



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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REPISHTI: Let's start this interview about the role you have played in public administration reform. What has your role been in this reform in Albania?

KODRA: *I played two roles in the reform, both as a policymaker and policy implementer, as well as monitoring the way the policies were carried out, which was done seriously for the first time in Albania and which was very complex and made for a very interesting experience. In other words as head of the Department of Public Administration, I have been a decision maker, manager (enacting policies), and a monitor of the whole process.*

REPISHTI: More specifically, how were you involved in the process? Was it as part of your work in the Albanian state, as part of your position here at the Socialist Movement for Integration, the UN or some other group?

KODRA: *I have spent all of my life working in the public administration. I have worked during the dictatorial regime [Communism] and in the time of democracy, experiencing and at the same time influencing changes in functioning of the state during the transition period. I started work in the public administration in 1981 and spent 10 years under the dictatorial regime. I have been lucky, but also partly due to coincidence, I worked in the high levels of the public administration. I know the public administration from its foundation because I started working there from the beginning of my career, and I was also able to climb the career steps one by one. I am aware of the good side and the bad side of our administration.*

I spent most of my working days during the time when Albania underwent a transition. It is a drawn-out transition, filled with trauma and with no particular aim. I would like to say that being a state in transition, a state with small administrative capacities, Albania has been one of the places where the smallest political change brought about direct change in all state institutions. And this constitutes one of the main weaknesses of the public administration in Albania, where a small political fluctuation causes great waves in the public administration and affects the development of the country, because countries with a tradition of centralization and orders from above find it very difficult to learn about initiative, individual action, and organization. Being one of these countries, the connection to politics will continue for a long time to directly affect public life and the public administration and state. So I would like to say that coming from a professional background and having been part of the system have enabled me to identify the problems and weakness of the public administration; and of course I was helped enormously by foreign experts who came and told us about modern practices, which I did not know but which I gradually learned.

I was also lucky to have had the chance to cooperate with the Ministry of Labor in 1992-'93; I was a specialist in the Ministry of Labor when I started collaborating with the International Labor Organization [ILO] to create the system of tripartite negotiations. I was the right person at the right place, because I was dealing with salaries in the Ministry of Labor. What I am trying to explain is the path that I have taken in building my knowledge through work and collaboration with

international experts in the field of wages and three-party negotiations, which is also relevant for other reforms enacted in the Albanian public administration. Our aim at the time was to increase salaries of civil servants in order to increase the motivation of people working in the public administration—which by the way is something that I observed in Moldova two months ago; it is the system that creates such things. The people within a system create the same stereotype, the same way of thinking, which, practically speaking, is something that might help people to move faster and not to make the same mistakes that we made. I would come back to this topic of mistakes, but perhaps I can talk about it later.

So I started working with ILO experts to create the tripartite group for negotiating salaries. It was a chance for me to start learning; it was a great lesson of democracy for me, the lesson of dialogue, how to dialogue with social partners in order to achieve acceptable results both for the government but also for employees and employers. The work of the tripartite group led to the creation of the National Council of Labor, which is the first dialoguing institute in Albania. It was created as an advisory body to the Ministry of Labor but in fact has served me as a school of learning dialogue, to learn the concepts of transparency, to learn that by being open and discussing things with interested people better results are achieved than when things are done dictated by above as I was used to before—I was told to do this and that's it, this is your job. So the first school of democracy for me, which I would say was the best school I ever attended, was the direct partaking in the creation of the tripartite commission for salaries.

REPISHTI: Which years were they?

