

## Book Review

Helena Ekelund, Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden

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### THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVANT – A SHARED ADMINISTRATIVE IDENTITY?

**Author: Patrick Overeem & Fritz Sager Kyris**

The growing complexity of public administration at the European Union (EU) level is well documented in academic literature, and multiple authors make references to a European administrative space, see for example Trondal and Peters (2013); Olsen (2003); Hoffmann (2008). Research on member state compliance with EU regulation often emphasises the importance of well-functioning national public administrations. Yet, questions related to the existence or the emergence of shared European administrative principles and values remain under-researched. *The European Public Servant – a shared administrative identity?* — edited by Fritz Sager and Patrick Overeem — aims to fill this gap in the literature by analysing contemporary and historical ideas on the role of the public servant in Europe. In doing so, the book makes a welcome contribution to the scholarly debate on the history of administrative ideas, and I would recommend it to any reader interested in public administration and Europeanisation.

This edited volume is divided into six parts, each part consisting of two or three chapters. The first part includes an introductory chapter written by the editors, and a theoretical and methodological chapter written by Raadschelders. Part two and three focus on historical developments and how the public servant has been conceptualised across countries and time. In the second part, “Older Notions of Public Service”, Paul first analyses the role played by the king’s counsellor as a sixteenth century predecessor to the European public servant. She concludes that counsellors of the past and public servants of the present share the responsibility to provide advice, and the advice given by them can be regarded as a way to increase the appearance of governments ruling *for* the people rather than *over* them. In the second historical chapter Rutgers gives an account of the oath of office in the Netherlands. This contribution shows that whilst the swearing of oaths is a symbolic act it carries important weight particularly in legal contexts throughout Europe.

The third part of the book is dedicated to what the authors refer to as the “formative nineteenth century”. In the first chapter of three Hegewisch addresses the heavily debated question of to what extent public servants should enjoy political influence. An analysis of early nineteenth century German ideas serves to illustrate two opposing normative stands: the public servant as someone whose influence has to be restrained to protect citizens’ freedom and the public servant as someone whose influence instead protects the freedom of citizens. It is argued that an important point of a shared administrative identity would be to mediate between these conflicting views. This is followed by Stapelbroek’s exploration of the link between moves to depoliticise government activities by turning them into administrative tasks and the opening up for the emergence of a European space. In the final chapter of the third part, van den Berg, van der Meer and Dijkstra investigate how and why public servants have acquired a protected status throughout Europe. Public service bargain

perspectives are used to analyse the similarities and differences in the historical development of countries belonging to different administrative traditions.

The contributions to the fourth part of the book assess the transfer of administrative ideas between Europe and America. In the first chapter Rosser shows how Hegelian ideas of the administration as a fundamental part of the government of modern states influenced American public administration. Mavrot then examines how American ideas have inspired post-World War II changes to the composition and study of public administration in France. She concludes that the French tradition of emphasising the juridical skills of public servants came under increased criticism from politicians, academics, and administrators calling for a more technocratic civil service similar to that of the United States. In the following chapter, Hurni similarly shows how American ideas that public servants are not mere tools of political power but hold discretionary power took hold in Germany.

The Europeanised public servant in the EU is the theme of the fifth part of the book, which includes a chapter penned by Connaughton and a chapter co-authored by Hilmer Pedersen and Johannsen. In her chapter, Connaughton analyses Irish public servants' interaction with policy-making at the EU-level, and concludes that, whilst EU-membership has affected the administration, tradition is still an important factor. Hilmer Pedersen and Johannsen instead look to the Eastern part of the EU and investigate how the public administrations of the Baltic states are moving away from the Soviet legacy and adopting European values. They find that the most significant differences are not to be found between states but between different levels of administration. Whereas public servants at the level of state administrations place more emphasis on integrity than what sub-national public servants do, those employed at the sub-national level tend to be more open to citizens' participation.

The sixth and final part seeks to address the question of whether or not a shared European administrative identity exists. Using multivariate analysis of the World Values Survey 2005/6, Brachem and Tepe find that public servants in France, Germany, Great Britain and Sweden rate *Self-transcendence* values (i.e. values associated with the protection and enhancement of welfare for people and nature) more highly than what public servants in the United States do. The training programmes of public servants and the implications that follow from them are then explored by Talshir, who argues that political culture has a significant impact on public service training. Finally, in the last chapter, the editors attempt to pull the strings of the various contributions together in order to shed light on the book's research questions.

As this overview of the various chapters show, the volume has an ambitious scope in terms of the time period and range of countries covered. Rather than imposing the same framework for all contributors, the editors have allowed the various authors to explore different aspects of the volume's themes from their various perspectives. The contributors come from different sub-disciplines of political science and public administration, and utilise different methodological approaches. This is simultaneously refreshing and somewhat frustrating. It is refreshing because it sheds light on European administrative values from a range of different perspectives, thus inviting the readers to open their mind to different avenues of research and critical thinking. It must also be stated that all contributions are highly informative and intellectually rigorous, as they are carefully situated in the wider literature, and include ample references to sources as well as succinct clarifications of methods and approaches used. Where appropriate, authors have also provided additional information and clarifications in foot notes. There is no doubt that this volume is an important contribution to the study of the European administrative space and the emergence of shared administrative values. The frustration comes from the sense that you have merely scratched the surface of one area before moving on to the next. For instance, given the undoubtedly significant influence of the European Union on national public administrations, readers looking for an in depth systematic exploration of the effect of the European Union upon the emergence of a shared

administrative identity in Europe may be somewhat disappointed. Readers approaching the topic from a different background may instead wish for more analysis pertaining to their particular interests. It would not be fair to the volume's contributors to label this a weakness. One must see this book for what it is: an attempt to explore and start to make sense of an under-researched area. It is apparent that the authors are reluctant to draw too far-reaching conclusions on what in some cases is a rather explorative research approach. This said I still believe that the concluding chapter could have been just that little bit bolder by elaborating further on results already discernible from the various contributions. For instance, what is the wider significance of tensions between Europeanisation pressures and national traditions, or between different perceptions on the role of the public servant? To conclude, its ability to stimulate curiosity is a key strength of this volume. Readers coming from different backgrounds but sharing an interest in European public administration can all benefit from reading this book, which ends by stating a number of clear future research agendas. Readers may, for instance, be inspired to follow the editors' suggestions to widen the comparative perspective to include more countries and regions, or to impose a more developed analytical framework on all contributions in order to more systematically develop a body of theory that helps us make sense of the wealth of historical and contemporary material.

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## SHORT DESCRIPTION:

This edited volume explores the emerging European administrative space. With contributions from several sub-disciplines to political science and public administration the book investigates to what extent a shared administrative identity amongst public servants exists in Europe using a range of methodological approaches.

**KEY WORDS** Administration; Europe; public servant; administrative space; identity



## BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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