THE SIGNS OF ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGY IN COMPANIES WHOLLY OWNED BY THE STATE TREASURY – THE IDENTIFICATION AND THE ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF THE PHENOMENON STUDIED

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Abstract

This paper discusses the identification and analysis of the pathological phenomena in fairly specific organizations, namely companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. The long-term and diverse dysfunctions that affect these organizations more often than private enterprises cause a considerable wastage of organizational resources of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. The result of development of organizational pathologies involves difficulties in the functioning and growth of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, as well as the decrease of competitiveness when compared to private enterprises.

This paper identifies such organizational pathologies developed in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury as negative empowerment, resistance to the change syndrome, identification with object of possession or management resulting in the lack of delegation of authorities, organizational attention deficit syndrome, responsibility decline syndrome, theft of company's property, hackwork combined with mental incapacitation of employees and making a series of irrational decisions by the executives, often to the detriment of the company.

Keywords: organizational pathology, state treasury, causes, companies.

1. Introduction

Despite the privatization processes ongoing for years, the public sector still has a great importance for the national economy as evidenced by the fact that it produces about 20% of GDP. Over 1700 economic entities still belong partially or completely to the State Treasury. More than 100 companies are wholly owned by the State Treasury.

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The main objective of this paper is to identify and analyse negative pathological phenomena occurring in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury and an attempt to answer the basic question, namely how to counteract these phenomena. Another important question for which the author tried to find the answer in this paper is as follows: what are the reasons for the formation and development of pathological phenomena in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury.

Several large companies wholly owned by the State Treasury have been included in the research. Names of these entities have not been given due to quite edgy subject matter. Research and the conclusions drawn were carried out based on the analysis of audit reports, press releases as well as direct interviews conducted among employees of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. In addition, conclusions of conducted research were enriched with knowledge and experience of the author who has worked in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury.

2. The essence of organizational pathology

The term pathology derives from the Greek language where *pathos* means suffering and refers to the science of disease conditions and, in a broader sense, drawbacks of the phenomenon or activity. Organizational pathology is understood as a state of prolonged and significant dysfunction as well as abnormality in operation of the organization that has strong destructive influence on the functioning of the organization and prevents the organization from implementing its objectives. Kieżun (2012, p. 16) defines an organizational pathology as relatively permanent incapacity of the organization, which results in the wastage exceeding the limits of social tolerance. In this respect, the pathology is the opposite of efficiency of performance understood as minimizing the wastage. Definition quoted above emphasizes the cause and effect relationship of the pathology, namely considerable mismanagement caused by the constant and continuing for over a long period incapacity of the organization performance.

This understanding of the concept of pathology also includes the phenomenon of social behaviour of individuals and specific groups contrary to the values and norms of the culture (Kozak, 2009, p. 23). Indication of organizational pathology is its long-lasting dysfunction, disorganized work and harmfulness having destructive impact on ordered internal structure of the organization (Laszczak, 1999, p. 14). Wastage, which is the effect of organizational pathology, is the result of not a single action or mistake, but the effect of the accumulation of numerous repetitive actions – wrong and harmful for the organization, intentional or not. What is very characteristic in

the case of the pathology is the fact that the organization often does not realize that it is being "digested by diseased condition". Just as in the case of the disease that often has no external symptoms, so in the case of the organization affected by pathological phenomena there are often no direct symptoms of malfunctioning. It is only after some time that the crisis occurs which is often already advanced and, consequently, is difficult to be brought under control.

The pathology understood in such a way whose main symptom is a considerable wastage of resources, is in contradiction with the guiding principle of the organization operation, which is to maximize profits and minimize costs. The pathology persisting for a long time – like untreated disease will inevitably lead to weakening and destruction of the organization from the inside and ultimately to its bankruptcy.

