



SIGMA

Support for Improvement in Governance and Management

A joint initiative of the OECD and the European Union, principally financed by the EU

Summary Observations

“Civil Service Recruitment Procedures”

Seminar jointly organised by the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior and Sigma

21. – 22. March 2006

Vilnius, Lithuania

Some System Characteristics

Recruitment is one of the main pillars supporting the construction of professionalism in the civil service, along with others such as the definition of rights and obligations (especially the constitution driven ones—impartiality, incompatibilities, conflict of interest, etc--) and their correlating disciplinary provisions, the salary scheme and the legal and organisational arrangements for the management of the civil service.

All selection and recruitment systems strive to combine three elements: Equal right of access based on a fair and open process, selection and recruitment of the best people based on merit and ability, and lastly, efficiency.

No selection and recruitment system is pure – Most combine elements of a career-based and a position-based approach to balance conflicting demands. Here, it is mostly history that will influence where the emphasis will be put. No model is perfect, and no model is there forever. The key challenge is how to design and build a model that can guarantee stability and legality, yet stay flexible enough to adapt.

Selection and Recruitment Systems - Role of History and Culture

During the presentations by civil servants from EPSO, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Belgium, France and Sigma, as well as during discussions, it was emphasised that all selection and recruitment systems are the fruit of individual national history and culture, though certain national systems were taken in Europe as referential for the rest of the Continent, namely, France, Prussia and the UK. Most recruitment systems have been in place for a number of years achieving stability, reliability and professionalism, serving the development of capitalist societies well. They have been able to adapt incrementally to the challenges European civil services face in a modern world.

New Challenges

Expert presentations and discussions revealed that European selection and recruitment systems currently struggle with new challenges – How to attract attention and promote a positive image of public service, how to cope with the competition from the private sector, how to deal with the problem of an aging body of civil servants, how to recruit ever more specialised people to fill specific posts while keeping a body of civil servants with an institutional memory and how to ensure equal quality of personnel and service, sometimes across a national territory that has been undergoing processes of decentralisation and deconcentration, to name just a few. Different countries are giving different responses to these challenges: For example, Belgium has invested in a successful publicity campaign using television, newspaper ads and the internet to dispel the notion of civil servant jobs as being merely administrative and dull. Ireland has allowed a great degree of flexibility to recruit high-level civil servants to managerial positions directly from the private sector. Portugal needs to rejuvenate its civil service retiring civil servants while strengthening recruitment of young people. The European Personnel Selection Office is organising a great variety of competitions, from generalist to highly specialised profiles tailored to the individual needs of the European institutions it services. France is allowing a degree of autonomy in civil service recruitment at the municipal level while closely watching overall quality of civil service delivery on its territory.

Selection and Recruitment – Part of a Whole

During the seminar, it was stressed that all selection and recruitment systems are part of a bigger system that exists to deliver superior quality of public service. Recruitment cannot be seen as an isolated matter - It is a crucial investment into future quality of civil service, but it needs to be complemented with other policies and measures such as salary systems, performance evaluation, discipline, etc. To be able to select and recruit among a body of

competent individuals, the education system plays an important role to giving future candidates the skills needed. After recruitment, on-the-job training and good management is crucial to keep up motivation and encourage personnel development in order to sustain quality of service delivery. It was rather clear that the probation period established in national legislations was not used properly mainly because of a lack of development of managerial responsibilities and accountability.

The Private Sector – Competition and Inspiration

Participants agreed that civil service is a pillar for democracy and a functioning market economy, as well as a bulwark against corruption, thus requiring special attention and care.

It transpired during discussions that the civil service, in Lithuania or elsewhere in Europe is looking at the private sector for inspiration as to how to organise selection and recruitment while competing with it for the pool of highly qualified individuals. However, presenters underlined the fact that civil service was not a job like any other and that this fact necessarily needed to be mirrored in selection and recruitment procedures to square the circle between equal access, merit-based recruitment and efficiency. Another theme of the seminar was the necessity to preserve civil service recruitment from patronage and nepotism characteristic for most countries in the past and still shaping many recruitment decisions in Lithuania and in other new MS.

It was also clear that the private sector can only be a limited source of inspiration, as the purposes of recruitment and HR management are different in the public sector from the private sector. The Irish and the Belgians (after Copernicus) are most inclined to be inspired by the private sector. The French, the Portuguese and the Spaniards are struggling to keep distinctive public service recruitment systems and look to the private sector in a very modest way. The EU (EPSO) is rather along the lines of these latter countries, but it has introduced wholesale IT into the recruitment process, a factor that is lending much efficiency to the system.

A Question of Costs

Participants were very interested to find out about the cost associated with different elements of recruitment systems. Selection methods such as assessment centres have now become a staple of public service recruitment, but oftentimes, cost considerations, next to equality and practicability issues prevent a large-scale introduction of these techniques. Also, the use of ICT is becoming ever more prominent, in some countries revolutionising selection and recruitment by increasing access, transparency, as well as efficiency, but requiring considerable up-front investment. While costing items is important to make reform decisions, it was underlined that initial sound investments can have very positive medium- and long-term effects.

Lithuania – A Special Situation

Lithuania faces a particular challenge as it has to put in place a functioning, cost-efficient system with not much time to experiment, while simultaneously having to cope with the demands outlined above faced by other European systems. Crucially, the issue of selection and recruitment is dominated by the overall question of professionalism of the Lithuanian civil service, notably how to ensure freedom from politicisation.

Judging from the questions and interventions of the audience, there is acute awareness on the key elements of a selection and recruitment process – right to access, recruitment of only the best, as well as efficiency – as well as a strong motivation to push for improvement and innovation.

The Lithuanian authorities present in the seminar were impressed by the Belgian approach, which they should take with caution given that the situation in Belgium greatly differs from conditions in Lithuania. It is also to be noted that among the audience were a number of relatively active academicians who, as it happens in other central and eastern European countries, are apostles of the new public management (NPM) approaches. They criticise governments --that would be well advised not to pay heed-- for their sluggishness in implanting an “efficient administration”, a rather blurred notion which often implies introducing managerial discretion or even unbridled arbitrariness in systems.

To sum up, the seminar was considered useful not only for and by the Lithuanians, but also by the rest of participating countries, which had an opportunity to listen to each other and mutually learn from their respective national systems.