KODRA: *From 1994 to 1996. This was the school where I learned how to present a case to our partners, but also how to be a negotiator, because the state—and I was on the side of the state—in the tripartite relations was an employer but was also the middleman between employees and employers. So it has two roles, and these two roles helped me learn how the state functions, lessons which helped me also later in the job I held in the Department of the Public Administration, when I moved there from the Ministry of Labor.*

I would say that there were occasions when I was told directly that I was assigned to the Department politically; in other words, I was a political appointee. It is something entirely normal. The system used to work like this; unfortunately it continues to function in the same way 10 years after—even after five years from the time I left the Department, even though now the situation is entirely different and it should not be like this, but at the time that was the reality. In my case, perhaps immodestly, I was the right person at the right time. And the reality showed that the person who appointed me to the Department of Public Administration had made the best decision at that time. Perhaps there could have been other selections, but my being in the Department of Public Administration enabled the institution to achieve results and make a mark in the history of the Albanian public administration.

REPISHTI: Let's talk about your time at DPA. What were some of the difficulties you encountered while you were leading this institution?

KODRA: *There were plenty of difficulties, to the point that it could have been mission impossible. I came in with a lot of knowledge about the system, about the public administration, even though my knowledge was mostly focused on salary-related procedures. I was aware of the deep politicization in the public administration, which I disliked, and as early as 1996 I had become aware—naturally, through reading and talking to foreign experts—of the important role the civil service could play as an advisor and implementer. And practically speaking, in the highest level of the administration, this is the role of the civil servant who knows he will be there for all of his life, and that he is there to come up with the best possible options in order for the politicians to make the best decisions. So based on this concept, I started to make the necessary changes at the place I was appointed.*

There was a strong connection between politics and the public administration on all levels and especially where I was assigned, because this was an office which dealt with policymaking but also with monitoring and evaluation of such policies. I would say that my being a preferred person of the political party which was in power at the time was a great advantage, as it gave me the possibility to do what I thought was necessary. This was the first advantage; people in power did not try to block my efforts. Second, having had close contact with politics, I was able to do things that in different circumstances would not have happened or would have taken a very long time. And lastly, due to the political goodwill that existed and due to the good relations I had with politics, I was trusted by those in power; they trusted my professional abilities, and their trust meant I had free reign to do what I thought was necessary and reasonable.

So there was a combination of my professional and academic experience—as I read a lot, I could not make these things up—and the political will. Everything came together; it was the right time, as apart from political will there was also foreign assistance in terms of expertise and funding. All these factors were combined in order to do things which were not done in ten years, because from 1992 to 1998, even though some efforts to reform the public administration were made, nothing had happened in practice.

But you asked about the difficulties. I would say one thing: first, the difficulty was that I had to have persuading powers. I came to the Department of Public Administration, to the Council of Ministers, in 1997, when the Albanian state did not exist, practically speaking. When there were still foreign soldiers in Albania, and in my office there still bullet holes, there were still bullet holes in the Prime Minister's office from the craziness of 1997. And when I arrived at the Department of Public Administration, I found only two or three people who did the most elementary things that had nothing to do with the things that that institution should do. In terms of the legal framework, there existed a law of the civil service, passed in 1996, which was practically non-implementable as there existed no

sub-laws or rules to make implementation possible. So there were no legal possibilities from which to start something.

There was also an inflation of foreign assistance on this topic too. The group of Friends of Albania was created which wanted to focus on rebuilding the Albanian public administration, precisely because in 1997 donors were convinced that they were wrong not to have paid attention to the creation of democratic institutions—perhaps we can talk about this later as it is an important point. I have spoken to foreign experts in great detail about this, as the argument went, when Albania first opened up after the fall of Communism, that having come from a dictatorial regime it was thought that the public administration, thus the state, would be able to withstand any hits coming as a result of the opening up, which was absolutely untrue and which was proven wrong in 1997 when the Albanian state was pulverized. So this is a case of remembering that foreign assistance does not always serve the good intentions for which the assistance is given to many countries.

It is necessary that every country has its own people who think, first and foremost, about their own country, and every country has their own culture, history, and mentality. The combining of all these factors with foreign aid can enable the achievements of incredible results, and if this combination does not exist, then the expertise is wasted, as has happened many times before.

