governor, three to five board members and a 21-member county council. In this town of 30,000, there is also a mayor and a 23-person city council. The county assets are assets that generate costs (schools, hospitals, social welfare homes). The county has a glaring shortage of own resources.

Country (in millions)	Population	2nd level	2nd level population (in thousandth)
Belgium	10.70	43 arrondissements	248
Denmark	5.25	15 amter	350
France	58.00	100 departements	580
Greece	10.50	51 nomoi	206
Spain	39.20	52 provincias	752
Netherlands	15.50	0 COROP-regions	387
Germany	83.50	328 kreise	255
Poland	38.60	373 powiaty	103
Portugal	9.80	30 grupos de concelhos	367
Great Britain	58.80	65 counties	900
Italy	57.50	95 regions	605

Even in the small country of Greece, the second level of local government covers 206,000 people. Spain, a country roughly equal in population to Poland, created its second level for 752,000 residents.

In Poland, the county is therefore a classic example of gigantomania, that is, the development of an excessive number of small organizational units.

2) The second rider of the apocalypse of bureaucracy is luxuryomania, which manifests itself in many forms. The first basic form is the scale of earnings related to the last county-regional reform. It turned out that the construction of a new network of counties, marshal offices, Sickness Funds and health care reform resulted not only in a large increase in employment, but also a large increase in salaries. The examples provided show that the average earnings in the new local self-government units are 50–60% higher than those in the former district offices and the current state regional offices. Local government executives' salaries correspond to about 60% of salaries in Canada, a country with a national income per capita that is five times higher than that of the Polish citizens.

A further form of luxury is the traditional expenses for luxury cars, furniture, dozens of official business trips to exotic places such as Saudi Arabia, Alaska, Australia, Mexico, South Africa, and similar places, the construction of luxury buildings with public money, and so on.

However, the most dramatic sign of this luxury is the waste in the use of unofficial extra-budgetary funds, which constitute 50.5% of the total public funds.

3) The third typical pathology is corruption. Many years ago, the outgoing mayor of the Center Commune revealed and the then Parliament Speaker Małachowski published information about the unusual level of corruption in the self-government apparatus in Warsaw. Małachowski wrote that the procedure to sell a plot of land for economic purposes by the city begins with the offering of a Mercedes.

The dissemination of corruption in Poland is an open secret. The report recently published by Transparency International (in October of last year) indicates a serious increase in corruption in Poland. In a ranking of 99 countries, Poland fell from 39th place in 1998 to 44th place.

The head of the Polish branch of IT, Prof. Kaminski, claims that "... the influence of recently introduced administrative reform, which may cause further deterioration of Poland's position in subsequent years, is obvious to us" (Apanowicz, 1999)<sup>[1]</sup>. I think that this opinion, against the background of the greed of the new self-government nomenclature demonstrated by the adoption of aforementioned salaries, which are indecent under Polish field conditions, can be considered accurate. These representatives of the

<sup>1</sup> Apanowicz, P., 1999. Konieczne przyspieszenie prac (Necessary acceleration of work). Rzeczpospolita, Warsaw, May 26 1999.

local communities, who are selected on a pro-rata basis, may not be people who deserve to be trusted to deal with monetary matters.

4) The typical fourth bureaucratic pathology is the arrogance of power. There are many relevant examples. In the sphere of administrative transformation, such an arrogance was exhibited in 1993 in the affirmation of the head of URM that "no discussion on the project of creating counties will be organized, because I do not hide that we want to create facts made. The government takes full responsibility here."

There were many more of these kinds of statements displaying social irresponsibility and concerning the lack of need to consult public in the implementation of the best and the right concept for the creation of counties. In any case, the practice of preventing substantive and serious discussions involving experts on the subject of county reform was just a symptom of this type of pathology, which represents a denial of an open civil state.

The complete lack of response to the dramatic and factual open letter of a group of high-ranking specialists on the construction of counties also testifies to the spread of this organizational pathology. In Canada, after the announcement of an open letter regarding the age limit for professors, the authors were invited to speak with the Prime Minister within two days to agree on a course of action. Paradoxically, it can be said that the popular power of the Polish People's Republic reacted negatively to the open letter of these intellectuals, though this was also done immediately.

