

European Public Sector Award 2015

Keynote Speech – Zoltan KAZATSAY

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Title: The European Commission as a partner for building quality of public administration

*****Check against delivery*****

Good morning ladies & gentlemen,

On behalf of Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, I am very happy to be able to join you today at the EPSA 2015.

I am here today to represent the European Commission at an event, which celebrates achievements of excellence among public administrations in Europe.

And you might ask why the European Commission takes an interest in the quality of public administration in European countries.

Looking at the 10 priorities of this Juncker Commission, such as: "*A new boost for jobs, growth and investment*", "*A Connected digital single market*", or "*A deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base*" - to mention but a few - one might be mistaken to assume that "good governance" and "quality of public administration" are not priorities of this Commission, because "public administration" is not mentioned explicitly as part of these 10 priorities.

However, in fact, the Commission very clearly recognises that the need to improve governance and the performance and capacity of public administration

is an important cross-cutting and underlying issue for the achievement of all of the objectives of this Commission.

I want to illustrate this point with one specific example:

The Commission has launched an ambitious European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) – the so called Juncker Investment Plan. The aim of this plan is to boost and leverage investments in strategic projects in Europe by more than EUR 300 billion in order to boost growth and jobs. A truly ambitious plan.

As part of implementing this plan, the Commission recognised that there is an urgent need to focus on improving the investment environment. And the Commission's analysis makes clear that making the Member States more attractive for private investors, requires removing key barriers to investment at national level, regional and local level.

The Commission's preliminary analysis of investment obstacles in each Member State confirms that there is a large diversity across Member States in investment patterns and barriers to investment, and therefore no one-size-fits-all solution.

However, it is clear that many problems in this area directly relate to problems related to governance, quality of public administration, the judicial system and the tax system – this includes for example: weak insolvency frameworks, administrative barriers, regulatory burden, and low labour market adjustability, unpredictability of rules, low quality of investment support, corruption, as well as generally weak institutional capacity.

In the context of the new European Semester, which is starting now – the "European Semester" in case you are not familiar, is an annual process of country analysis and recommendations, related to economic governance - the Commission intends to engage in a dialogue with the Member States on the identification of these barriers and their possible removal, including through

thematic discussions at the Council. The identified barriers will also be further analysed in the framework of the European Semester, particularly in the Country Reports. The Commission will then discuss with Member States how countries can receive specific support to improve their investment environment. The Commission recently even set up a dedicated new service, the so called Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) in order to deliver dedicated support, based on Member States' demand.

So, this example clearly illustrates to you that the Commission considers quality of public administration as very important, as a basis for reaching EU objectives.

We are living in times where our economies and societies in Europe are continuously being tested by ever more crises and emerging challenges. I don't need to mention these in detail. It is enough to just open a newspaper.

In an increasingly 'connected' but uncertain world, policies and structures that have been successful in the past might not be sufficient or appropriate to serve citizens and business in the future. The ability to reflect today's needs and to anticipate tomorrow's - agile enough to adapt - have to become permanent features of the public sector. Most of all, administrations must build on a solid foundation: ethical, efficient, effective and accountable.

In difficult times, people tend to seek someone to blame for the problems. Often this blame also goes to governments and public administrations.

It is certainly true that there are situations where public administrations are struggling to cope or adapt quickly to handle new realities. Public administrations are therefore often seen as inward looking, politicised and unwilling to change in order to serve their societies better.

However, in order to effectively manage today's challenges and to ensure continued and growing well-being in EU countries, public administrations need to be able to provide answers to our pressing problems.

Often, people don't see or don't recognise the hard work inside many public administrations. And it seems to me that when public administrations actually do a good job, this is often taken for granted, and it is not always recognised how much effort stands behind a new initiative. It is not often that public administrations receive praise and recognition.

That's why the EPSA is such an important event. Because, the EPSA highlights and celebrates all the hard work and the efforts public administrations are making to improve our societies. And the EPSA inspires through real practices that produce real improvements, for real people.

