

Meanings and significance of “public accountability” From economy and management to public policies

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Abstract: The concept of “public accountability” is a challenge for political science as a new concept in this area in full debate and development, both in theory and practice. This paper is a theoretical approach of displaying some definitions, relevant meanings and significance of the concept in political science. The importance of this concept is that although originally it was used as a tool to improve effectiveness and efficiency of public governance, it has gradually become a purpose in itself. “Accountability” has become an image of good governance first in the United States of America then in the European Union. Nevertheless, the concept is vaguely defined and provides ambiguous images of good governance. This paper begins with the presentation of some general meanings of the concept as they emerge from specialized dictionaries and encyclopaedias and continues with the meanings developed in political science. The concept of “public accountability” is rooted in economics and management literature, becoming increasingly relevant in today’s political science both in theory and discourse as well as in practice in formulating and evaluating public policies. A first conclusion that emerges from the analysis of the evolution of this term is that it requires a conceptual clarification in political science. A clear definition will then enable an appropriate model of improving the system of public accountability in formulating and assessing public policies, in order to implement a system of assessment and monitoring thereof.

Keywords: public accountability, economy, management, political science, public policy
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Introduction

Rooted in economics and management literature, the concept of “public

accountability” becomes ever more relevant in political science both in theory and discourse, as well as practice in developing, implementing and assessing public policies.

This paper is a theoretical approach of the evolution of the concept in economics and management in public policies area and seeks to clarify the concept in political science and public policies and to identify practices of this concept.

The attempt to clarify the concept of accountability in the public system and to identify its practices associated thereto as well as the impact on all actors involved has as context the assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of public programs and policies. One of the questions this paper seeks to answer is "Who takes public responsibility for the results of the implemented public policies and programs?" I am referring here to accountability as a result, a consequence of the assessment and auditing of a public policy.

This paper begins with some definitions, meanings and significance of "public accountability" as shown in specialized dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Further on I shall present the origins of the term and the way it grew apart from its meanings in economics and management to a concept which embodies the principles of fair governance. Among the debates in political science literature, the most relevant and recent theories concerning this concept in evolution were developed by Mark Bovens (2007) – he describes a theoretical frame, Jens Steffek (2010) – gives a response to the question "What is "public" in "public accountability"?", Richard Mulgan (2000) – provides an image on the expansion of the concept and Teresa Kulawik (2009) - describes a range of mechanisms for implementation and public accountability assessment practices. Currently, the concept of "public accountability" is defined as specific to a democratic state and useful in the preparation and assessment of effective public policies.

Definitions, meanings and significance of „public accountability“

"Public accountability" is a recently used concept in political science, but under continuous development which has gained a central role in the international and European area both in public discourse and the preparation and assessment of public policies. In this moment the meanings of the concept are controversial and unclear as it lacks precise definitions, regulating principles, enforcement mechanisms and assessment tools/criteria to measure the concept. Moreover, there is no considerable literature around the concept of "public accountability" focused on the analysis of the concept which is often used by its synonyms. The overall purpose of this paper is to define the term in political science in order to further on establish the methodological framework needed to analyze the concept of "public accountability" in preparing and assessing public policies.

In the specialized dictionaries and encyclopaedias² "accountability" is regarded as a person's obligation to do something, to respond in the sense of accounting for something, that is to bear the consequences for the effects/results of his/her activities or actions. To be responsible means to undertake a responsibility position, a conscious and cons-

²I've studied the definitions and the meaning of "accountability" in Bealey, Frank W., 1999: "The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science: A User's Guide to Its Terms", Blackwell publishers; Robertson, David (2002): "A dictionary of modern politics: third edition", Europa Publications, United Kingdom; Webster, Merriam (2004): "The Merriam-Webster English Dictionary", Bedworth, David, Bedworth, Albert E (2009): „Dictionary of Health Education“, Oxford University Press, USA

cientious attitude towards one's duty and a sense of liability towards social and/professional duties.

Accountability may also be a situation where a person/authority/institution is empowered to make decisions and may be blamed/challenged if his/her activity does not meet the expectations of those affected by his/her responsibility.

