Essential Issues of Politico-Administrative Relations

The present paper to be addressed in the proposed thesis is about the Estonian politico-administrative culture, its reformed structural and functional legal organisation facilitating sustainable development, yet maintaining its national characteristics and also integrating the critically assessed experience of the European Union Member States. The analysis has to be based on a sound theoretical basis.

Contacts with the culture of public policy are a part of our every-day life. We come in touch with it through the writing media (newspapers and magazines), the showing media (television) or the speaking media (radio) or when seeking solutions to the problems arising in various institutions of the public sector.

What kind of criteria do we use to measure politicians' behaviour at a certain moment and in a certain situation? I think that the criteria could, first and foremost, be decision-making and accountability both at the individual and collective level with the purpose of using good and new political culture.

The public sector plays a central role in the regulation of public life both when stable democracy is strengthened and during revolutionary phases of the society since it is the public sector which is the source and immediate basis of genuine power of the people.

The objective of the public sector is to make and implement decisions that represent different interests. The way of acting depends on the nature of these interests and the type of the relevant public institutions. In general, public institutions operate on the principle that politicians, bureaucrats and trained officials are elected to act in the interests of the people as their employers.

It is not for science to say what kind of policy is right and good. Politicians can say that, political analysis can say that, but the highest potentate - people, have to say it. Unfortunately, every analysis in itself is not yet science. A political analysis studying the logic of politics proceeds from its inherent values. It is important to know the forces and connections motivating people rather than the forms which the movement takes, in order to understand politics as a social process. Furthermore, the forms differ from country to country and they depend on the historical and
polITICAL HERITAGE OF THE SOCIETY. POSSIBILITY IS TO ANALYSE POLITICS AND ITS INSTRUMENTS, I.E. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS FROM THE HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS TO DISCLOSE CHARACTER AND ORIENTATION OF VALUE OF POLITICS.

POLITICAL IDEAS AND THEORIES ARE A PART OF POLITICAL CULTURE CONCERNED WITH PRINCIPLES AND IDEAS OF ORGANISATION OF SOCIAL LIFE. THE CONNECTIONS OF THE PRINCIPLES AND IDEAS DEPEND ON THE TYPE OF CULTURE AND THEY HAVE A RECOGNISED LASTING SYSTEM OF CONCEPTS AND LAWS. TRANSITION FROM THE IDEAS AND THEORIES OF ONE TYPE OF CULTURE TO ANOTHER MEANS ESSENTIAL DIFFICULTIES; SUCH DIFFICULTIES ARE PARTLY LINGUISTIC BUT PARTLY CAUSED BY CONTEXT OF SOCIAL LIFE IN WHICH THOSE IDEAS OR THEORIES HAVE EMERGED AND EVOLVED. HISTORICALLY WE CAN DISTINGUISH BETWEEN 4 PRINCIPAL TYPES OF CULTURE. EACH OF THEM HAS ITS OWN VIEWS ON POWER, AND ON METHODS AND PURPOSES OF USING IT. THE 4 PRINCIPAL TYPES OF CULTURE ARE THE CULTURES OF THE ORIENT, ANCIENT INDIA, ANCIENT CHINA, AND ANCIENT GREEK AND ROME. WE CAN CONSIDER OURSELVES THE DESCENDANTS OF THE LATTER.