So this was the situation: there existed no laws, no institution to deal with this problem. There existed political goodwill, and there existed donor efforts to support reform and to begin the reform of the public administration. The first difficulty that I faced which can be considered also as—I apologize, but I would like to intervene, perhaps in brackets, as this is how thoughts come—as a coincidence; the circumstance is fortuitous. Because I had been in contact with Gary Reid, an expert of the World Bank, who worked on public administration reform at the World Bank. I had been in professional contact with him when there had been a survey carried out by the World Bank on the system of salaries in Albania. So we knew each other, even personally, and maybe this helps in speeding things, because a certain reciprocal trust is created which moves things along. However, I had to convince even Gary that I wanted to respect the law because we initially started with the existing law at the time. There were also many experts from the European Union who were willing and always a phone call away in giving me any advice or knowledge I needed on a daily basis. I had countless discussions with Gary about the impossibility of implementing the existing law, but Gary as a representative of the World Bank insisted that the law needed to be implemented, and many days passed until I told him: let's implement the law.

So the work started, and apart from the willingness to work we needed tools, which did not exist. In long and countless conversations with the World Bank, I had to convince them about doing something as well as try to convince the representatives of the EU and principally SIGMA [Support for Improvement in

Governance and Management in Central and Eastern European Countries], which was required to work on public administration reform, who on their part insisted on urgently starting the reform and had their own comments on the drafted law and the law in existence. Another problem related to trying to have all the donors think alike; as I said, there existed the table of the Friends of Albania, where there were representatives from the World Bank, EU, UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] and other states such as DFID [Department for International Development] from the UK, USAID [United States Agency for International Development] and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe]. So there were all these donors who had experts, or who pretended to have experts, on the fields they had given money, but who had different opinions, because it is impossible for a country to have the same experience as another. Each of them had their own ideas and their own methods of disbursing funds, and all of them came crashing on the Albanian government, onto me, and they all wanted, in a way, to impose their own form and work method. So it was an unusually complicated situation, which I dealt with by bringing everyone together. What I did to get out of the situation was to gather everyone, as I believed in transparency and thought that the more open the one who asks for help is, the easier it will be to face any type of pressure or to solve the most difficult problem. I called to the table all of the donors' representatives and told them: this is the situation, let's solve it: let's find the best way to do it so that it benefits Albania, but that also conforms to your policies in this field. And if you look at it, the law, the status of the civil servant which was approved in 1999 came in with three signatures; there was consensus from the World Bank, the EU, and the OSCE.

There was also a problem, which is the reason three signatures were used, because we were at the time trying to convince donors that there was a need to fix the existing law, so by discussing, by being transparent and sincere and really motivated to do something, the World Bank, which insisted the most on implementing the law, agreed that it was impossible to implement that law. So the program was entirely changed, and from requests for implementing the law it was moved to requiring that the law be revisited and possibly rewritten because it was concluded that the law could not be changed: a new law was needed. At that point, the work for drafting a new law started, but the difficulties did not end, because it was me who asked for the drafting of a law which would make the public administration more stable, the civil servant more dignified, and that every person would be evaluated on their skills and there would be possibilities for a career. I remember with nostalgia the time when we discussed for hours because even I was unclear on many things. It was an experience I had never had before, and it is worth remembering the patience of the experts who came often to explain to me how even a comma in a paragraph of the law could change the entire meaning of the law—and I faced these commas every day—because I would give an opinion, but it was the lawyers who materialized it in legal form, and one should keep in mind that Albanian lawyers even today, ten years later, lack the necessary skills in the law drafting process.

Still today, one of the biggest problems in the Albanian administration is the process of the technical law drafting, let alone the authoritarian concepts which existed in the minds of all people, because we are talking about 1997, when almost nothing had changed in the public administration—I am talking about the mentality of being in charge of a state—and even the aims of those who stood behind those who had a right to participate in the drafting of the law, because truly the law was drafted by the Department of the Public Administration, but the Ministry of Finance, the Council of Ministers and other institutions were also involved. There were ministers who had direct interests which became apparent when the law was debated in Parliament, who could not conceive of the notion that a minister could not be able to participate in the hiring or dismissal of a civil servant. All these [interests] were realized in the way particular paragraphs of the law were drafted, which meant that at a specific moment when the law was almost ready to be approved in the Council of Ministers, the meaning of the law had changed and the new drafted law was different to the one we had intended to create.

