

Editorial

'Trust but verify.'

*Ronald Reagan's much cited translation of the Russian
'Doveryai, no proveryai'*

This special issue presents a unique insight into the wider environment, historic context and influences, institutionalisation and current situation of public affairs and lobbying in a number of countries in the geographic area of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

We aim to shed further light on the context, institutionalisation and development of public affairs in the countries of CEE. For the purpose of this special issue, we have defined CEE as the countries in the former Soviet/Union of Soviet Socialist Republics bloc, save Russia and the Soviet republics proper. We have widened the context to include Austria and Germany: Austria because throughout the centuries, it has had major interaction with the CEE countries, and Germany as in its current formation, it consists of the former West Germany and the former German Democratic Republic (DDR) — then part of the Soviet bloc. Both countries are still perceived by CEE countries as highly influential neighbours.

The papers have been written by academics and practitioners who know the countries, live there and/or breathe the local experience and culture of the countries concerned and through their articles, share with us the vast gamut of experiences, impressions and analyses.

We start the collection with a paper by the two editors, Carla Millar and Peter Köppl: Carla is a practitioner-turned-academic who took a Research Masters on European Union – Comecon Studies at the University of Turin's Institut Universitaire des Hautes Études Européennes, carried out a number of substantial pieces of research on CEE values and attitudes in the 1990s and has frequently visited the region for research, teaching and leisure for almost 50 years, and Peter is a practitioner from Austria with a long academic career in research and teaching.

Both of them are active in public affairs teaching and research and are associated with ECPA, the European Centre for Public Affairs in Brussels.

László Kanyó is a consultant/historian/journalist/PA practitioner who shares with readers his unique experience of change and his perception of the future for public affairs in Hungary. The comments by the reviewers on this piece were striking, for example, 'I enjoyed this piece enormously. You offer a fresh and insightful perspective on PA in Hungary, one which we do not often see in academic journals...' Kanyó provides an insight into how public affairs is regarded in Hungary and how it developed after the change of the political system in CEE. Interesting are his analyses of how business people and decision makers think about each other and—echoing the fact that because of client confidentiality, he cannot mention names—he ends his abstract with: 'Public Affairs is still a trust business – you can lose your reputation only once'.

Next, we look at framing papers about Germany and Austria: Germany is of particular interest because before reunification it consisted of West Germany and the DDR, epitomising the contrasting systems, and Austria as over the years, it has been very closely connected with all that happened in CEE. These two papers are followed by CEE papers from north to south: Estonia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria.

GERMANY

Historically divided between the East and the West yet currently firmly in the West, Germany has had its own very special development path in public affairs and lobbying.

Dominik Meier, the chairman of *de'ge'pol*—the German Association of Political Consultants—and Managing Director of Miller & Meier Consulting, explains the changes in public affairs or rather 'interest representation' as it has developed from a tripartite closed shop to an active multifaceted multi-stakeholder beehive of activities. The role of transparency and trust, and integrity and politics are discussed, as is professionalisation—and in a very professional paper—and the paper ends with a look at the future.

AUSTRIA

Peter Köppl—newly elected president of OePAV (Austrian Public Affairs Association) and Managing Director Mastermind Public Affairs Consulting—and Julia Wippersberg of the University of Vienna provide a historic anchoring of public affairs in Austria and delight us with new research on the public affairs industry in the country. The institutions certainly frame public affairs in Austria, and the research gives us a good picture of the young public affairs industry, its actors and the working environment, while their commentary highlights the impact that changes in the political scene can have on the relevance and environment of public affairs.