Merriam-Webster (2004) defines "accountability" as "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions." In accordance thereto "accountability" involves a series of requirements from officials, their government agents or public service organizations, including colleges and universities, namely:

- 1) They must make proof of having used their own powers.
- 2) They must make proof of working to achieve their mission or the priorities of the institutions or organizations.
- 3) They must make proof of their performance "power is opaque, accountability is public" (Schedler, 1999).
- 4) They must produce efficiency and effectiveness: "for the resources they use and the outcomes they produce" (Shavelson, 2000).
- 5) They must assure the quality of the programs and services provided.
- 6) They must prove that they serve public needs.

The beneficiaries of public services are the public in general and students, business people, governments, non-governmental organizations in particular.

In "The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science: A User's Guide to Its Terms" "accountability" is defined as the synonym of

"responsibility" and explains how a government or an elected person is responsible in two ways. "First of all, to be responsible means to be on a managing position and thus to be called for answers to questions about one's activity and the latter one about his/her subordinates' activity. Secondly, it is an objectionable concept. A government is liable when it may be voted both by the voters and the members of the legislature. In practice, both are nearly identical meanings. If ministers fail to fulfil their business properly, they may receive a negative vote. An unpopular government may be defeated in elections. Liability is usually seen as a necessary ingredient in a democracy. In the modern world it may be difficult to ensure its effectiveness. The lack of information makes it difficult to discover who it is to blame"³.

"A dictionary of modern politics: third Edition", Robertson, David (2002) defines "accountability" as a concept with two major and overlapping meanings. "First, the standard meaning, ordinary in democracies, is that those who exercise power such as governments, elected representatives or appointed officials must be able to demonstrate that they have exercised their power and fulfilled their obligations properly. Secondly, accountability may refer to the arrangements made to ensure the consistency between the values of persons who delegate and the person or persons to whom power and responsibility were delegated to. With the growing interest in human rights and democracy worldwide and especially in the new Eastern European democracies, the voters seek "accountability more than ever. This term is often associated

³ Bealey, Frank W., 1999: "The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science: A User's Guide to Its Terms", Blackwell publishers

with the transparency of governance and the ability of knowing exactly what the elected officials do.”

The concept of “accountability” is often used in literature interchanged with terms such as “responsibility”, “responsiveness”, “accountable”, “transparency”, “answerability”, sometimes not clearly stated or without any distinction between these terms. There is confusion at conceptual level in Romania as well where no distinction is made between “accountability” and “responsibility” or between accountability and responsibility.

„Public accountability” – from economy and management to public policies

In terms of origin, the concept of “accountability” is Anglo-Norman. Historically and semantically, the term is very close to that of “accounting”. Dubnick (2002) states that the roots of the contemporary concept may be traced back to the reign of William I, when Normandy was conquered by England. In 1085 William requested all the proprietors in his land to count everything they had. These properties were assessed and added to a list of royal agents in the so-called royal Domesday Book. This census was not conducted only for taxation purposes but it was used to lay down the foundations of royal government. Domesday Book was the king’s realm.

In contemporary political discourse, “accountability” and “accountable” no longer mean a clogged picture of accountings and financial administration but they hold strong promises of fair governance. Furthermore, the relationship of liability was reversed. “Accountability” means that the authorities themselves have now become accountable to their citizens. Since the late twentieth century, the Anglo-Saxon world in particular has

witnessed a transformation of the traditional accountings function in public administration into a broader form of public accountability. The broader change from financial accountings to “public accountability” occurred in parallel with the introduction of the new public management by the Thatcher government in Great Britain and with the reinvention reforms of the governance initiated by Clinton-Gore administration in the United States of America. Therefore the emancipation of the concept of accountability from its origins in the accounting lies in the Anglo-Saxon phenomenon - because other languages such as French, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Japanese have no exact equivalent and do not distinguish semantically between “responsibility” and “accountability”⁴.

