

### **The Great Transformation. Administrative Personnel in the Successor States of the Habsburg Monarchy**

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„*Verfassungsrecht vergeht, Verwaltungsrecht besteht*“, according to the German jurist Otto Mayer. To what extent can this statement be applied to the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy? This workshop was organized to shed some light on this question. It focused on the transformation of public administration that took place after 1918, paying particular attention to changes in the administrative personnel. Five presentations traced continuities and discontinuities in different successor states and regions of the Habsburg Monarchy, and a sixth and final presentation complemented the picture with a description of the civil service in Germany.

Although the presentations generally noted a high degree of continuity in the public administration in the immediate aftermath of the political upheavals of 1918, they nonetheless did address various reforms to service regulations and administrative structures, as well as certain changes in administrative personnel. They considered the context of the respective state-building processes, paid attention to the different challenges involved in the establishment of new states or in the incorporation of former regions of the Habsburg Monarchy into existing states. Varying administrative structures within the Habsburg Monarchy (especially between Cisleithania and Hungary) also presented an obstacle for unifying processes, as discussed in the workshop by drawing on the examples of regions in three of the successor states: Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Further discussions focused on economic and social

aspects, such as austerity measures and the payment of civil servants. The presentations investigated not only different regions in different states (and relations between them), but also different levels of administration, partly illustrated by particular institutions or functions.

KARL MEGNER and GUENTHER STEINER (both Vienna) examined the transition from the Habsburg Monarchy to the Republic of German-Austria and the impact of this transition on administrative personnel. The focus was on the transfer of civil servants to the administration of the new state. Megner and Steiner highlighted German-Austria's *de jure* rejection of an automatic transfer, due to its self-conception as a nation state. German nationality was a fundamental requirement for readmission into the public service. Whereas this regulation gave an opportunity to German civil servants from other regions of the former Habsburg Monarchy, it excluded non-Germans within the territory of the Republic of German-Austria. Megner and Steiner illustrated the implementation of this principle with reference to the activities of the *Zwischenstaatsamtliche Komitee* (inter-ministerial committee), which was responsible for examining individual cases. They made further mention of social aspects, for example the adjustment of hierarchies towards more democratic principles. While lower officials benefitted from reforms, the abolition of the nobility meant a degradation for many higher officials.

The role of nationality in determining eligibility to continue to serve in the new administration was a central aspect in the presentation of ROK STERGAR (Ljubljana) as well, who dealt with the public administration of the former Habsburg provinces of Yugoslavia, focusing on Slovenia. Stergar outlined preparations for independence and attempts at modernizing the administration, beginning with the establishment of the National Council for Slovenia and Istria in August 1918. The National Council and its provincial and local councils increasingly established themselves as alternative organs of power, and many civil servants worked with and for the National Council. However, Stergar emphasized that their activity was not always in opposition to

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the emperor; 'Yugoslavia' did not necessarily refer to an independent state. Several options were available at the time, ranging from federalization of the Habsburg Monarchy to independence. Stergar expounded that there were few changes initially after the declaration of independence, pointing to the continuity of laws and structures, and most officials also stayed on their posts. However, German was abolished in the administration and officials of „German nationality“ were, in general, dismissed. There were also purges of „unreliable“ officials, but nationality played a key role. While these dismissals happened in Slovenia immediately after gaining independence, structural changes towards an administrative centralization of Yugoslavia took place significantly later, in the 1920s.

JUDIT PÁL and VLAD POPOVICI (both Cluj) dealt with changes in the public administration of the multi-ethnic region of Transylvania in the aftermath of the First World War, contested by Hungary and Romania. They outlined the takeover of Transylvania by the Romanian National Council, and the steps towards an integration of the region into Romania. During the period of transition, the Romanian government agreed to accept a certain degree of autonomy in Transylvania. The organization of the public administration and the old Hungarian administrative legislation were maintained with a number of amendments: the Romanian language became the official language of the public services, and county officials, who formerly were elected by the county assembly, were now to be appointed by the Prefect. While there were no major changes, from a normative and organizational point of view, until 1925, the body of civil servants, composed mostly of non-Romanians before 1918, went through a reconfiguration process. Pál and Popovici traced this process of Romanization with the example of the function of the High Sheriff (*főszolgabíró/primpretor/Oberstuhlfichter*) in four Transylvanian counties, taking into account ethnicity, education, and career path. While in 1918 Saxons and Hungarians were clearly over-represented in relation to the demographic profile of the counties, the reverse situation was often found in 1925. In particular, Hun-

garian officials were widely replaced by Romanians. This influx of Romanian personnel was facilitated by the refusal on the part of Hungarian officials to take the oath to Romania in the spring of 1919. However, Pál's and Popovici's research has shown that these personnel changes led to an overall decrease in specialized training and experience, leading to a major problem with the lack of specialized staff. Whereas prior to 1918 the position of High Sheriff required a university degree of Law or Administrative Sciences, often the new Romanian High Sheriffs were former village notaries, most of them graduates of short-term specialized courses.