ESTONIA

Although the primary focus of the paper is on understanding what drives the regulation of lobbying, it brims over with exciting excursions into the understanding of the very unique position of Estonia as one of the three Baltic states, sandwiched between Scandinavia and post-communist countries, and now sucked into Brussels and the European Union (EU). As it happens, the position of lobbying in Scandinavia is very different from that in CEE countries, and hence, Estonia is constantly at the crossroads. The paper, by Ott Lumi, a former Estonian MP, lecturer at the University of Tallinn and founding partner of PA consulting firm META, concludes with policy recommendations for Estonia and suggestions for further theoretical research directions for improving understanding of the policy impact of lobbying regulations designed and implemented by post-communist CEE states.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The paper on public affairs in the Czech republic by Denisa Kallmannová, Head of the Department of Marketing Communications and PR at the Charles University in Prague, and Anna Matušková, a former Fulbright Scholar, now assistant professor at the Charles University, represents the first academic study on the subject in the republic and the second piece of primary empirical research in this special issue. Great strides have been made through this painstaking piece of survey research in describing what is going on in the profession, in professionalisation and carving out a worthwhile niche that is no longer tainted by the bad reputation of lobbying. The insights and careful exposition of the research also uncover exciting new challenges for the future.

HUNGARY

Gabriella Lewis, a native Hungarian PhD student at New Mexico State University, USA, and her supervisor Professor Philip Benson tackle the complex situation of public affairs in Hungary, giving a description of the transformation from communism to capitalism and from state control to business development and interest representation. The dualism in the country in which democracy is in decline, corruption scandals are rife and government control is on the increase leads to a difficult situation for the development of public affairs, the legitimacy of which is again called into question. She describes how currently, because of antidemocratic and centralisation tendencies, as well as the deregulation of the public affairs industry, most corporations cannot effectively represent their interests nor can they create a working partnership with the public sector.

BULGARIA

In the final paper in this special issue, Meglena Mihova, managing partner at EPPA (one of the oldest public affairs consultancies in Brussels) and a known expert on EU environmental and chemicals regulations, analyses the development of public affairs in Bulgaria. As in other CEE countries but almost to a much greater extent, history, economic factors and legacy shape how government institutions and business operate today. The economic actors in Bulgaria are represented by two extremes—a myriad of small and medium enterprises, lacking the capacity and resources to develop government relations, and a few monopolistic groups with an unclear structure and ownership, which influence government policy in a non-transparent way. Despite the exceptionally strong state tradition, government institutions are very often paralysed by the lack of long-term political vision. As a result, government was and still is easily subject to external influences. Public affairs is in a very early, embryonic stage of development: it is a slower than slow process; however, the situation is progressively changing, though not without external pressure from the EU and the internal pressure of foreign investors, and the prediction is that public affairs will develop at the speed of the development of political democracy, modern corporate culture and the establishment of economic operators with a long-term vision and interests. The profession of public affairs consultant, almost non-existent today, will then progressively find its natural place, acting as a catalyst for the development of business–government–society linkages.

EPILOGUE

This special issue would not have achieved the quality it has without the assistance of our team of wonderful reviewers-cum-English-editors—in alphabetical order—Michel Ehrenhard, Maria Laptev, Andrew Lock, John Mahon, Conor McGrath, Hartley Millar and Danny Moss, who each reviewed more than their fair share and did so in a dedicated, critical and encouraging way, and the ever vigilant administrative assistance of Rebecca Coatswith at Ashridge who made sure the machinery always ran smoothly: many, many thanks to each and every one of you.

We would also like to thank the editors of the *Journal of Public Affairs*, Phil Harris and Danny Moss, for trusting us to deliver this special issue, and to Graham Russel and Jayvin Macatangay of Wiley for taking care of the final stages of this process.

However, the biggest thank you goes to all our authors who have shown tenacity and dedication to produce this very special Special Issue, a very first overview, giving insight and future perspective based on experiencing, perceiving, studying and looking at public affairs in the economies in transition in CEE: Philip Benson, Denisa Kallmannová, László Kanyo, Peter Köppl, Gabriella Lewis, Ott Lumi, Anna Matušková, Dominik Meier, Meglena Mihova, Christian Scheucher and Julia Wippersberg

We hope and trust that many more researchers, be they practitioners, journalists or academics, will take a leaf out of the authors' book and further research this area. Should you wish to pursue this and/or have any questions, please contact Carla Millar via c.millar@utwente.nl.

Finally, we wish you much enjoyment reading this special issue on public affairs and lobbying in CEE and its special institutional context.

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