However, what started as a tool to improve effectiveness and efficiency of public governance has increasingly become a purpose in itself. Accountability has become an image of good governance, first in the United States of America, developing then in the European Union as well. As a concept, “accountability” is rather elusive. Richard Mulgan (2003) stated that the term “came as a general term for any mechanism that makes powerful institutions accountable to particular publics.” This is one of the evocative political words that may be used to settle an incoherent argument, to evoke an image of trust, fidelity, and justice or to remove criticism. As an icon, the concept has become less useful for analytical purposes and today it looks like garbage filled with good intentions, a concept loosely defined, and vague images of good governance.

⁴Bovens, Mark (2007): „Analysing and Assessing Accountability: A Conceptual Framework”, *European Law Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 447–468

The concepts of “accountability” and “public accountability” are in full debate in political science literature, many authors trying to provide definitions, meanings and significance and raising discussions around this concept in various aspects. I will set forth in this paper some of the most relevant positions.

In contemporary political and scientific discourse, accountability often serves as a conceptual umbrella that covers various other distinct concepts as transparency, fairness, democracy, efficiency, responsiveness, accountability and integrity (Mulgan, R., 2003). Particularly in the American scientific and political discourse, accountability is often used interchangeably with good governance or virtuous behaviour. For example, in O’Connell’s view accountability is present when public services have high quality, low cost and are competitive in a courteous manner. Koppell (2005) distinguishes no less than five different dimensions of the concept of accountability: transparency, accountability, controllability, responsibility, and responsiveness - each of them as images and umbrella concepts themselves. Some dimensions as transparency are instrumental for accountability but not constitutive, others, like responsiveness are rather evaluative in exchange of the analytical dimensions.

Accountability in a very broad meaning is essentially an evaluative concept, not an analytical one. It is used to describe a positive state of facts or the performance of an actor. The term gets close to responsiveness and a sense of responsibility - a desire to act in a transparent and fair-way. Accountability in this broad sense is an essentially challenged and challengeable concept (Galle, WB, 1962) as there is no general consensus regarding the standards for the accountability specific

behaviour and because it differs from one role to the other, from one time to the other, from one place to the other and from speaker to speaker. In an article starting from the idea that the European Union suffers from a serious lack of “accountability”, author Mark Bovens uses the concept in a very narrow meaning, defined as the relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor has the obligation to explain and justify his conduct, the forum may ask questions and make judgments and the actor may bear the consequences. Mark Bovens does not use the concept of accountability in his article in a broad, evaluative meaning, but in a much narrow one, in the sociological meaning. For Bovens, accountability is not just another political slogan, but it refers to concrete practices of given accounts. The most concise description of the concept of accountability should be: “the obligation to explain and justify the conduct.” This involves the relationship between an actor, an accountant and a forum, accountholder or accountee. Bovens remains closer to the etymological and historical roots and defines accountability as a specific social relationship as follows: “accountability is the relationship between an actor and a forum where the actor has the obligation to explain and justify his conduct, the forum can make questions and make judgments, and the actor can bear the consequences.

Bovens’ definition of liability in a narrow meaning as a social relationship, has seven constituent elements:

- The existence of a relationship between the actor and the forum
- Where the actor is obliged
- To explain and justify
- His behaviour
- The forum may ask questions

- Make judgments
- And the actor may bear the consequences.

Bovens identifies several types of accountability. Public institutions are often necessarily responsible for their conduct towards various forums in several ways. Starting with the elements of the concept of accountability, Bovens asks four questions and he answers to them:

- Whom should it be accounted for to?
- Who should be responsible?
- What should be given an account for?
- Why do actors feel compelled to be accountable?

Regarding the first question, Bovens states that public organizations and the officials working in a constitutional democracy are facing at least five different types of forums and hence five different types of accountability:

- Political accountability - elected representatives, political parties, voters, media
- Legal accountability - the courts of law
- Administrative accountability - auditors, inspectors and inspection bodies
- Professional accountability - professional peers
- Social accountability – groups of interest, charity organizations and other stakeholders.

Political accountability is an extremely important type of democratic accountability, where it is exercised in the principal-agent relationship. Voters delegate their sovereignty to their representatives who, in return, at least in parliamentary democracies, delegate most of their authority to a cabinet of ministers. Ministers then delegate much of their

authority to the officials or to several administrative more or less independent bodies. The mechanism of political accountability operates exactly in the opposite direction to delegation. In many countries the media has quickly gained the power of informal forum for political accountability.