### **Synthesis of discrepancies – the theory of organization – the practice of transformation**

1) Absence of an initial concept for the complete transformation and public administration; with the assumed decentralization, there was no determination of the competence of the center, the terrain and the proportion of employment; reform carried out "piece by piece" with no awareness of what the "parts" would look like; to date, there is no concept of the structure, size and scope of the ministries'

activities and the so-called special administration; glaring non-professionalism in the design.

2) Rejection of the subsidiarity principle in the construction of permanent, unjustified organizational structures, the organization of the work process, or the scale of economic development, including the development of the central apparatus and increasing the disproportionate size of the central and field apparatus; this is also connected with the rejection of the principle of pure surveillance through the extension of central and field administrative units having the task of supervision and control of units grouping teams of professionals.

3) Rejection of the principle of flat organizational structures and broad management span by building a three- and four-level organizational structures (in Warsaw and the branches of provincial offices), the multiplication of managerial positions, as well as the multiplication of the administrative units related to a small number of inhabitants (counties have an average of 103,000 residents).

4) A county not connected to a megasystem of social organization is a fiction and is in contradiction to the principle of cohesion of the public administration. The fact that the county office takes over the supervision of higher-ranking units than those supervised by the municipalities must lead to actual substantive superiority or to conflict. The principle of complementarity of activities of the communes and county without anticipating mutual organizational ties extends the circulation of information and the possibility for technical cooperation by way of the provincial office. The conflictogenity of ordinal order regulations in relation to the commune in the absence of a business relationship (superiority); an incomprehensible departure from the constitutional principle of controlling the legality of self-government activities by introducing the praxeological criterion of effectiveness.

5) Failure to calculate the costs of the county reform and the maintenance costs of the assumed structure in precise intervals of circa 50 types of costs; complete disregard of the social costs.

6) In the county reform stage, there was no equal consideration of alternative concepts through a comprehensive and explicit analysis.

7) Failure to develop a comprehensive plan for the modern instrumentalization of the large public administration system in time intervals and to adapt it to static and dynamic structures.

8) Politicization of the entire reform process through the activities of governmental teams that were subordinate to political power; broad political promotion of only one concept through the enunciation of political factors and a media that is dependent on the political environment; choice of the most expensive variant in material and moral terms; the use of unacceptable methods of *ad personam* discussion and the methodology of the "enemy syndrome".

9) Unsuccessful implementation; lack of full and careful legislative, housing, supply and personal preparation.

10) Permanent disinformation at the stage of implementation of the counties' reform concerning costs, structures, and administrative division.

11) Underdevelopment of the counties' financial structure, which was dependent on budget subsidies, which facilitates the development of a clientele pathology.

### What to do?

As can be seen from the above considerations, the entire transformation process of the public administration cannot be positively evaluated in organizational terms. Undoubtedly, the empowerment of communes, which took place in the first stage of ideological enthusiasm after regaining independence, was made efficiently and in accordance with all the principles of democratic structures. However, the infection of bureaucratization and the unrestrained development of the administration occurred very quickly. It seems that it is a known phenomenon, especially in newly developing independent state organisms, for there to be a rapid emergence of a political oligarchy, which is greedy because of the newly emerging sources of political power and aims at quickly gaining material benefits and maintaining them even within the cyclical rotation of the system of proportional representation. This political oligarchy develops through constant increases in the size of the bureaucratic apparatus,

the creation of off-budget sources of financing through funds and government agencies, and constant work aimed at increasing the scope of its operations in the administrative units. This phenomenon explains the gigantic growth of the central administration in Poland, as well as the *par force* of the county and regional reform, which created a large number of extremely attractive positions and a high average remuneration for the entire apparatus.

The greedy political multiplicity is obviously not unique to Poland, but rather is a common phenomenon. This is how the very bureaucratized and extremely inflated administrations of Belgium and France have developed. In spite of large differences in worldviews, the entire political establishment in those countries has been in agreement regarding the constant growth in positions and in personal material development through political and administrative activities.

These horrendously bloated bureaucracies have somehow functioned because both France and Belgium have made money from the exploitation of resource-rich overseas colonies. At the moment, attempts at reform are simply impossible, but the high standard of living persists because they have an old, huge capital base. I have made similar observations of the processes in Africa, but there have been shifts from coup d'états and murders of competitors to the abundant administration table.

