

Keynote speech by Mr Guy Wagner (LU), Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reform, on behalf of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Wednesday, 18 November

“Sharing and creating innovative practices – a core concern of European Public Administration cooperation”

Dear Governor,
Dear Director General,
Honoured guests,

It is a great honour and a pleasure to have the opportunity to address this ceremony at a moment where the Luxembourgish EU Presidency is finalising the activities of a programme of 18 months in the field of European public sector cooperation before handing over to the next Presidency.

Since the first edition of EPSA in 2007, Luxembourg was among the countries supporting the EPSA award. In our view, this support is largely justified by two reasons (returns):

First of all, EPSA is a great opportunity for raising awareness of innovative trends in the European context in our central and local level administrations. As defined as an important “learning area”, taking part in EPSA ensures boosting the learning curve by gathering new ideas, getting to know new methods and being inspired by them as well as - hopefully – learning from past pitfalls to avoid them in the future.

At the same time EPSA is also a privileged place of communication and feedback, a stage to present the most innovative Luxembourgish initiatives and projects and at the same time to get feedback from peers and from high level experts.

1. Key challenges for Public Sector Modernisation

Coming back to my current Presidency role, I would like to give a short overview of the concrete purpose of cooperation of the Directors general responsible for Public Administration in EU member States (EUPAN – European Public Administration network).

At the beginning of 2014, when the proceedings for designing the 3 semester programme for the activities of the current TRIO of EUPAN were shaped, one of the ideas was to focus on the increasing importance of the role of public administration in the political agendas, at the national level as well as at the European level.

Actually, seven years after the financial crisis, the discourse on public administration was evolving. Reduction of public spending and public sector cost-efficiency predominated the public debate during the crisis. But after 2010, the perspective on public services changed and rising expectations towards the public sector as an important actor in a changing and complex national and European context could be observed.

This was particularly the case in the EU 2020 agenda, the European strategy for economic growth, sustainability, social cohesion and the labour market. It became obvious that the success of any public action aimed at growth, social cohesion, knowledge and an innovation society, could not be envisaged without enhanced institutional and administrative capacity. Meanwhile one could also add other key EU processes, such as the European semester, the programming of the European structural Funds and the digital agenda for Europe, where public administration gained increased importance.

The conclusions of the meeting of the ministers responsible for public administration in EU member states, which took place in Rome on December 3rd, confirmed this development. To prepare the meeting, ministers were asked to reflect on two questions:

- From their country perspective and experience, what do they consider as key drivers and challenges in public sector modernisation?
- Do they think that there are new opportunities for European sector cooperation in the field of public administration?

Since the final conclusions of this meeting have to be considered as the mandate for the current and future work of the cooperation of public administration in Europe, I would like to come back to them briefly and make the link to the context of this ceremony:

First they considered that

- The quality of public administration strongly affects competitiveness, growth and social cohesion in Europe and therefore the need to modernise administrative systems is a top priority across Europe;

Furthermore they identified the following key priorities and challenges for public sector modernisation:

- Restoring trust in public institutions at national and European level is a key priority and open government strategies can contribute to this allowing:

Transparency, accountability, participation and collaboration with citizens and civil society stakeholders

- Key challenges for public sector modernisation include ways to ensure implementation through innovation and development of new capabilities as well as effectiveness through evidence-based policy decisions.

Finally, they considered that informal cooperation among EU Member States and with the European Commission in the field of public administration is a long standing reality that can support public sector modernisation.

Regarding the question on **how** to tackle the current challenges of public administration modernisation, the ministers called for re-invigorating the informal cooperation within EUPAN as a forum for sharing and creating innovative practices.

In this respect, “**bench-learning**” is and has always been at the core of EUPAN activities and related value-creation. As a concept, bench-learning is an effective way of knowledge-sharing and acquisition. Bench-learning can have many different formats depending on the objectives and available resources.

Among the types of activities and results promoting this sharing and exchange of innovative practices, EUPAN maintains and develops conferences such as Quality conferences, CAF events and others, carries out comparative studies, organises interactive working groups, issues discussion papers, and so on.

More specifically, I would like to mention two bench-learning activities of the Luxembourgish Presidency:

- The organisation of the 8th Quality conference on October 1st and 2nd
- The study “Trends and challenges towards innovative public services”

2. 8th Quality conference: A forum for sharing innovative practices and analysing trends

In line with the ministerial conclusions, the overall theme of the 8th Quality Conference was “Strengthening the capacity of public administration in tackling current and future challenges – public administration as part of the solution”.

The objective of the conference was to illustrate with the help of interesting practice cases what high quality public services require in terms of:

- Strategic thinking
- Technological and organisational innovation
- Competencies, skills and motivation of the personnel
- Performance management systems and monitoring
- Involvement of stakeholders and citizens
- Internal cooperation and external partnerships...

300 participants attended the Conference, where 4 key note speakers intervened and 31 selected cases from 20 EU Member States and observer countries were presented in parallel sessions and in in-depth workshops.

The Conference illustrated the common challenging context public administration is currently facing, for example in terms of

- complex policy-making, implementing and monitoring issues,
- technological trends including the potential of open data and the role of social media,
- social challenges like demographic issues, rising demands from citizens for new dedicated services.

The conference showed new ways of developing innovative services to the citizens and key capacities to be strengthened in order to contribute to innovative solutions.

Very concretely design-thinking frameworks and external and internal stakeholder involvement were identified as key means to solve complex issues and contribute to a better understanding of the needs and expectations towards public services.

They require an appropriate organisational culture, marked by new leadership approaches and a culture of innovation.

The evaluation of the conference showed that events of this kind continue to be an appropriate way to contribute to the organisational learning of public administration.

3. Innovation in Public Sector – Overall study on trends & challenges towards innovative public services – innovation capabilities

A most recent example of a comparative European study is the study ‘Trends & challenges towards innovative public services – Trends and innovation-enhancing practices in Human Resource management & Public Service Delivery’, which is currently undertaken by the Luxembourgish EUPAN Presidency. Hence, in this study, IDHEAP, EIPA and LIST pursue the ambition – on the basis of research and inspiring practices from all over Europe - to present key HRM and PSD practices that support innovation in European public sector organisations. This study is also quite interesting because it presents a direct link with EPSA.

Some of the selected inspiring practices in this study are EPSA cases and winners such as for instance the Mannheim case ‘Change – Achieving more together’ on organisational commitment to innovation or the best practice from Iceland ‘Police and Social Media’ on collaborative and digital work or, last but not least, the Dutch case ‘Every Child Safe forever’ on flexible work design. Thus, in this study, the EPSA cases are used to illustrate key levers of innovation in the field of HRM and PSD and to promote a better understanding of innovation processes within the public sector – which is at the core of this study.

4. Conclusion

Public administration evolves in a complex and fast-changing environment and needs to be more and more reactive and agile. Learning areas as Quality conferences, awards, observatories and studies are vital to strengthen the learning and innovation capacity.

In this respect, let us continue to identify, to present, and to share the most promising practices in order to produce public value and act for a better society.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the organisers of this EPSA edition and by congratulating all the members of the project teams nominated for this ceremony.