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COST Action IS1207 LocRef Short Term Scientific Mission
Electoral Reforms and Local Parties
- Central-East European and English Local Governments Compared
De Montfort University, Leicester

Scientific report

Time: 8 Feb – 15 Feb 2013

Host/Supervisor: Prof. Colin Copus, Local Governance Research Unit, DMU

During my visit in Leicester I elaborated a post-doc research proposal *Political Parties in Central European Local Governments* using the resources of DMU libraries. In my project, I plan to assess the electoral performance of political parties in the Central and Eastern European local governments and explain it both by the institutional design of local democracies and the institutionalization of party systems at the national level. The empirical study will take into account the results of almost 60 local elections which took place in 11 countries (all new EU member states). In Leicester, I worked principally on the review of the theoretical literature dealing with the place of political parties in local democracies. I also elaborated a part devoted to the local government reforms, particularly – electoral reforms which have been introduced in the recent decades. Using the advice of Prof. Copus, I collected the literature on independent local lists and small parties in English local governments. The analysis of the English case sheds a new light on the peculiarities of the post-communist CEE countries. I plan to submit the project in the following months, after the defense of my Ph.D. dissertation, to Marie-Curie IEF Program and to Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

The STSM took place just after the COST WGIV meeting in Cluj-Napoca, where the research strategy of the group was discussed. During the short stay in Leicester, I searched the Horizon 2020 calls for proposals which are currently opened and prepared a short report on the H2020 funding possibilities. After the discussion with Prof. Colin Copus, using the conclusions from the

Cluj meeting and research notes prepared by the country experts before the Cluj meeting, I prepared an initial draft of a research project which could be elaborated further and submitted in response to the call “Political challenges for Europe”. A new research consortium could be established on the basis of COST WGIV. The general aim of the project is to investigate how local leaders respond to the “legitimacy deficit” in times of economic crisis and fiscal austerity.

On 13th February, I delivered a presentation to the students of DMU School of Business and Law in which I discussed the institutional design and reforms of local governments in Poland after 1989. I presented the main results of my research on local elections, independent local lists and non-partisan mayors in Poland. I discussed more precisely the on-going electoral reform which introduced the single-member districts in all Polish municipalities except the largest cities and removed many proportional and majoritarian multi-member districts (one of my research tasks for this year is to assess the main consequences of the reform after 2014 autumn local elections).

On 13th February, I had a meeting with Peter Soulsby, the elected Mayor of Leicester, a member of British Labour Party and a former Member of Parliament. I conducted a short interview, focusing on the peculiarities of party politics at the local level and the changes induced by the direct election of mayor, introduced in Leicester in 2004. This interview is an interesting material, complementing the literature review on independents and non-partisans in English local politics.

During my stay in Leicester, I met Jane Scullion, who is a Ph.D. researcher at DMU and former city managing officer. We discussed our research projects and exchanged some interesting literature references. I also attended an event organized by the School of Business and Law which aimed at collecting the DMU students’ proposals of reforms in the main public policy areas. After several similar meetings the elaborated proposals will be presented to main political parties. A part of the students’ discussion led by Prof. Colin Copus focused on the local governments reform. It was a valuable experience to observe such a “collective brainstorming” on current political issues before the parliamentary elections in the UK.

Overall, this STSM was a very valuable experience for my scientific work. I am very grateful for this opportunity.