That's why the European Commission has decided to sponsor the EPSA again in 2015, as it already has done every two years, since 2009, with money from the European Social Fund.

Quality of public administration is a challenge for all institutions in all countries in Europe, and on all levels. This equally includes the institutions of the European Union, as well as any small local authority – we all need to work hard every day to serve our citizens better.

That's why I am happy to see the increased participation in this year's EPSA with more countries than ever participating, and submitting more proposals than ever to the test of the judges. And while it is clear that not everyone can be a winner today, I find that every effort of every participant deserves our applause. Because submitting your initiative to the EPSA means that you actually have an initiative, and made an effort, to provide better services to your citizens.

The EPSA is more than a nice event every two years

The EPSA highlights many good practices that can be used to spread ideas and knowledge. In this way enabling public administrations to learn and improve. I would like to mention in this context that the preparation of the EU Quality of Public Administration Toolbox, which my colleague Florian Hauser presented to you yesterday, benefitted greatly from the EPSA experience. Indeed, the majority of the "inspiring practices" in the Toolbox come from the former EPSA editions.

Further, I would like to commend and thank Mrs Marga Proehl, our host for today, and the OECD, for having started discussions on a practical collaboration between the EPSA and the OECD Observatory for Public Sector Innovation (known as OPSI). Such collaboration once the details are agreed has the potential of achieving important synergies between the EPSA and the OPSI. It can ensure that knowledge from the EPSA will be made available via the OPSI internet platform, and that the expertise of EIPA will be used facilitate learning for public institutions. Finally, this collaboration between EPSA and OPSI would be a good example how we can ensure optimised use of precious funding of public funds of the sponsors of both the EPSA and the OPSI. Pooling knowledge and resources, and thereby dissolving the silos of different agencies is clearly a trend that we need to see more in public administrations on all levels.

Ladies & gentlemen

The motto of this year's EPSA is “The Public Sector as Partner for a Better Society”.

As Marianne Thyssen mentioned in the foreword to this year's EPSA publication: *"the complex challenges [we are facing] cannot be solved by cities,*

regions or Member States and their respective administrations on their own. Europe as a whole needs to act in solidarity between Member States, which means creating partnerships across national, regional, local, departmental, institutional and sectoral levels".

The European Commission is certainly part of this partnership, and through policy, guidance and EU financial support, we are making every effort to support our Member States and our neighbouring countries to build better societies.

The fact that 31% of all EPSA 2015 submissions come from EU co-funded projects, which presents again an increase compared to previous editions, shows that EU financial support can make a clear contribution to administrations ongoing efforts towards modernisation and building quality of institutions.

With growing financial support from the European Structural and Investment Funds, which allocate more than EUR 4 billion for improving public administrations in the 2014 – 2020 funding period, and with our enhanced emphasis on reaching results with EU funding, I expect to see even more excellent practices to be submitted in future EPSA awards.

The current social and economic challenges require institutions, which are strong and stable, but also flexible enough to adapt to change. This demands openness to dialogue with different economic and civic stakeholders, ability to introduce new policies and delivery of adequate and forward-looking services.

The nominated projects, as well as the best practice cases selected, show that the EPSA fully reflects current developments in Europe since it has identified projects that have found and implemented innovative solutions to address common concerns regarding migration, labour market integration, youth unemployment and youth protection, as well as citizens' involvement.

At the same time, the selected nominees also demonstrate that EPSA is very attentive to rewarding leading-edge public sector approaches and initiatives aimed at exploring new ways of working together, with proven results for improved efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

Improving our institutions, delivering quality services, and finding solutions to our societal challenges requires all our attention and hard work every day. However, occasionally, we also need pause and reflect, and to celebrate our achievements. In this sense, I am very happy to be able to celebrate with you the best performers of the EPSA 2015, and I would like to warmly thank the entire EPSA team for their hard work to make this event possible.