Legal accountability has increased in importance for public institutions especially in Western countries, as a result of increased formalization of social relations due to greater confidence in the courts than in parliaments. This is usually based on specific responsibilities formally or legally conferred by authorities. Therefore, legal accountability is the most ambiguous of the types of accountability whereas the legal situation relies on detailed legal standards prescribed by civil, criminal, administrative or earlier statutes.

Administrative accountability is based on administrative forums exercising regular financial and administrative controls often based on specific statutes and prescribed norms. Professional accountability is particularly relevant for public managers of servants working in professional public organizations such as hospitals, schools, research institutes, etc. In response to a perceived lack of trust in the government in many Western democracies a direct and explicit accountability between the public agencies and clients, citizens and civil society was urgent.

Regarding the actor that should be responsible, Bovens raises the “issue of several hands” stated by D.F. Thompson, that forums are facing, meaning that policies pass through several hands before they are effectively implemented. Bovens proposes four strategies to the forums in order to settle this issue, the first one focusing on organization, and the other three on officials individually.

Thus, the four types of identified accountabilities are:

- Corporate accountability: the organization as an actor is responsible.
- Hierarchical accountability: one for all - the highest official is responsible and usually this strategy is dominant in politics.
- Collective accountability: all for one - the public organization is responsible even if one member shall be held liable.
- Individual accountability: everyone for himself/herself – each individual is liable by his/her official position.

The actor can be held accountable for two reasons: he/she is bound to do so or he/she makes it voluntarily. Depending on the nature of the obligation, accountability may be of three types:

- Vertical - particular feature of political accountability, the forum formally gives the actor power to make decisions - principal-agent relationship. It is the case of public institutions accountable towards ministries or directly towards Parliaments.
- Diagonal - indirect accountability through intermediaries as auditors, inspectors, supervisors, etc.
- Horizontal – there is no principal in the accountability relationship.

Regarding the effects of accountability, Bovens identifies three evaluative perspectives, each of them generating different types of “accountability” deficiency:

- Democratic perspective: popular control
- Constitutional perspective: prevention of corruption and power abuse
- Learning perspective: improving government effectiveness.

Public accountability is very important in the democratic perspective as it helps citizens to monitor those who hold public office (March and Olsen, 1995). The theoretical base is the principal-agent model. Modern representative democracies may be described as a chain of principal-agent relationships (Strom, 2000). People who are principal in a democracy transferred their sovereignty to their representatives who, in turn, transferred the development of laws and policies to the government. Subsequently ministers entrusted their tasks to thousands of officials who delegated some of them to more or less independent institutions. Each principal in this chain of delegation tries to monitor the performance of delegated public duties by calling the agent to be responsible. At the end of the chain of accountability there are the people who make judgments on government's behaviour and who show their discontent by voting other representatives. Therefore, public accountability is a prerequisite for the democratic process as it provides the people's representatives and the voters the necessary information to judge good faith and the effectiveness of the government's behaviour.

The main purpose of the constitutional perspective is to prevent the absolute tyranny of leaders, of the elected leaders, or of a too wide and “privatized” executive power. The remedy against an arrogant, abusive and corrupt government is to organize “checks and balances” of countervailing institutional powers. Good governance arises from a dynamic equilibrium between the different powers of the state.

Accountability is seen as an instrument to induce governments, agencies and individual elected to carry out their promises. From the perspective of learning, the purpose of

public accountability is to determine the executive branch to learn. Moreover, the public nature of the process of accountability teaches others on the same position the expectations towards them what works and what does not. Analyses of public performance, for example, may induce more managers than those under control to rethink and re-adjust their policies. The mechanisms of accountability lead to reflexivity in the political and administrative systems that might otherwise be first of all in seeking active improvement. There is a long tradition in political science and related fields that perfectly fits this idea. In this context, Lindblom refers to "intelligence of democracy": the superiority of pluralistic democracies over other political systems derives from the large number of incentives that encourage information and learning in the policy-making process. Accountability is an important link in this matter as it provides regular mechanism to confront managers with information about the way they work and forces them to meditate on the past successes and failures of their policies.