I spent hours late into the night discussing with experts from the World Bank and the EU about the law. I remember one night talking to the experts until 10 pm about how to explain to the prime minister that this law (about to be approved in the Council of Ministers) was not the law which needed to pass in Parliament. Because the prime minister trusted me and I had told him that the law was in order. The experts working with me on the law were patient and very professional—they were, for example, cautious and calm when we spoke with the Friends of Albania, even though they were livid about the way the law had been changed. But we took all the necessary steps to change the drafted law in order to make the law the way it needed to be done, a stable foundation for the stability, professionalism and independence of the public administration.

So these were some of the behind-the-scenes which at times account for the main reasons certain decisions are made. These were the things that consumed most of my time, because I had to be always vigilant in order to assess whether a decision made by someone went against what I believed, do I disagree with it, how do I go about doing, who do I need to talk to and how do I convince my superiors that this decision is wrong; and in this process I had the full support of the foreign experts who helped me and advised me on how to deal with my supervisors, because it is not always possible to talk openly to your supervisors, and you never know how your decisions might affect those above you.

And while considering that all those who made decisions think of themselves as being wiser than anybody else, it is important to know how to present an argument and to give them the right argument in order to convince them that this is the best way to go about solving a problem.

I forgot to say that when the changes were made once again, we had to deal again with the foreign institutions, which had their own ideas about the form of the system to be adopted in Albania. While the EU, or rather the representatives

of SIGMA, who represented the EU, were more in favor of a system which encouraged continuation and permanent employment in the public administration, the World Bank favored a flexible public administration, and all parties had their own convincing arguments. The EU said that the public administration should have all it needs; a civil servant should be aware that by entering the public administration he will be secure and protected from any interference which will allow him to be devoted to his work and his career, while the World Bank thought that if a person has everything and is guaranteed his being in the public administration, he would lose any motivation, the sense of competition, so he will have no need to be better, as there will be no reason to do so if his staying in the public administration is guaranteed. So these were aims which I had to align, but I had to convince the World Bank that the stability of the public administration was necessary because this represented the A of what we wanted to do in the Albanian public administration, precisely because many people were replaced continually, and as many experts kept saying, it was impossible to start and continue a reform in this place. Because, minimally, the reforms would be delayed by a year, until the person who was in the X position could learn what had happened and became familiar with his tasks and could start to think about what to do in the future.

So while I spoke about the necessity of creating a durable system to the World Bank, I needed to convince the EU that we did not need a public administration which could guarantee jobs for life, because that would encourage laziness and would avoid competition, and by creating rigid bodies in a small place such as Albania we would have difficulties to make changes later. So as you see, there was an important role to be played, and my experience in the public administration was invaluable, as due to that I was able to find the necessary argument and the convincing method to unify opinions which at times were entirely opposite, and this is the reason why the status of the civil servant is a career system but based on the position. It is a position which allows the civil servant to make a career, but at the same time it is open to external competition. This was the way we thought about all the issues at the time which are today represented in the law.

Naturally, ten years after the implementation of the law, many things might have changed. However, I am convinced that at the time we made the right decisions, and this was shown when the change in the political power happened which illustrated that the system we chose was the right one, was necessary and achieved results on the basis of which we should continue to build on. I continue to believe that the law we have is very good. Of course there might be a need for adjustments, but these are things which can be discussed at another time. So these are the difficulties I faced, not just every day but every minute, because I received phone calls about why certain things were done in such a way, why were certain things not included, why were other things included, etc. This is part of the things I can remember now.

REPISHTI: Let's move on to the second part of our interview, which is about the mission of the reforms and the general context. You spoke about the capacity then when you first started in the public administration. How does that compare to now?