The crisis triggered by the presence of pathological phenomena in the organization features a different character, which is dissimilar to sudden, often explosive and unexpected crisis defined by A. Mitroff, a classic of crisis management theory. In the case of organizational pathology the crisis is the condition the company is already accustomed to and accepts, and what is more, the company does not try to take action against the crisis because it does not consider the situation in which it finds itself a crisis. In this case, it is about maximizing its own particular interests, profits of employees or groups of employees of a given economic entity, even at the cost of actions leading to the degradation of the economic or social system. Therefore, it involves highly harmful destructive organizational and economic processes aimed at achieving goals not approved by the external social system (Dyoniziak & Slabon, 1997, p. 15). This may lead to the snowball effect if these processes are not eliminated in time or fixed by means of changes in the organization - destructive processes may gradually increase, accumulate and even result in the self-destruction of the organization, and moreover, lead other wellfunctioning systems into the crisis.

A similar concept, and in opinion of some authors even equal to the concept of organizational pathology, is the concept of dysfunction understood as the disruption of the efficient operation of the organization, which in a longer term may lead to the development of pathological phenomena in the organization. Stocki (2005, p. 49) indicates the identity of the concepts of the pathology and dysfunction, showing that the pathology is any dysfunction in the organization, which makes it impossible to achieve realistic goals designated for the organization and consistent with the social welfare in the planned time and with specified resources.

The organization affected by the pathology is a *sick* organization that cannot fully exploit its potential, strengths and opportunities inherent in the environment. In an era of fierce competition in the market such situation sooner

or later will lead a weakened organization to its collapse. Private companies, for which the main determinant of good condition and *health* is the amount of profits and the level of costs, while the verifier of usefulness is the client and competition, cannot afford to develop pathological phenomena.

The situation is slightly different when it comes to state-owned enterprises which in addition to economic goals, also achieve political and social objectives and for which the environment is more friendly in comparison to private enterprises.

For the purpose of this article the following author's definition of organizational pathology was adopted: it is a long-term situation "latent" of the crisis, including highly harmful, not accepted by the environment actions, intended to implement the particular interests of certain groups of internal stakeholders, harmful from the point of view of the development objectives of the organization.

3. Organizational pathology vs healthy organization

In order to fully understand the essence of organizational pathology, it is also crucial to analyse the concept of "healthy organization". From the point of praxeological view it can be stated that a healthy organization is the one whose components contribute to the success of a wider whole as well as there is complete harmony of integration and cooperation between all components of the organization. Therefore, each of the separate units of the organization must remain in close connection with the other.

According to Cooper and Cartwright (1994, pp. 462-463), a healthy organization is distinguished by the financial success, physically and mentally healthy workforce able to maintain good health and satisfactory work environment all year long, as well as organizational culture, especially in periods of market volatility and changes. Authors pointed out the following features of a healthy organization: low stress level, high level of commitment and work satisfaction, lower than the national average level of morbidity, absence and fluctuation, good industrial relations and rare strikes, good level of work safety (BHP).

Healthy organization is the organization that managed to maintain the balance between high level of satisfaction of the owners, clients, employees and other stakeholders, balance between working and private life of employees as well as balance with the environment thanks to a high level of adaptability. The health status of this type of organization is boosted by achieved successes, it creates high quality of working life, and thus influences high quality of life of its employees. Healthy organization is the organization efficient in terms of both internal and external aspects, it copes well with changes generated by the

environment and makes the use of opportunities offered by this environment. The basic form of efficiency is effectiveness, which means that healthy organization is the organization effectively striving to achieve its objectives.

Beckhard (1998, p. 36) indicated, among others, the following features of healthy organization:

- it has a clear sense of purpose, while management is based on a vision of the future,
- it has an effective system of identification used for obtaining up-todate information,
- it ensures wide internal access to information,
- communication is characterized by openness,
- team management is applied as a dominant mode of work,
- it respects customer service (both internal and external),
- payment systems are correlated with work and support individual development,
- employees are evaluated according to their performance and implementation of objectives in respect to improvement of efficiency,
- it expresses visible recognition for innovation and creativity as well as has high tolerance for various thinking styles and ambiguity of different things,
- its policy reflects respect for tension occurring between family life and work requirements.