Bovens also provides the criteria of assessing public accountability from the three perspectives mentioned above. Thus the assessment criterion for the democratic perspective is as follows: the degree to which an accountability arrangement or the regime enables the democratically legitimized bodies to monitor and to assess the behaviour of the executive and to determine the executive actors to alter their behaviour in line with their expectations. The main criterion of assessment for the future constitutional perspective is the extent to which a commitment of accountability reduces the abuse and the privileges of executive power. The criterion for the learning perspective is the degree to

which accountability stimulates the executive and the bodies to focus consistently on achieving the desirable results expected by the society.

The debate frame of the concept of accountability provided by Bovens is only a suggestion to assess accountability by each state. The author notes that the assessment of accountability cannot be separated from everybody's vision of what constitutes adequate democratic governance in the context of European integration. Own vision eventually determines why some see the European accountability glass half full and others the glass half empty. The construction around the concept offered by Bovens can structure, as the author says, the debates about accountability and develop it in empirical research.

One of the authors focusing on the debate on the public feature of accountability is Jens Steffek, giving an answer to the question what is "public" in "public accountability". The spread of the management notions of accountability in the public domain in the particular context of the new processes of governance led to a contest between an established meaning of the concept of public accountability as democratic liability and the new conceptualization inspired by management literature. In a conventional meaning, "public accountability" means a relationship in which the public understood as citizens, renders its elected representatives liable. Michael Dowdle (2006) states that "the idea of public accountability seems to express the belief that the people with public responsibilities should be accountable towards the people for the performance of their commitments". Which stresses for the citizens that public accountability is very close to the concepts of political accountability and

democratic accountability. The key mechanism for democratic accountability is elections as they provide an incentive for political decision makers to explain their behaviour and an opportunity for citizens to penalize them. The test for democratic accountability is the officials' responsiveness to citizens' expectations and concerns. Robert Behn (2001) suggests that political performance and responsiveness are key aspects of any conception of public accountability. Jens Steffek says that the term "public" from the concept of public accountability is increasingly redefined in the context of international governance, but it does not fully disappear.⁵

Steffek identifies three features of recent discourse that undermines the traditional view of public accountability as democratic accountability: 1. Returning to the concept of stakeholders, 2. Fitting in the principal-agent theory, 3. Perspective on public accountability as an umbrella concept under which it collects the instruments and the mechanisms that may be subsumed.

Regarding the return to the concept of stakeholder, the author notes a significant tendency in the literature about government to replace the term stakeholder with citizens. A term with origins in the literature of management, its transfer to the public domain means pushing the citizens from their status of proprietors of the state to the status of stakeholders. Stakeholders are consulted by public institutions in their decision. That is a matter of good governance and not an expression of popular sovereignty. In governance literature, the authority of the governing institutions often appears given as such

⁵Steffek, Jens (2010): „Public accountability and the public sphere of international governance“, *Ethics&International Affairs*, 24, no.1, p.45-68

and unproblematic. Institutions have the unchallengeable and indisputable right to take binding decisions, while citizens are expected to show interest in a particular policy or decision. The return to stakeholders has practical political consequences. The concept implies that public accountability is not for everyone, but for those affected by the decisions taken and it assumes that this class of individuals can be admitted objectively, perhaps even a priori. The increase of accountability towards stakeholders often suggests that public institutions of government should establish consultative forums in which stakeholders shall exercise their right and take decision makers into account. While some would not preclude consultations with the interested and affected parties, the selection of preferred partners creates new risks of exclusion. The return to the stakeholders interested in governance may lead to social exclusion and to a risk of democratic equality.

The conceptual movement from citizens to stakeholders is supplemented by fitting the accountability relations within the principal-agent theory. The roots of this theory are not in political science or in the theories of democracy but in economic organization. In the context of public accountability in international governance, where the states delegate their competences to governments, citizens become external stakeholders.