KODRA: *Are you talking about the administrative capacities, or about the administration in general?*

REPISHTI: And the state of the reform—mostly about the civil servants, which is the key.

KODRA: *Unfortunately, the political party which will come to power in a year will find almost the same state of affairs as the one I found in 1998, but with one major exception which relates to the existence of the legal framework as well as the perceptions of the civil servant and the public at large, that implementing the law has a significant effect in improving civil service function, has a significant effect in the general institutional reform in Albania. Administrative capacities are necessary for the reform in the judicial sector as well as in improving public service and in improving policymaking and drafting of laws in general.*

I would say that the situation has worsened in the past three to four years, as is reflected in how reform is being blocked. If you see the EU monitoring reports, it has continually been concluded that—but we should keep in mind that the EU is not our tutor, we vie to become partners, and that it uses diplomatic language—however, in the field of administrative capacities they have been direct in saying that Albania needs to improve administrative capacities, as was said in the 2008 EU report. So as the EU report states that there is a need for improving capacities, work needs to improve, and the fight against corruption has stalled. Thus these three elements [indicate] that there has been regress since 2004 in implementing the reform, although fortunately the law has not been changed. At least the law has not been changed, but the way the law is implemented—or rather, is not implemented—has led to arbitrary decisions, has led to increased corruption, has led to people who have been accused of many things to continue to serve in high public administration positions. And this is not my belief only—this is the perception of all those who monitor the process of reforms in Albania. Due to my position now, I see these things more and, also because of my experience in the public administration, I know many people who tell me often of arbitrary decisions, fictitious tests, and neglecting of rules in hiring people. All these factors lead [me] to conclude that practically the reform in the public administration is now in the 1999 phase, when the law started to be implemented for the first time.

REPISHTI: Can you describe briefly the objectives and aims of reform now? What should change in order to avoid some of the problems you mentioned, and what motivates this type of reform if it exists? Which organizations or individuals can be champions of reform?

KODRA: *I don't understand in what way they can be champions—meaning that they can move the reform ahead?*

REPISHTI: Yes, exactly.

KODRA: *But I said that I'm now in a position entirely different to the one I had in 1998, when I was entirely immersed in the process of reforming the public administration. So from the position I have now, as the vice-chairman of a political force which aims to develop the country, I think that the main problem in the Albanian administration is not respecting the law, and this is conditioned by the lack of the political will. This is why the law is not implemented. Meaning that 18 years after the change of the system, there is still a mentality of the Albanian leaders of leading as authoritarians as in dictatorial times. So the malfunction does not exist in the public administration, but rather in the ranks of those who are leading our country with methods inherited from the dictatorial regime they learned when they were being formed and grew up. This is not my saying; this is the saying of a politician from the majority who stated that we have now a governance which is trying to accommodate two things that cannot be accommodated: a free-market economy and an authoritarian way of governing. And this is where the problem lies: the mode of governing should change in order to create the necessary space for the continuation of the reform in the public administration.*

I would like to remember here the year 2000, when Albania was at the forefront of implementing the reform in the public administration compared to all other countries in the region, including Bulgaria and Romania, which are now members of the European Union and at the time had made no steps or were in the initial phases of reform in the public administration. Albania provided expertise to all other countries in the region about how to carry out reform in the public administration, what were some of the difficulties and how to deal with them.

REPISHTI: Is there any pressure from donors or from fiscal needs which can affect the reform or change the political will, or how can the desire to enter into the EU change things, and what is public opinion like?