In light of these historical reflections, one cannot be surprised by the existing situation in Poland, but our homeland, as a poor country, cannot afford the output of this kind of enormous and expensive bureaucracy and all the riders of the apocalypse. Therefore, within the praxeological theory of organization and management, one should propose a program of improvement activities, not forgetting its axiological assumptions based on the "general human fair play system, referred to the criterion of efficiency and the entire arsenal of praxeological assessments consistent with ethical assumptions."

I am not convinced of the possibility for a genuine sanitation because, apart from minority political groups, there is a definite majority who show solidarity with the beneficial activities.

It seems to me that the key assumptions of sanation of the Polish public administration include the following points:

1) Introduction, for all types of choices, of the majority voting model in small electoral districts with the democratic principle of winning the majority of votes. The implementation of majority rule would also require the model used by Belgium and Australia to introduce voting obligations. At present, 30 to a much smaller percentage of entitled persons vote for the local councils, and thus, there are minority governments everywhere, which of course is further evidence of the widespread "organizational fiction" and "pretend" activity.

2) Establishment of an apolitical multidisciplinary team of high-class professionals with the task of developing a center reform, with the aim of radically reducing both the ministry apparatus and the special administration apparatus that have already been transferred to the area. At the same time, this team would have to formulate a precise definition of the ministries' tasks, minimizing the number of all types of economic permits. Ultimately, we should strive to return to the starting point, that is, the level of employment in the last year of the existence of the Polish People's Republic. The implementation of this DOWNSIZING must, of course, be spread over time. However, within one year, a few variants of such a plan should be ready.

3) Establish a thorough financial control of the functioning of state-owned agencies and special-purpose funds and introduce a system of rigorous parliamentary control based on the principle of budgetary control, while also considering the desirability of continuing to maintain them.

4) Conduct a permanent and spectacular anti-corruption campaign with a wide response in the mass media through:

a) the introduction of the American method of formal immunity, that is, exemption from criminal liability for giving a bribe, in exchange for exhaustive testimony enabling punishment for taking a bribe,

b) the arrangement of a legal provocation to give a bribe, primarily to higher official positions,

c) the current and permanent publicity of bribery scandals and severe punishment of the guilty in the press and on TV and radio.

5) Development of a long-term plan to rationalize the field administration structures. The participants can include two of the creators of the idea of counties: The Former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Interior and Administration Jerzy Stepień declared (Weekly AWS 18. I.1998): "There will be two levels of administration, that is, the municipalities will disappear in favor of the county, you can withdraw from direct contact with the citizen. So public authority withdraws from the first administrative level and stays on the second and third level." It emerged that the co-creators of the three-tier structure also see the rationality of the two-tier structure; according to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which states "Directing public affairs should, generally speaking, belong to those authorities that are closest to the citizen", not the commune, but the county, is the appropriate candidate for liquidation. The Polish county, undoubtedly glaring in its size against the background of the structures of the European Union countries, cannot be maintained for long. The second level, if it is needed at all for the existence of community associations, should have a maximum of 100 units.

6) Development of a long-term, precise plan for the global computerization and instrumentalization of the public administration and the systematic implementation of this at annual intervals.

7) Determination of the limits on the proportion of salaries in all state and local government bodies and the introduction of an austerity regime in the areas displaying elements of luxuryomania: As in France, company cars should only be those produced domestically, and there should be a radical reduction in all types of representation expenses; spectacular propaganda in the style of "we are crying because we are making achievements"; a search for those with the new "Mercedes syndrome"; models reflecting the Canadian style of elegant modesty and saving public funds.

8) Forbidding the combination of any managerial administrative positions with other work and business activities except for scientific and didactic work. The same should apply to deputies and sena-

tors. This prohibition would also apply to membership on supervisory boards.

9) Consistent separation of the legislative, executive and judiciary powers; separation of the General Prosecutor's Office from the Ministry of Justice; prohibition on occupying a government position in addition to the position of an MP or senator.

10) Suspension of the act on the Civil Service until the end of the DOWNSIZING action; an analysis of the list of positions to which the concept of civil service can be applied.

11) Verification of the education system of the administrative staff in terms of a radical increase in organizational and management issues, organizational analysis, organizational research techniques, IT in administration, and so on.

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