Also inspired by the management literature, the concept of public accountability is used as an umbrella that covers many types of accountability in the public domain. Jens Steffek notes the use of the public accountability concept often as alternative for "political accountability" and "democratic accountability". Author's aim is to give the concept a clear and very limited meaning:

the accountability of the persons or of the institutions invested with public authority towards critics, questions and comments expressed in public by citizens and by the civil society. Steffek identifies three mechanisms of democratic accountability: electorally - citizens' direct accountability or of the political bodies elected towards the citizens, legally – the accountability of the unelected institutions which protect citizens' rights and publicly – the accountability for the public as public scope. These three mechanisms reinforce one another.

Jeffek's conclusion is that international governance is not affected by the lack of accountability in the managerial meaning, but by accountability in the public space. The reconcepting proposed by the author is that public accountability shall signify the accountability of the government institutions towards citizens in public scope. In this respect, public accountability requires that decision maker's choices shall be publicly examined, discussed and criticized. This will strengthen the legal mechanisms of democratic accountability. Jens Steffek considers that public accountability and the public scope are the necessary condition for the democratization of global and European governance.

"Accountability" - an ever-expanding concept? This is the question that author Richard Mulgan answers to. In stating his argument that the term extends beyond its central meaning "to ask someone accountable for its actions" (Jones, 1992), the author identifies three relevant features of the concept, namely:

- 1) It is external - accountability is made by another person or institution than the responsible person or institution;
- 2) It implies social interaction and change - between a party that calls somebody to account for something,

seeks for answers and rectification and the liable party who answers and accepts sanctions;

- 3) It implies the right of authority - those who control have rights of superior authority over those liable, including the right to ask for answers and impose sanctions.

In the context of democratic states, the key of the relationships of accountability, in its main purpose, are the relationships between citizens and the public service providers, between elected politicians and bureaucrats. More recently, in the academic language, the concept of accountability has been developed beyond its main meaning in the scopes where its various features no longer apply. For example, accountability usually refers to the meaning of individual responsibility and concerns public interest of public officials. Secondly, accountability is a feature of various checks and balances institutions through which democracies seek to control the actions of the government even if there is no interaction or exchange between the government and the institutions that control them. Thirdly, accountability is linked to the extent that governments follow the wishes or needs of the citizens (accountability as responsiveness) regardless of whether they are induced to make them through the process of control and authoritarian exchange. Fourthly, accountability applies to public discussion between citizens democracies depend on (accountability as dialogue), even if there is no suggestion of any authority or subordination between the parties involved in the relationship of accountability.⁶

⁶Mulgan, Richard (2000): „Accountability: an ever-expanding concept?“, Public Administration vol.78, no.3, p.555-573

The development of the concept of accountability has led to a restriction of the concept of responsibility. Sometimes these terms were used interchangeably, but now responsibility develops as the ethical part of personal accountability the freedom of action and discretion, that is of the internal aspects of official activities (Harmon and Mayer, 1986). As generally accountability used to be seen as part of responsibility (external aspect), now the position is often reversed - responsibility is often taken as part of accountability (internal aspect). Accountability refers to external functions of control as calling somebody to account for something, requiring justification and the imposing sanctions, while responsibility covers internal functions of personal guilt, morality and professional ethics. Concerning the implementation mechanisms and the accountability evaluation criteria, a practical example is provided by author Teresa Kulawik in an article on political science and public accountability in Poland, case study research on stem cells. The conclusions of the study show that public involvement requires precise institutional rules in order to have impact and to develop public accountability in consolidated democracies.