In contrast, MARTIN KLEČACKY (Prague) painted an entirely different picture of the situation in Czechoslovakia. He pointed to the legal continuity of the administration, but also to a high level of continuity in personnel. In this respect, Czechoslovakia adopted a highly pragmatic approach, rather than one based on nationalism. In spite of distancing Czechoslovakia from the Habsburg monarchy by officially propagating its character as a nation state, the administration relied on retaining experienced civil servants. Klečacky's research on District Governors in the Bohemian region has shown that most of these officials stayed in office regardless of their nationality. Reforms in the mid-1920s brought changes in civil service laws as well as in administrative structures, unifying the former self-administration with the state administration. In regard to personnel, there was rather a gradual generational change that increased the proportion of Czech civil servants. However, the new central institutions and ministries sometimes did present Czech civil servants with opportunities for a rapid career path.

While the first presentation of the workshop focused on German-Austria at the federal level, THERESE GARSTENAUER and VERONIKA HELFERT (both Vienna) examined the city administration of Vienna, outlining major changes under the slogan of democratization and modernization from November 1918 to the end of 1920. An important factor – maybe more important for the city administration than the end of the monarchy – was the shift of political power in the municipal

council due to the electoral law reform. The formerly dominant Christian Social Party already lost ground in the provisional municipal council established in December 1918. In the first election featuring universal and equal suffrage to the municipal council in May 1919, the Social Democrats obtained an absolute majority. Furthermore, female deputies contributed to a reevaluation of women's issues. The first significant administrative reform in April 1919 targeted official regulations for employees of the city of Vienna, establishing not only a comparatively generous salary scheme, but also the right of civil servants to engage in political activity. Importantly, it strengthened the position of staff representatives. In 1920, a broader administrative and constitutional reform followed, changing administrative structures. Garstenauer and Helfert pointed out close relations between politics and administration. Whereas the nationality of civil servants seemed to be less relevant in the city administration than it was at the federal level (the commitment to German nationality was removed from the requirements for employment contracts in 1920), Garstenauer and Helfert raised the question of how much of a role party affiliation or belonging to a trade union (as the Christian Social party lamented) played.

STEFAN FISCH (Speyer), drawing attention to the situation in Germany, highlighted the role of the German civil servants' association founded during the revolution of 1918. He pointed to the high degree of organization amongst officials, especially of low- and mid-level officials who have already worked in the German empire, and outlined their major concerns. Besides questions of social security, one of these concerns was their full enjoyment of civil rights, including the right to personal political activity. Fisch outlined the well-directed activities of the association in representing the interests of civil servants. As part of the discussion, the situation of civil servants in Germany was compared to those in the Habsburg Monarchy and the Austrian republic, pointing to their political rights as well as to the strong fragmentation of civil servants' organizations in Austria.

The workshop's goal was clear considering the recurring emergence of certain themes

in the presentations and complementary discussions. One of these topics was the role of nationality and/or citizenship in determining eligibility to continue to serve in a new administration. The discussions raised questions about the respective definitions of nationality, concluding in the cases of German-Austria and Slovenia that self-declaration was insufficient and nationality was determined by the authorities. Moreover, Stergar pointed to a biological understanding of nationality in the case of Slovenia. Another recurring theme were questions surrounding the oath of allegiance. The presentations and discussions pointed to the oath as one of the first changes that the new states made to administrative regulations. The period of transition was sometimes marked by the coexistence of the oath to the emperor and the oath to the national state. These oaths often posed an awkward question, especially in regions claimed by two states; the requirement of the oath to Romania or Czechoslovakia posed a major dilemma for Hungarian or German officials in regions of uncertain status. The workshop addressed several instances of conflicts of interest between civil servants and the state.

Overall, the workshop presented a nuanced picture of the transformations of civil service that took place after the First World War, raising the question to what extent 1918 was a turning point. Although the presentations shed light on reform initiatives under the mottos of modernization, democratization, nationalization or centralization, a gradual change seemed to be more likely than a revolution.

#### Conference Overview:

Peter Becker: Introduction and Greetings

Karl Megner / Günther Steiner (both Vienna): Gesamtstaatliche Transformation der öffentlich Bediensteten anhand von Normen und Einzelfallbeispielen

Commentator: Waltraud Heindl (Vienna)

Martin Klečáček (Prague): Im Dienste des neuen Staates? Beamtenkarriere im Prozess des Aufbaus der tschechoslowakischen Staatsverwaltung 1918–1920

Commentator: Gertrude Enderle-Burcel (Vienna)

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Rok Stergar (Ljubljana): Between Continuity and „National Purification“. Public Administration of Former Habsburg Provinces of Yugoslavia

Commentator: Thomas Stockinger (Vienna)

Therese Garstenauer / Veronika Helfert (both Vienna): Die Verwaltung der Stadt Wien in der neuen Republik

Commentator: Brigitte Rigele (Vienna)

Judit Pál / Vlad Popovici (both Cluj): Normative and Structural Changes in the Public Administration of Transylvania during World War I and its Aftermath

Commentator: Julia Bavouzet (Paris)

Stefan Fisch (Speyer): Anerkennung der Beamtenschaft als Interessengruppe. Umschwung in der deutschen Novemberrevolution

Commentator: Peter Plener (Vienna)

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