4. Specificity of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury

The State Treasury companies are a type of companies set up by the Minister of State Treasury at the request of the founding body, namely director of state-owned company, work council or on their own initiative. On the one hand, such companies are subject to general rules laid down by the provisions of the commercial companies code, while on the other hand, they have quite specific characteristics that distinguish them as compared to other companies – private ones. The source of specific characteristics of such companies is the shareholder – the State Treasury. In companies wholly owned by the State Treasury the State owns 100% of the shares and has full control over them.

Initially, the legal form of the company wholly owned by the State Treasury was supposed to be a transitional form of the organization preparing state-owned enterprises for privatization. The unlimited time of the functioning of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury was established on the basis of the passed act on commercialization (Czerwińska, 2002, p.5).

The Supreme Court, which has repeatedly commented in one of its resolutions on companies wholly owned by the State Treasury (In the resolution of 19 May 1992, III CZP 49/02 (OSNCP 1992, No. 11, item 200) stated that the

transformation of state-owned enterprise into joint-stock company or private limited company is in the Polish legal system the transformation of state legal entity, governed by special provisions. This transformation is characterized by the fact that:

- there is no incorporation of the company, but the transformation of the state enterprise as legal entity into another legal entity, that is the company wholly owned by the State Treasury,
- there is no change of the owner of the enterprise and owner of the capital. The only entity is the State Treasury,
- there is no transfer of the property by the State Treasury as a non-cash contribution, but by the virtue of a special provision the property of the enterprise becomes the property of the company.

Once the transformation of the state enterprise into general partnership is completed, the State Treasury shall have powers and duties of the financial and corporate character against the company.

The property of the state enterprise becomes the property of the company. The sum of the share and reserve capital is equal to funds in the possession of the state enterprise. Under the law, employees of commercialized economic entity become employees of the company and have the opportunity to gratuitous acquisition of 15% of the shares owned by the State Treasury, as well as those people who provide the company with raw materials.

In the case of the company wholly owned by the State Treasury, the State Treasury brings an exclusive contribution to the entity of the commercial law and transfers into it specified assets for the ownership or dependent possession which are nationwide property. The company wholly owned by the State Treasury ceases to act on behalf of the State Treasury, but having legal entity must act on its own behalf, although with the use of nationwide assets. Acting on its own behalf from a legal point of view is certainly not an action on behalf of the State Treasury, and therefore is not an action on behalf of the legal entity appointed to represent widely understood economic interests of the Nation. When appointing the company wholly owned by the State Treasury it is of course assumed that acting on its own behalf, companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, i.e. representing the national interest. It seems that this assumption is the source of various problems and scandals which are associated with different companies wholly owned by the State Treasury and their privatization.

By analysing the overall functioning of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury it can be stated that with the constantly decreasing number of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, their assets decreased from 7776,7 million PLN in 2012 to 3407 million PLN in 2013 and looking at a longer, five-year term one can notice the trend of steady reduction of assets

of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Noteworthy is also the gradually declining net financial result of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury and declining sales revenues as well as negative results from the sales. Companies with the highest total revenues in the group of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury in 2013 were: Pharmaceutical Centre CEFARM, The Polish Baltic Shipping Company S.A., Construction Industry Company CHEMOBUDOWA-KRAKÓW S.A. (Ministry of State Treasury, 2013, p.24).

Companies wholly owned by the State Treasury present themselves negatively in comparison with the sector of enterprises in terms of net profit margin (in %). In 2013 net profit margin for companies wholly owned by the State Treasury amounted to -2.9%, whereas that for the sector of enterprises was at the level of 4.3%. (Ministry of State Treasury, 2013, p.24)

A positive manifestation of the economic situation of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury compared to generally negative tendency in finances of these entities is the increase of equity, which was reported in 57 companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, including the largest growth in the company Spa Krynica-Żegiestów S.A. due to the increase of the share capital by approx. 60%.