WE CAN POINT OUT THREE MAIN REASONS FOR CARRYING OUT A SYSTEMATIC COMPARISON OF PUBLIC POLICIES. ONE AIM IS TO LOOK FOR GUIDANCE IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING BETTER AND MORE SUCCESSFUL POLICIES. ANOTHER AIM IS TO GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES OPERATE WHEN DEALING WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS. THE CLASSICAL QUESTIONS OF POLITICS ARE ALWAYS THE SAME: WHO GOVERNS? HOW DO THEY GOVERN? WHAT ARE THE RESULTS FOR THE LIVES AND WELFARE OF CITIZENS? KNOWING WHO VOTES OR WHO IS ELECTED FOR OFFICE IS NOT SUFFICIENT. IT IS NECESSARY TO KNOW WHAT PEOPLE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND AT ITS FRINGES ARE ACTUALLY DOING TO MAKE AND REMAKE PUBLIC POLICIES AND TO UNDERSTAND WHETHER THEY DO TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE, WHETHER THEY FULFIL THEIR DUTIES EFFECTIVELY AND ADEQUATELY OR NOT, WHETHER THEY SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE SOCIETY AND THE PEOPLE OR NOT. THE THIRD REASON FOR THE COMPARISON IS THE POWER OF INDEPENDENCE. IF WE CONSIDER A SPECIFIC BEGINNING OF A POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT, WE ALWAYS REFER TO CERTAIN FACTORS. CLOSER INFLUENCES CONSIST OF INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE OPINIONS OF POLITICANS, BUREAUCRATS, INTEREST GROUPS AND THE PUBLIC AS WELL AS THE FACTORS, WHICH INFLUENCE THE POLICY OF THE BENEFICIARIES AND OF ALL THE OTHERS. OBVIOUSLY, THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE GOVERNMENT FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON. BUT ALMOST EVERYBODY IS INTERESTED IN WHAT AND HOW THE GOVERNMENT DOES FOR HIM OR HER PERSONALLY.

POLITICAL DECISION IS AN ELEMENT OF POLITICAL PROCESS THROUGH WHICH POLITICAL CHOICE IS EXERCISED. POLITICAL PROCESS WORKS THROUGH DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS AN EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL WILL OF DECISION MAKERS. SINCE ARISTOTLE, THE SOCIOLOGICAL
thought has been trying to understand how the way political decision-making has influenced the quality of authority and government.

The theory of decision distinguishes between three mechanisms or types of decision. Firstly, the oldest type is theoretical tradition treating decision as an appropriate and purposful choice between various possibilities of a rationally thinking and behaving decision maker. This decision maker proceeds from clear objectives, considering all advantages and disadvantages before making the best choice.

Another approach underlines the routine character of decisions made by the masses. It is due to the influence of mass psychology in passing decisions. The routin of organizations and their way of acting guarantees continuity of decisions and their implementation. The third theoretical tradition treats decisions as a result of political conflict and struggle. The decisions are made as a result of a compromise and are not necessarily the first choice of decision-makers. According to the theory decisions are influenced by the number of decision makers, their prestige, their responsibility, their values, their experience and also activities of pressure groups, public opinion and media.

The decisions made by the authorities can be divided into political and administrative decisions. As both types of decision are generally connected with politics, distinguishing between them is not so important in political practice. But from the point of view of science distinguishing between them is essential in order to explain the relation between administrative inertia and political management in evolution of society. We can characterise the difference between the decisions as follows: political decisions so what we must do; administrative decisions show how to do it under the existing circumstances.

Administrative decisions generally mean making use of the existing regulations and laws. Political decisions, on the other hand, are aimed at creating new laws and regulations, as well as at interpreting the existing ones. For example, a minister in charge of any field passes mostly administrative decisions in his everyday work, but as a member of the government and a representative of a political party, he participates in political decision-making that determines the development of the state and society.
Selection of personnel in administrative machinery offers, for example, certain possibilities to demonstrate political preferences. Personnel policy as such should be considered an essential instrument of politics which, from the point of view of the public, is largely conducted behind the scenes. Behind the scenes activities usually remain incomprehensible and unknown for electors.

Political decisions are decisions of value; the criterion of objective probability does not apply to them. Everything worth to be an object of human aspirations is generally considered valuable. And as we know, the objects of human aspirations are different, often even contradictory. Therefore, we cannot talk about right or false politics in the absolute sense of the word, but only in a certain context of political objectives. Decision-makers regard as socially valuable everything that guarantees their existence, power and identity, and opens up possibilities of further evolution and improvement.

Although political decisions are decisions of value, it does not mean that politics exists more in the dream world than in reality. Political decisions are based on facts, their interpretation and analysis. Facts have to be objective and systematic. Such assumptions do not leave much room for pragmatism in politics; pragmatism is often considered the main characteristic of intelligent political behaviour. There is actually no farther social purpose to pragmatical politics that is striving for momentary benefits.

