

# Lithuanian civil service reform in the process of Europeanisation

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## Abstract

The article investigates the interrelationship between Lithuanian civil service reform initiatives and administrative Europeanisation processes by identifying the role and approaches of Lithuanian parliamentary elites in the process of the implementation of reforms during the period of membership in the EU. The research was based on the qualitative content analysis of primary sources, the records of the Lithuanian Government activities, and the qualitative analysis of the secondary sources including research literature and other documents and records, semi-structured qualitative interview. Research gives an opportunity to estimate the level of institutionalisation of pro-European values amongst parliamentary elites and their contributions to the implementation of administrative Europeanisation. According to the research findings, administrative Europeanisation agenda is not a priority for Lithuanian parliamentary elites *per se*, however, pro-European attitudes are fixed.

**Keywords:** civil service, Europeanisation, European Union (EU), Lithuania, parliamentary elites, reform, government.

## Reforma służby cywilnej na Litwie w procesie europeizacji

### Streszczenie

W artykule zbadano wzajemne relacje między propozycjami reformy litewskiej służby cywilnej a procesem europeizacji administracji, identyfikując rolę i postawy litewskich elit parlamentarnych w procesie wdrażania reform w okresie członkostwa w UE. W badaniu wykorzystano metody jakościowej analizy treści źródeł pierwotnych i zapisów działań rządu litewskiego, analizy jakościowej źródeł wtórnych (w tym literatury naukowej oraz innych dokumentów i zapisów) oraz częściowo ustrukturyzowany wywiad jakościowy. Badania dają możliwość oceny stopnia instytucjonalizacji wartości proeuropejskich wśród elit parlamentarnych oraz ich wkładu we wdrażanie europeizacji administracyjnej. Zgodnie z wynikami badań, administracyjna agenda europeizacji nie jest priorytetem litewskich elit parlamentarnych *per se*, jednak postawy proeuropejskie są utrwalone.

**Słowa kluczowe:** służba cywilna, europeizacja, Unia Europejska (UE), Litwa, elity parlamentarne, reforma, rząd.

Civil service systems of the EU Member States had to be improved in the framework of the implementation of the Europeanisation of administrative systems on the basis of the common principles for European public administration. These principles were formulated for the Member States as a practical guideline for the reforms of the public administration. This initiative of the EU inspired the need to restructure the principles of human resources management in the public services in Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter referred to as CEE). It is important to underline that the outcomes of a reform are subject to a number of factors (social, economic, political, etc.), inherent limitations of empirical research of this thesis can be highlighted in this aspect, and yet the possible policy changes are often implied by the attitudes and approaches of parliamentary and administrative elites – regarding both the contents of proposals and decisions adopted or rejected. In this particular case, self-sustaining reform processes, were left to take their own course, with responsibility for their implementation shifting to national parliamentary elites (who hold legislative and administrative control instruments) and their own values and attitudes towards pro-European values. It is stated, therefore, that the attitudes of parliamentary elites towards the continuity, contents and compliance of the reform to pro-European values remain relevant as the research task after a lapse of fifteen years of EU membership.

The relevance of the analysis of the reform sustainability in the case of Lithuania is further enhanced in view of a new political context during the term of office of the Seventeenth Government of the Republic of Lithuania, including the increased initiatives to improve the Lithuanian civil service system and the decisions made. It is important to determine to what extent the current initiatives aimed at improving the civil service system are coherent with the idea of administrative Europeanisation in order to evaluate its results and prospects and to assess the driving factors? The answer to this question requires an assessment of the level of institutionalisation of pro-European values amongst parliamentary elites and their contributions to the implementation of administrative Europeanisation. Remembering that the institutionalisation is deemed as having taken place, when formal (legal framework) and informal (value framework) rules overlap – the institutionalisation is deemed as having taken place.

The research was based on the qualitative content analysis of primary sources (analysis of legislation), the records of the Lithuanian Government activities, and the qualitative analysis of the secondary sources including research literature and other documents and records, semi-structured qualitative interview. The study of the attitudes and approaches of parliamentary élites opens up quantitative and qualitative content analyses of electoral programmes of the political parties. As a complementary study, a structured survey of the members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of the 2016–2020 term of office was carried out with a view to identify attitudes and approaches of another political elite segment towards the current issues of civil service reform and Europeanisation during the research period, which were identified by the qualitative research, and to make clear which institutional factors define attitudes of parliamentary elites.