Summary of the main economic and financial indicators is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Basic economic and financial indicators of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury

Economic and financial indicators/year	2013	2012	2011	2010
Net revenues from sales (in million PLN)	3424	6233	9335	19352
Net financial result (in million PLN)	70,8	127	166,7	1608
Total assets (in million PLN)	3407	7776,7	8436,3	26082,2
Equity (in million PLN)	1985	5225	5931,2	19432,8
Total amount of liabilities (in million PLN)	1422	2551,4	4300,1	3966,8
Sales result (in million PLN)	-100,3	-301,5	-99	-65,5
Operating cash flow (in million PLN)	79	29,7	174	286
Employment	12800	23000	40400	61987
Number of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury	102	113	168	246

Source: Information on the economic and financial situation of companies supervised by the Ministry of State Treasury in 2013, 2012, 2011 and 2010.

5. Symptoms of the pathology in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury – analysis of the phenomenon

Quite difficult financial and economic situation of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury is in most cases determined largely by the inner pathological factors developed in these entities, which hinder development and competitiveness of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury in the market.

By analysing the functioning of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, based on reports from held audits of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, press releases as well as own observations acquired during many years of work in various positions in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, the author of this paper identified several evident symptoms of organizational pathology occurring in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Such pathological symptoms include:

- 1) Negative empowerment. Kieżun stated (Kieżun, 1997, p. 18) that negative empowerment consists in changing the main objective of the organization to the side objective, and also means such a change of objectives that the middle objective becomes the main objective if it all leads to wastage of resources in the social scale, exceeding the limits of acceptable tolerance. Negative empowerment in case of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury concerned the following situations:
- the organization does not implement functions founded in the social division, focusing solely on activities profitable only from the point of view of its particular interest;
- there is a tendency to reduce the span of control in the organization, thus increasing the number of executive positions;
- the implementation of tasks in the organization which do not contribute directly to achieving objectives or main objectives. They may be inadequate to the intended objectives and go beyond these objectives or may even be contrary to them;
- unjustified, excessive growth of auxiliary units (service, advisory) and regulatory (superior) in the organization;
- imbalance between the primary and secondary functions of the enterprise value chain, excessive growth of the secondary functions at the expense of the primary functions;
- activities of the company become more and more *alienated* and self-oriented, remaining detached from the reality and trends in the environment in which this organization operates. There is an increasing gap between expectations of the environment and objectives of the enterprise;
- formation of *lofty* and conservative attitudes among employees of regulatory and executive units;
- excessive emphasis on stressing formal authority of the power;
- empowerment of such forms of the organization operation as control and council. Carrying out the control becomes *art for art's sake*. Once the control is completed, conclusions concerning corrective actions in the organization are often not drawn or simply ignored.

- 2) Resistance to change syndrome. The implementation of deeper changes very often encounters strong resistance in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Organizational change, especially in a large scale is treated as a "necessary evil" violating the so desirable status quo in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Such a change very often raises strong resistance of employees, particularly if it is going to involve infringement of the interests or influence of particular groups or individuals. Organizational culture in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury is not targeted at permanent changes. It is more conservative culture basing on the adoption of defensive attitude against changes in the enterprise with the state capital. The adoption of defensive attitude by employees results in the implementation of the assumptions of the organizational changes, but without conviction and greater commitment, and very often without an understanding of the essence and need for changes.
- Identification with the object of possession or management resulting in the lack of delegation of authorities. Senior executives in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury very often do not delegate or delegate to a small extent their authorities to employees. They deal with the current operational issues and do not have time for planning development strategy, namely analysis of the key development factors. An example of such situation can be personal operating planning and organizing the promotional trip by the director himself, including preparation of materials for this trip. The result of this situation is overwork of the executives and engagement in solving minor problems, while problems of greater importance for the enterprise remain unsolved or postponed for later on. In this case managers often have a problem with division of tasks for those with the key importance and those which are less important, and for this reason they choose random tasks for implementation. This situation may be the result of small conceptual competences of senior executives who by dealing with operational tasks and personal involvement in solving easy problems try to hide their shortcomings in management skills.
- 4) Organizational attention deficit syndrome is characterized by the lack of proper selection, ordering and determining the importance of information from the environment; no perception of functioning of organizational units in the context of strategic vision by executives. The effect of such pathology is the failure in internal management system in relation to the increase in the number of decision-making problems; taking numerous uncoordinated actions; wastage (and even theft) of resources; instability and impulsivity of actions with no consequence in their completion; using chaos to achieve personal goals; formation of a "camarilla" having access to the decision maker.