Political culture is manifested in the way of making and using political decisions. Political culture can be regarded as an indicator of quality of political process. The American political scientists G. Almond and S. Vebrá defined political culture as a stereotype of orientation aimed at objectives of politics. Orientation is a tendency to, predisposition for or receptivity to any activity of a certain tendency. Such predisposition is determined by historical memory, traditions, motives, norms, emotions and symbols. There are two aspects to orientation: the cognitive aspect represented by knowledge of politics; and the emotional aspect that derives from emotional attitude to politics and its objectives. Thus, the general cultural phenomena molding political behaviour can be considered elements of political culture.

Political culture as a way of making and carrying out political decisions is closely connected with political regime. Autocratic, democratic or totalitarian exercise of power differentiates political regime from political culture. However, political culture is not limited to exercise of power but it
is influenced by customs, decision-making mechanisms and procedures of society. Every state has its unique past and political development, which means that it has also its own special political culture. Political culture is like litmus showing political maturity of a state and nation, the quality of which we can identity as follows:

Firstly, conscious recognition of structures and laws of a political system - we know how the parliament functions and how laws come to be.

Secondly, accepting politics. We either agree with it or not. Agreement is an invisible part of every political system; without it the system is impossible.

Thirdly, behaviour expectation, i.e what we expect from the system. People hold the government responsible for their activity and expect the promises to raise the quality of life to be kept.¹

In the sense of political awareness, political processes are changes in social consciousness which result in emergence and change in political self-definition of human beings, they become aware of their political interests, and which bring along change in correlation of political forces in society.

There is little room for free choice in politics. Human preferences and choices are influenced by social conditions that mold social and political choices of people. Active participation in political life increases in proportion with an increase in income and educational level; people’s interest, skills and possibilities to participate in politics depend on those factors. Behaviour and political choices of the electorate are also influenced by their attitudes to problems, politicians, and by their values and ideological preferences. Media, trying to influence behaviour of the electorate to their best knowledge, has its own effect.

During and after elections we often compare positions of a candidate or party on a given political issue with those of others. A comparison, in its turn enables a deeper understanding that could be gained only by looking at one aspect at a time. Clifford Geertz has said, "It is through comparison (and comparison of in comparables) that whatever heart we can get to, can actually

¹ Laanemäe, A. Poliitilise kultuuri moistest /Halduskultuur’98, Tallinn: TTÜ 1999
Comparing one situation with another, we gain a better understanding of our own situation, as well as of the options to obtain information and of obstructions we will face.

Is there a crisis of the behavioural culture of political power?

Does anyone remember having heard any politician sincerely say that a proposal, a decision or a statement of another party, however good and necessary, deserves recognition? I am afraid nobody does. A simple sentence of appreciation could sound as follows: “Although a member of the opposition, I would like to say that the coalition has solved the problem well and deserves to be congratulated.” This is the strength of parliamentary culture and conduct. It synthesises a common part from the opposite opinions of the interest groups, which is always wider than the opposites, and meets the expectations of the wider public and interests of the state.

In a real state, the strength of a state always depends on the continuous dialogue between people and the parliament elected by people. The dialogue must always be constructive and serious and it must address the goals state is striving for. The former of politically essential positions in public opinion is usually political, social etc elite, who is trying to find support of the masses for realizing their own objectives. Therefore, formation of public opinion fulfills the function of manipulation with the masses with simultaneous propagation of objective information. Anonymous public opinion does not influence the general social atmosphere and behaviour of people; it can also create an illusion about unavoidability of political decisions or vice versa, about their impossibility.

Economic, political and cultural interests compete when public opinion is formed; therefore, an important peculiarity of public opinion is that it is contradictory. This is, among other things, caused by the fact that information disseminated by the media is said to be complete and exhaustive. Therefore, information consumers tend to accept it without any analysis and on the ground of emotional suitability. This creates favourable conditions for formation of attitudes characterised by the lack of logical connection and by combination of contradictory positions or assessments. A human being with such an intellectual disposition is easily manipulated and succumbs easily to propaganda.