KODRA: *Listen, I teach at an institute, and my students ask me why should they study the management of human resources when this makes a very small part of the public administration, because the status of the civil servant covers only about 5,000-6,000 people, 1,500 in the central administration and the rest in the local administration. The answer is that the status of the civil servant is the basis of how people in the public administration should be hired, promoted, and dismissed, so there is a set of rules which all the Albanians who want to work in public institutions should know. It is necessary for Albanians to learn these rules, and such rules need to be implemented first and foremost by those who take it upon themselves to lead these people, the state and the institutions of the state.*

REPISHTI: I was asking about the different pressures which can improve—

KODRA: *And I started by saying that it is necessary. On the other hand, we aim to enter in the EU, and this can serve to push the reforms. We say that one of the biggest problems of the public administration is the lack of administrative capacities.*

Albania has concluded some deals mostly in the field of open trade, and many of these deals have resulted problematically because the negotiation process has been not very well thought out, which means that the Albanian experts have not considered all of the issues, have not analyzed all the factors involved, both internal and external. But entering the EU provides certainly encouragement for the reform, but provides also a challenge, as it would be facing the rest of the world, facing the EU when we negotiate with them. But we don't have the experts with the right knowledge, even experts who have graduated abroad in excellent universities, need to come to Albania to learn about the expertise here in Albania in order to combine it with the foreign expertise and use them to the benefit of the Albanian state.

There are fiscal indicators which show that the more qualified and competent the Albanian public servants are the better it is for the Albanian state, as these people will save money in various areas, even if they get paid higher salaries, they will compensate when negotiating and when getting better deals for Albania. So this is a mutual [beneficial] relationship; the more appreciated civil servants feel, the more dedicated and motivated they will become. So this is a win-win situation.

If I can talk about the donors now: after all a donor is always a donor. No matter how good the intentions of a donor are, if after a long time there are no continuous results for the work he is paying, the donor will get up and leave. It is normal, after all: why should he waste the money of his country's taxpayers in a country which does not think about itself? This is the worst-case scenario in the relations with donors. But I would say that there are many cases where the donors play a very active role in the development of a country, as in the case of encouraging or forcing the reform in the public administration in Albania. I remember how tired I used to be, but the work also served as a tool for me to ask the policy makers to get things done, as these were the conditions set by the World Bank. I don't see now, however, the same helping role that the World Bank and the EU played then.

This government does as it pleases without repercussions; it behaves as an authoritarian government. To give you an example, the government tried to reform the system of pensions, and it tried to pass the law without consulting with the opposition, but the World Bank stopped it from trying to pass it in Parliament before consulting the opposition—yet another example of the power of the World Bank. When in the end we all sat at the table to discuss the reform and we asked for the necessary reading materials, a vice minister of this government told us to get the papers from our people in the public administration. This is a clear example of how this government does not care about the civil servants, whom it regards as servants who should do whatever the bosses say. And what was the reaction from the World Bank? Nothing. I hope that this is only a momentary thing, as I can never believe that this is the policy of the World Bank. These examples I provided show how important is donor involvement at the beginning and continuation of a reform in a given field.

REPISHTI: You said that the political support for reform in the public administration at the time you worked there was very high, which perhaps might not be the case with our actual government. Is there support from different levels of government, from various ministers, and what have they done?

KODRA: *Unfortunately, I have to repeat that Albania is actually governed by someone with deep authoritarian tendencies, and I would say that we have a prime minister but no ministers, meaning that all decisions are made by the prime minister, and he does not consider the reform in the public administration a priority. I say this because with his arrival, the Department of Public Administration was taken away from the Council of Ministers and was put under the Interior Ministry, which lowered greatly the influence of the Department, as it receives little attention from an institution such as the Interior Ministry, which prioritizes public order and problems with local governance, leaving not much room for public administration. This lack of political support means that the reform in the public administration is stalled, as unfortunately in Albania we are still in the period when there is need for political support to carry out a process, because the majority of Albanians would do whatever the boss says.*

Moreover, this government has become a patron-based government, as those politicians who came to power in 2005 used their power to give posts and offices to all those who supported them in their political campaigning. And this is done openly and clearly, meaning that it is done to show that now it is their time and they can do what they want; no one can do anything about it. This is the mentality which is dominant in Albania, and this is the state of our administration.