- 5) Responsibility decline syndrome. In companies wholly owned by the State Treasury avoidance to take responsibility is very frequent, shifting responsibility to another employee, hunting for the party guilty of mistakes other than oneself. Employees faced with imprecisely defined tasks shift responsibility for these tasks to each other. Responsibility decline syndrome can apply to the employee who, e.g. when going on vacation does not transfer crucial and important cases or issues to his co-employee or does not inform his superior about these issues. This syndrome can also apply to the superior who, favouring the *laissez-faire* approach, applies the do whatever you want principle to his subordinates. Responsibility decline syndrome may also result from employees neglecting their tasks and duties.
- 6) Theft of company's property. Unfortunately, thefts happen and meet with general acceptance in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Noteworthy is the pathological case of a certain company wholly owned by the State Treasury where the chairman of this company was widely reviled in the organization for the fact that he detected company property theft perpetrated by a group of employees. What is more, the remaining group of employees who had not been involved in the theft were dissatisfied with the fact that, by the virtue of their duties, they themselves had no opportunity to steal any property of the company.
- 7) Hackwork combined with mental incapacitation of employees. Unfortunately, in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, retaining employees in the same positions for many years does occur which fosters mental incapacitation of employees in accordance with the principle: only executives can think; employees do not understand the point of their work; thought patterns inheritance; confusing tradition with former period of glory.
- 8) Taking often irrational, or even absurd decisions; no effect of learning from mistakes. It very often happens in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury that new undertakings and projects are launched without due recognition of the reality, without providing source of financing, without recognizing reliability of partners and without adequate safeguard of the company's interests in contracts. A frequent phenomenon in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury is conclusion of contracts containing grossly inflated prices, placement of orders for unnecessary goods and services, acceptance and payment of invoices without documentation of performed work; making donations and sponsorship in the situation of constantly deteriorating financial condition of the company. An example of irrational decisions can be the decision taken by the board of management of one of the company's wholly owned by the

State Treasury where the contract required the company to pay a law firm a monthly lump sum stand by also in situations where no actions were carried out. The fees amounted to 186,660 PLN.

A similar contract was concluded by the same company with another law firm based in Warsaw where a monthly lump sum *for standing-by* amounted to 15,000 PLN; payments amounting approx. to 132,000 PLN were realized to date. When describing this situation it should be pointed out that throughout the duration of the contract the company provided full time employment for the entire staff: three experienced legal counsels and eight other lawyers, including three with completed legal traineeship.

Another example of irrational decisions incorrectly taken many times in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury can be decisions concerning payment of anniversary prizes and a number of donations of very large sums of money in the situation when companies noted increasing losses.

As previously mentioned, the drawback of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury was taking irrational decisions concerning contracts whose value was significantly different from the market rates for similar services. For example, the same natural person received respectively 60,000 PLN and 40,000 PLN for two training sessions on accounting policy held in a certain company wholly owned by the State Treasury. The contract in the amount of 27,000 PLN was concluded with an HR consulting company for the recruitment of the president of the management board in one of the subsidiaries. The president appointed with the recommendation of this company was dismissed after three months of work.

Wrong or even absurd management decisions in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury often relate directly to the supply and cost management system. An example of pathology of decisions in these areas are decisions taken in one of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury for ordering production of mailboxes for the amount of over 11 million PLN in the situation when the company already had in stock a supply of such boxes to last for over a year.

In case of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury the irrationality of decision-making and the lack of learning from wrong decisions is often repetitive and concerns a long time horizon, which is especially painful in terms of profitability of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. In addition, wrong decisions often concern large sums of money, which further reflects negatively on the functioning of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury.