---

The development of the Estonian administrative structure has been a complicated process, the continuity of which was broken for 50 years by the Soviet Occupation of the Republic of Estonia in 1940. In the late 1980s, when the development of socio-political events confirmed an inevitable and irreversible process of desintegration of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian system, a historic opportunity presented itself to start preparations for re-establishing independence in Estonia and the administrative organisation of an independent state. That was the period when it became vital to study the historic legacy of the administrative system and its theoretical basis since the scholars studying the development and the structure of the administrative system in different countries came to a unanimous conclusion that it has a rich historical background and its own national characteristics.

The administrative reform getting entangled in conceptual blind alleys has an influence on balanced relations between the central and local authorities within the public administration organisation; it diminishes the state’s administrative capacity and creates favourable conditions for dangerous tendencies of the people enstranging from the power of state. Also the experts assessing Estonia’s preparedness for integration into the European Union institutions have underlined the necessity to increase the state’s administrative capacity.

After a long period of interruption, Europe is returning to Estonia. This has been a steady movement resulting in the creation of a platform based on European traditions and values, well-functioning political and administrative institutions and the welfare of citizens. Cooperation based on equal opportunities will ensure for us participation in Europe’s decision-making structures.

The value of Europe lies in its diversity. When in Europe, not only geographically but also intellectually, we shall understand ourselves better. When intellectually in Europe, we shall have to communicate not only with those who are pleasant but also with those who are unpleasant, e.g. with public servants. Communication requires tolerance. Introversion – self-immersion – has been a more wide-spread quality in political culture than extroversion, i.e. orientation to others. We must change our way of thinking that is often dichotomous. Communication means taking others into consideration; it would certainly make us greater, more cultured and more intellectual.

The redistribution of assets has always and everywhere been a dirty business. A former official turns into a millionaire overnight. The press addresses them almost respectfully with a fancy title
of corrupter instead of simply calling them thieves. This is how President Lennart Meri expressed the general public opinion in his Republic of Estonia 80th anniversary speech on February 24.

Presentation of information should be more civilised and respectful. Faux pas scandals, catastrophes, deep bewilderment and stories of defending one’s "honour and dignity" in court are everyday reading of citizens. I would like to know what has led to this. The reason is the same old victories of one party and losses of the other in all those privatisation and swindling transactions.

Let us suppose the critic is right; that what he notices and thinks is true. A “stumbler’s” mistake catches the eye, and we cannot and must not approve of it. But do we have to announce it to the public? It is an essential question. Our personal relationship with society and our international reputation depend on it. The concepts of honour and dignity have dimmed in the Gentile world. Everyone must look for the criteria they assess their deeds against.

The European etiquette is based on Christian traditions and we belong to the European cultural environment. St. Matthew said that should your brother sin, you should reprove him in private (18,15). If it does not work then you must act differently.

Bureaucracy and loyalty are the traditions in public policy. The designation and implementation of public policy is not a fixed limited goal because in reality there is no perfect administration. Implementation is difficult because the results of the implementation processes are insecurity, uncertainty and disorder. In case of democratic governments, the implementation is based on the power granted to politicians and officials of the public sector, be the officials administrators or experts. Politicians and officials have to report on the policy to be carried out; this is the main restriction in the decision-makers’ and executors’ freedom of action set by their superiors, that is the citizens.

It is inherent to bureaucracy to limit administration to the implementation of certain rigid rules and to demand servile devotion to routine which only infuriates people and regularly postpones decision-making in the public sector. Bureaucracy is usually characterised by red tape, delays, postponements, unwillingness to bear responsibility and try something new. It certainly does not apply to all institutions and staff of the public sector but we feel danger here.
Loyalty in present-day seems to be quite an uncomfortable and reserved issue because generally it may mean any kind of loyalty, be it a simple feeling of loyalty to someone or something or communal radical fundamentalism that requires dogmatic obedience to serve the canonised/hallowed goals. Loyalty reflects a potential conflict with ethical values provided, of course, that there are general ethical principles/convictions/beliefs accepted by everyone. It seems to me that beside the potential ethical conflicts the national culture plays an important and essential part in it.