Accountability is an important factor to ensure the legitimacy of public power in representative democracies. Accountability is measured by a broader range of criteria. Teresa Kulawik says that recent policy debate overpasses a pure model of government accountability based on democratic elections and representative meetings. Accountability was usually equated with the performance of accountability (performance accountability), and recent literature increasingly begins to incorporate „policy-making.“ Susan Rose-Ackerman (2002) states that governments

should respond publicly for taking up policies. The „Public“ includes those who voted the government in the last election and also those affected by or particularly interested in the chosen policies. The interaction between government decisions on policies and citizens' commitment and the participation in public affairs is essential in relation to accountability. Teresa Kulawik pays greater attention to the dimension of accountability regarding the process of taking policies by the government. Although the significance of accountability for a democratic policy seems obvious, applying the concept in science and political science is a completely new phenomenon. It should be attributed to a changing society, usually summarized in the concept of „society of knowledge“. The new mechanisms of accountability involve new tools to assure quality and the distribution of resources and it also includes new procedures and criteria for decision making in political science.⁷

The concept of “public accountability” means practices that allow the review and assessment of the power exercised within the principal-agent relationship. The principal-agent relationship is part of representative democracies and is based on one of the major mechanisms of delegation of sovereignty which in turn delegate their power to a cabinet of ministers. Ministries then transfer the proper administration of their authority to officials and administrative agencies. The mechanisms of accountability operate exactly in the opposite direction.

They provide the “principal” with the necessary information to judge the decency

⁷Kulawik, Teresa (2009): „Science policy and public accountability in Poland: the case of embryonic stem-cell research“, *Science and Public Policy*, 36(6), July 2009, p.470

entrusted to the agent. In democracies, citizens expressing their judgement on the governors' behaviour to the reiterated elections are at the end of the cycle/chain of accountability.

Although the concept of "accountability" and its development are new, the mechanisms of accountability have always been and are essential components of parliamentary democracies. There are very many reasons to enhance the popularity of the concept in politics and academic work. The new social movements have high demands in the democratic processes in order to expand opportunities for citizens' participation beyond the electoral process. Moreover, the relevance of the current concept is related to the changes that took place in the political power and decision-making structures which are the delegation of national sovereignty to supranational bodies and the transformation of public administration by the methods of public management (Bovens, 2006). These developments indicate a weakening of the traditional vertical accountability via ministerial responsibility and meetings emerging from elections. Changes led to new forms of control characterized by more direct and explicit relationships of accountability between public institutions and officials as well as between citizens and groups of interests. The new mechanisms of controls consist of mediators, audit agencies and forums for citizens and stakeholders. Therefore, the emergence of participatory technology of assessment is seen as part of a broader trend in the overall transformation of the democratic accountability arrangements.

Good accountability is expected to produce a variety of positive outputs: resettlement of public authority trust and the

assurance of its legitimacy, fair, accurate and competent policies and the increase of civic commitment. In new democracies, the low level of civic commitment and the poor quality of public policies are the indicators of poor democratic processes that give rise to demands for increasing accountability commitments (Rose-Ackerman, 2005). Accountability is an umbrella concept whose specific purpose and dimensions are challenged. In a narrow interpretation the concept of "accountability" is defined solely by focusing on the controllability and justification of the already taken decisions. In a broader meaning of the concept, the decision-making procedures are considered a significant component of democratic accountability. Teresa Kulawik assigns the concept to a direct and proactive function to enhance the quality of policies taking, thus stating the responsiveness to the needs and interests of the people. From this perspective, the assessment of public accountability is not focused on performance but rather on the ways to create policies within the government and administration and their relationship with the public (Rose-Ackerman, 2002). The exercises of involving the public involvement and consulting the company are important mechanisms of public accountability.

Conclusions

Having its roots in economics and management literature, the concept of "public accountability" becomes ever more relevant in political science, both in theory and discourse, as well as in practice in preparing and assessing public policies. The approaches of "public accountability" concept in political science is recent and in continuous development,

the basic idea that in a democracy the power is publicly accountable towards the citizens being developed in various aspects. The questions not provided with clarifying and complete answers in the specialized literature, cover the subjects of accountability: who has the right to accountability and who is responsible in a democracy, which are the mechanisms of implementation of accountability, how we evaluate accountability, which are the limits of the concept, what is its importance in the democracy in international national and European governance how this

can lead to efficiency and effectiveness in the act of government. All these questions are still subject of debate in this domain.

In terms of political science it has not been given a final definition of the concept of "public accountability". The conceptual clarification will subsequently enable to formulate an appropriate model for improving the system of accountability in preparing and assessing public policies, to implement a system of assessment and monitoring thereof, in line with the European and international systems.

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