9) The lack of will to cooperate between departments of the organization and the occurrence of strong antagonisms and interdepartmental as well as interpersonal conflicts. In companies wholly owned by the

State Treasury, the object of this research, the frequent phenomenon partially associated with the previously described negative empowerment is the implementation of their own particular interests by individual departments. Conflicts that occur in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury often have a long-term, or even chronic and destructive character. Companies wholly owned by the State Treasury very often resemble a wasps' nest where everyone is fighting against everyone, while quarrels and denunciation, as well as conspiring against co-employee, are the best ways to get rid of an inconvenient colleague from work. The organization is a field for the constant inner struggle and implementation of one's own particular goals, rather than collective and organizational ones. Of course, this lack of cooperation, which undermines foundations of the organization will cause chaos and indiscipline in the organization as well as hinder the implementation of strategies of the organization. It will also absorb the attention of senior executives who instead of focusing on conceptual work, implementing strategic goals and acquiring external resources to achieve these goals, will have to accept an uncomfortable role of an arbitrator in disputes between employees.

6. Conclusion

Numerous organizational pathologies are present in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury that will hinder organizational functioning and result in significant and long-lasting wastage of organizational resources. Organizational pathologies in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury very often have complex, systemic and diverse nature.

The following reasons for this state of affairs can be pointed out:

- errors in the management of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury such as: the lack of vision and reactivity; poor current control; over-reliance on fixed internal procedures and rules that have worked in the past, but which are inadequate for the changing environment; bureaucracy and excessive formalism of actions; not recognizing relation between organizational expenditures and results; shortening time horizon of decision-making; undertaking projects without a reliable assessment of effectiveness and profitability as well as proper safeguard of the company's interests; leniency in relation to acquired helplessness and simulated work of employees.
- weak and not very active ownership supervision. As confirmed by the audit carried out by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK, 2009, p. 22) in companies controlled by the State Treasury their economic and financial situation was not monitored and analysed regularly

and sufficiently, as well as clear criteria for assessing situation of companies had not been determined. The lack of these activities facilitated actions to the detriment of companies and promoted development of pathological situations. Supervisory activities focused mainly on the formal and not substantive aspects of the supervision such as appointment and dismissal of members of the company's bodies and approval of accounts and reports of companies. In addition, weakness of the supervisory boards may be indicated by the fact of frequent personal changes in councils and weak quality control of the supervision carried out by the Ministry of State Treasury and Ministry of Economy.

- strong, often opportunistic influence of numerous trade unions in relation to executives of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury. Trade unions in companies of the State Treasury have a strong influence and support which they use more often to maintain the status quo in the organization rather than to support organizational changes, particularly of the restructuring nature, which result in the reduction of full-time employments.
- frequent changes of boards of management in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury that are motivated by political and economic reasons. It often takes place that precarious situation of members of the board of management in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury is not conducive to the implementation of profound and courageous organizational changes that would suppress organizational pathologies. Short terms of boards of management and sudden dismissals of members of the board of management do not create favourable conditions for planning and implementing long-lasting strategy and continuity of the enterprise policy. Often, after the change of the board of management, successors choose and implement completely different direction of strategic development. Sometimes in order not to run afoul of strong trade unions, board members of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury avoid making unpopular decisions, turn a blind eye to irregularities which further strengthens organizational pathologies. The fight of more courageous chairmen against pathologies very often resembles tilting at windmills or a lonely fight of an individual against everybody where, after some time, the chairman is dismissed and the system he fought against remains unchanged or returns to the baseline.
- the lack of a clear long-term ownership policy of the Ministry of State Treasury in relation to companies under its supervision.

It seems that the main way to combat organizational pathologies in companies wholly owned by the State Treasury is simply to carry out the privatization of these entities. The less political determinants in the functioning of companies wholly owned by the State Treasury, the more effective fight against organizational pathologies. Another important way to combat organizational pathologies is to increase activity of the supervisory boards which should be strong base supporting members of the management board in the fight against organizational pathologies.

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