Maybe we have to look for the reasons that influence the behaviour of officials in cultural traditions together with national characteristics. We can certainly be justifiably proud that we are one of the smallest nations in Europe who has established their own state; this is a sign of vitality and conservatism of a nation. On the other hand, our small size is in some respects dangerous because one million people is a critical number - the mutual relationships of people can become a hindrance for the development of the state. I know many people and many people know me. Above all, it concerns the decision-making level because idealistic leaders are needed to pass decisions that take public interests into consideration. One of the hindrances of idealistic government is unfortunately corporative society where the principle “everybody knows everybody” applies. Such inevitability alone makes increasingly high ethic demands on people involved in government – just governing should mean ignoring the pressure of connections and relationships. On the other hand, we can suppose that the small size of a nation is adventage to government since then the nation seems to be a family where an eye is kept on everyone. Yet, a million is a number in case of which family supervision or nepotism and favouritism -free competition on public posts does not apply. Ethic severity has to become a decisive criterion in society and a measure of each elected or nominated official.

Culture has developed in the long-term co-operation of man and the environment and involves knowledge, beliefs, works of art, codes, laws and customs that man acquires as a member of a certain society. In social sciences the term values is used to express general beliefs, which, in its turn, is an essential element of culture. Taking into account the values that operate in culture enables to predict the attitudes of people and obstacles in carrying out the chosen policy. The ways that individualism and collectivism manifest themselves in culture have been most researched areas in culture. In individualistic cultures the interests and needs of an individual are valued whereas in collective cultures subordinance to the group, inter-group harmony and belonging together are considered essential.
In most societies there exists a public culture which unites the interests and loyalty of smaller
communities. This culture has a common language, borrowed slang, its own institutions of mass
media, means of communication etc. At the same time the common public culture comprises
certain prerequisites to all members of society.

Estonia is located between the East and the West and Estonian culture has been influenced
alternately by both directions. A typical Estonian is usually characterised as being industrious,
well-balanced and persistent. The research of values shows, however, that Estonians often take
decisions that are based on emotions, rather than on rational considerations.

On the basis of RISC, a research of values widely used in Europe, the world of values of
Estonians is more voluntaristic than the “Euro” average. It means that people are convinced that
when they act the way they like, things will go as they want.

Attitudes and personality stereotypes play an essential role. The abstract elements of culture have
an important role in the formation of human behaviour. Management and different management
styles are influenced by the spectrum of national characteristics. Although the world is moving
towards globalisation faster and faster and people are more and more influenced by mass culture,
the role of national culture cannot be underestimated. It can be said that geographic proximity, a
common religion, a similar language and close historical ties should form a uniform basis to a
similar culture and, consequently, to similar thinking and behaviour.

Self-criticism, avoidance of irritating circumstances and stress, discretion, tolerance, constant
studies of the culture, the history and language of the partner – all these things should be taken
into account in the culture of the public policy.

Adoption and harmonization of legal acts is only one facet when it comes to real participation
after accession. If the rules and regulations are not adequately enforced, neither the fulfilment of
obligations, the administrative practices nor the management quality will reach the standards set
for the rightful members of the EU.

Information must be easily accessible at each level, i.e. at the national, municipal and individual
level. Co-operation between politicians, public servants and citizens in the near future will
determine the ways of how we can take the best advantage of the opportunity offered to us by the EU.

The aim of the quality relations is to compare the cultural and behavioural traditions and values of people from different regions of the EU member states and candidate states, as well as the differences in political and public administration cultures in order to raise Estonia’s national adjustment capacity upon accession to the European Union. The comparative analysis points out the shortcomings of the Estonian political culture and suggests ways for their elimination.

The present study enables to point out the shortcomings in the political culture, thus increasing the awareness and improvement of the general norms of behaviour and ethics.