And even if the director of the Department of Public Administration might want to do something, it is not possible, because she will need to go over the secretary general of the ministry, go over the vice-minister in charge of problems in the public administration to reach the minister of the interior, let alone trying to get to the prime minister, to make even the smallest changes needed. Here is another practical example: today I received an invitation to participate in a conference on the strategy of developing the public administration, and here I see that the main speaker will be the director of the Department of Coordination in the Council of Ministers; then after her will talk the director of the Department of Public Administration. Do you see how many barriers the director of the Department of Public Administration needs to jump to be able to reach the levels of policy making?

This is a big barrier to the development of reform, let alone for other, bigger problems which might arise and which might need Prime Minister's intervention. I don't trust this government; I don't trust that they are working to improve the public administration. This is my understanding, but I also think that the implementation of the law is supported 100% by civil servants themselves, by the same civil servants who have understood the benefits the law bestows on them, and even the public is well-informed because of the reactions of those who were fired. Now the people know that there exists a law which protects the civil

servant; they know that this law is not carried out by the government, so even the public knows that the law should function and this government has not done a good job in this field.

REPISHTI: One of the topics I want to talk about is how to reduce political influence in recruitment and promotion. If we can talk about concrete reforms, are there any tests which can help the promotion and hiring without any influence in the public administration?

KODRA: *It might seem like a paradox, but this is the reality. In order to increase the independence of the public service, we need to include politics as much as possible in the process; politics has to decide the way this is done. I said many times that if politics is willing the reform can happen, and if politics is not willing the reform cannot happen. This will continue for a long time because our public is extremely politicized. I did not mention for nothing that when the actual party came to power, simple people in the streets were saying: we took it [power], and we are not letting it go. It is the mentality of the people which needs a long time to change, and such change can only happen by acting in such a way that can show people that by coming to power one has to serve the entire country, not just the party militants and the people who helped that person win. The best and quickest way to achieve this is to respect and carry out the laws and rules. If you have clearly stated rules and you follow these rules, this helps not in changing the mentality but in creating a tradition which can lead to changing mentalities.*

REPISHTI: Can you talk a bit about some of the types of trainings or programs which aim to increase the capacity of civil servants, to increase their quality.

KODRA: *We spoke very little or not at all about the system of salaries. Why did we decide to reform the system of salaries? Apart from many other factors—the spending without knowing the destination, the inequality between the same levels in different institutions, the many types of bonuses even for things which made no sense—it was thought that the reform of salaries should be parallel to the reform of the public administration. To come back to the case of Moldova, the first thing they asked for was higher salaries, but this can only be done if civil servants are hired according to rules, and an appropriate level of payment is given in order for the civil servants not to try and find other sources of income, but to be dedicated and motivated to public service. This was also the reason why we started working on reforming the salary of civil servants the moment the status of the civil servant was approved, and we were hoping to expand salary reform to all levels of the public administration in Albania. The facts have shown that after the reform of salaries for public servants happened, the funds from the state's budget dedicated to paying civil servants were lower than before even though the salaries had increased, precisely due to the repairs [changes] that happened; of course I talk in terms of percentage of the GDP. This was the reason we continued the reform in the salary system parallel to implementing the reform in the civil service.*

Actually, and I again say unfortunately, this government has deformed the system of salaries, as it has included a reward [bonus] for master's [degrees]: those who have a master's from abroad receive \$200; those who have a master's from here receive \$100. Not to say that this is public discrimination; it is stupid. This type of treatment, first of all, creates problems within the civil servants and degrades our education system by valuing more those who have studied abroad—who in a way were privileged to study abroad, as not all have the possibility to study abroad. In this way, those in the public administration who have studied here, who have spent time and money to go to university and to receive an Albanian master's are discriminated against twice. So this has deformed the system.

Furthermore, I would like to say that this is an experience which has failed, because in the first years after the fall of communism, the Soros Foundation tried to apply this in our public administration and created many problems, created conflicts within the administration, and in the end this project was terminated without the desired results, which I think will be the same end for the government's program.

