

Book review: *Local government in Central and Eastern Europe*, Marek Barański (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, pp. 293

by Beata Słobodzian

The work is a compilation of well-chosen and documented works on local governments in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. The timeline that the authors have assumed has its starting point in the beginning of the 1990s, when the transformation processes of the states of the former Soviet block had begun. This also marks the beginning of the process of forming of democratic state structures, including local governments.

The work, consisting of 10 chapters that regard the characteristics of local governments in particular countries, begins with an *Introduction*. The conclusion presents data on units of local governments, presented in a tabular form.

The chapters are arranged according to alphabetical order of the topics: 1. M. Barański, A. Czyż, S. Kubas, *The Local Government in the Republic of Bulgaria*, 2. A. Czyż, T. Rduch-Michalik, *The local government in the Czech Republic*, 3. J. Zieliński, *The Local Government in the Republic of Estonia*, 4. A. Czyż, *The Local Government in the Republic of Lithuania*, 5. Ł. Makowski, *The Muncipal Governme-ent in the Republic of Latvia*, 6. R. Rajczy, *The Local Government in the Republic of*

Romania, 7. M. Barański, S. Kubas, *The Local Government in the Republic of Poland*, 8. M. Barański, *The Local Government in the Republic of Slovakia*, 9. K. Krysienieli, J. Wojnicki, *The Local Government in the Republic of Slovenia*, 10. A. Czyż, *The Local Government in the Republic of Hungary*.

The structure of each chapter is, in most cases, alike and consist of several general topics that can be enumerated: the Local Government and rules of territorial division of particular states; the local government in the constitution and muncipal laws; municipality as a basic unit of local government – its characteristics, authorities, rules of representation, appointing and recalling; tasks and duties; financing of basic local government units and „other” units of the local government, that should exist in a particular country.

Characteristics of the current model of local government is preceded by an introduction to the contemporary political system and indication of factors that influence its perception in the world.

Such structure of the publication has allowed for easy comparison of particular „municipal” elements in the given co-

untries, as well as distinguishing crucial features of particular systems. This renders this work helpful when performing comparisons with the Polish local government, its functions, competences and tasks.

In the discussed countries of Central and Easter Europe, local government is an institution of the decentralized state. Characteristic feature of new legal solutions is the empowerment of local communities to decide upon their own issues. The structure of local governments reflects the character of ongoing system changes. When restoring local governments, the authorities of particular countries seeked effective solutions. Historical and innovative Western European solutions had proved helpful.

Without doubt, adopting in 1985 the European Charter of Local Self-Government to local legal systems was crucial for development and evolution of local governments of countries in question.

An important part of each study is an analysis of normative-legal acts (constitutions and legislation) that regulate functioning of local governments in particular countries. A valuable supplement is indication of amendments of the acts and their legal consequences in terms of influence on systemic solutions.

The discussed countries differ in structures of territorial division: one-level

(communal) is present in Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovenia and Lithuania; two-level – in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Latvia and Hungary; three-level – only in Poland. Authors suggest that transformation processes are not to be considered as final. Adopting different solutions as to the territorial structure of the state is being considered in, for example, Slovenia (p. 250).

The rules of electoral rights are of great importance for the quality of local governments. All the local administration bodies in each country described in the work are elected directly. One-person executives (in Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Hungary) or collective bodies (in Czech Republic, Estonia) come from direct or indirect (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) election.

Mechanisms of electing members to legislative and executive authorities of units above communes are diverse. Moreover, the Authors enumerated the rules for holding the office of town councilman – its legal status, duties and situations of mandate expiry (pp. 64–64, 72–73, 114, 270–272). An interesting solution (following Scandinavian models) is the position of a „substitute member” in the Estonian local government bodies. Such a person is granted all privileges and duties of a person whose mandate expired or was renounced (p. 96).

The rules of financing local governments has also been shown from an interesting perspective. The financial resources for performing particular tasks come partially from the central (state) budget (subsidies, subventions, grants) and the so-called „own revenues“. The financial mechanisms are described in detail by separate regulations (for example, Slovenian *Law on the Financing of Municipalities*).

The Authors point to specific problems of the local government institutions that are determined by particular countries' social reality, functioning, etc. Among the problems, the Reader will find such as: issues of territorial autonomy, relations with the authority, functioning of ethnic minorities, etc. within the boundaries of particular countries.

The source materials for the publication have been meticulously gathered and well exploited. Source books (both in Polish and foreign languages), legal documents (in foreign languages, or translated into the English language), websites have been enumerated. The Authors have as well prepared tables with data on territorial divisions of states, rules for electing electing bodies of local governments, etc. (pp. 290–293) that may prove to be of assistance to researchers of local government issues.

The publication is a valuable source of knowledge on functioning of local governments across Central and Eastern Europe. It provides reliable information on the mechanisms of functioning of local governments in the countries with young democracy.