This was another field where the government had to be involved and deform the system. This government, despite promises, has not fought corruption; in fact, corruption has increased, as shown in the case of Gerdec [a village near Tirana where an explosion of ammunition killed many and destroyed entire villages], where three villages were destroyed. I would say that there has been only improvement in serving the public, meaning that the center for the registration of business has been created, but that is it. Even this has not realized its function, because it is only a link in the entire chain of servicing the public, and if you don't have the capacities to serve the public, this center might be a step in the right direction, but many other steps need to be taken in order for the administration to serve the public well.

REPISHTI: Have there been any ideas on how to attract talented people?

KODRA: *Listen, I would like to say something about the training which I started with but I did not finish. Alongside the implementation of the reform in the public administration, alongside the increases in salaries, the institute for training the public administration was created. This institute was built from scratch; there was an attempt in 1994-'96, but from that institute there remained no trace, maybe due to the fact that that institution was conceived as a private endeavor, not public. In 2000, the Institute for Training was created as a public institution under the public administration, which was to train those who entered the public administration for the first time, so the people who were under a probationary period in the public administration were required to start first at the Institute in order to understand the basic notions of the public administration and then to continue. Apart from this, the Institute had other duties too, such as analyzing their training, evaluating needs, and verifying the effectiveness of their training for which there existed an entire strategy. Now the Institute has been reduced to*

teaching a few modules and that is it, because that which served as the engine of the public administration, the Department of Public Administration, is closed, is limited, and it is not permitted to develop its own capacity and abilities.

The way to attract people to the public administration? First, I think we should increase the age of the people entering the public administration. Until now we have not assigned an age limit on the people who join. We have employed people straight out of universities who after four or five years have left to join more profitable sectors. I have personally dealt with people who had no knowledge when they were hired but have come to me after four or five years, when they had become experts in a field, and said that there was nothing else for them to learn, and they would go. At the time these people become useful to the public administration, when they are capable to give back, they leave. So in a way, the public administration has served as a training institution for people who have had other aims outside of the public administration. This can be solved by imposing conditions on those who want to enter the public administration, make them work a particular number of years after they have received training, or increase the age for training and entering. People who have worked in other fields and have decided to be dedicated to the public administration. Another solution would be to use our system which we already have to make sure that there is both internal and external competition for every level. Another method might be to assign projects to people who hold key positions. A general secretary should be put in charge of a project; he should be asked to achieve this result in a given timeframe, and if this person is not capable to achieve the result, then naturally this person should leave his post for someone else more capable. So there are many possibilities, but the first priority for Albania is for the law to be respected.

REPISHTI: Are there any ideas to implement the reform which might reflect, for instance, actual traditions and practices in Albania?

KODRA: *Let's talk a little bit about the infrastructure, which is problematic. There are electricity cuts throughout Albania, even in Tirana, while in other cities these might last up to 12 hours. We have tons of computers and technology but not enough electricity. This is the first problem. The second problem is the lack of training of public servants. We have people in high school who do not know how to use computers, and in some cases, in remote villages, we have people who have never even seen a computer. I was in a village in Korca in 2005 and met a 14-year-old girl who did not know what a calculator was, let alone computers and the Internet. This is a huge challenge that needs to be addressed soon. We have a great positive aspect, which is that we are a people who adapts easily. We have great initiative, but of course the problem is that we also have difficulties getting used to rules! That is why we need the state to influence people to respect the rules, even those of driving. The number of automobile accidents has increased dramatically because people do not respect the rules and drive very fast.*

REPISHTI: Has there been any monitoring from the civil society?

KODRA: This is part of our tradition too; we have not known the notion of a community. We are individualistic. However, in the last 18 years the civil society in Albania has developed, but as I said before, we live in a society which is greatly politicized. Even the NGOs have not been immune to this fact. Some of the NGO leaders I used to work with in bringing about reform have now gone quiet or entered politics. We still [...] the civil society to be more experienced and with more professional integrity.

REPISHTI: Thank you very much. Let's stop here.

KODRA: No problem.