## A common European Administrative Space: institutionalisation opportunities

A multitude of global and political changes have triggered major changes in the development of the civil service (Dowding 1995: p. 3), and the governance systems have undergone fundamental reforms of the civil service in practically every national state (Demmke, Moilanen 2010; Demmke, 2015: p. 450). Only such civil service that is professional and concentrated on the implementation of good-quality policy is capable of the successful implementation of the objectives and tasks of public administration. For an efficient performance of the public governance system, the principles, standards and values of its operation must be in line with the public administration priorities and current circumstances. European integration processes that fostered public services to define common operating approaches and frameworks were among such circumstances, which affected the civil services in the European countries (Dimitrova 2010: p. 137–148).

An European administrative space usually denotes that public administration operates and is managed on the basis of European principles, rules and regulations uniformly enforced in the relevant territory and development of European administrative space can be understood as a process of institutionalisation of common administrative capacity (Zubek, Staroňvá 2012: p. 938; Trondal, Peters 2013: p. 295–296). An important European administrative space component were common European principles for public administration to make basis of common model of administration across the EU such as reliability and predictability, openness and transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness (*European principles of public administration* 1999: p. 1–31). The descriptions detailing the European principles for public administration were consistent with the Neo-Weberian State model (see *Table 1*).

**Table 1: Compatibility of the Neo-Weberian state model with the principles of European public administration.**

Elements of the Neo-Weberian state model	Principles of European public administration	The elucidation of European public administration principles
Equality before the law, ensuring privacy, legal certainty and the rule of law in accordance with administrative law	Reliability and Predictability  Openness and Transparency	The rule of law means that public administration ought to discharge its responsibilities according to law. Public authorities make their decisions by following general rules or principles applied impartially to anyone who comes within their ambit of application.

Preservation of the idea of a public service with a distinctive status, culture, and – to some extent, though perhaps not as much as in the past – terms and conditions	Reliability and Predictability	The concept of professional civil service requires the absence of apoliticalism and other political dependence among civil servants
Orientation towards meeting citizens' needs and wishes. The creation of a professional culture of quality and service.	Reliability and Predictability	Accurate and apolitical implementation of the law in administrative procedures, focusing on social values such as respect for the individual
A greater orientation on the achievement of results, rather than merely the correct following of procedure. This is expressed partly in a shift in the balance from ex-ante to ex-post controls, but not a complete abandonment of the former.	Reliability and Predictability  Accountability  Efficiency and Effectiveness	Timeliness in the action of public administration Any administrative body should be answerable for its actions to other administrative, legislative or judicial authorities. Accountability also requires that no authority should be exempt from scrutiny or review by others. Successful in achieving the goals and solving the public problems set for it by law and government.

Source: compiled by the author based on Pollitt, Bouckaert 2011: p. 118–119; *European principles of public administration* 1999: p. 1–31.

These principles were formulated for the Member States as a practical guideline for the reforms of the public administration (Meyer-Sahling 2011: p. 237). This initiative of the EU inspired the need to restructure the principles of human resources management in the public services in CEE that indicated their willingness to join the EU. In the pre-accession period, the initiatives of the restructuring of the public administration systems buttressed by the Europeanisation in the CEE countries essentially played the role of a catalyst for the reforms of the civil service systems, which had to imply an ongoing process of the civil service improvement, and the institutionalisation of the European values within the new bloc of the CEE states. It should be noted that the reforms constituted one of the practical measures of the Europeanisation of national policies (Šerpetis 2012: p. 51; Dvorak 2015: p. 129). The pre-accession process and the starting period of the membership opened up the way for the reforms of the civil service systems in the CEE countries characterised by the institutionalisation of pro-European values in

order to achieve the objectives such as depoliticisation and improved professionalism of the public services by bringing their performance closer to the common principles of European public administration, the idea of which accorded with the Neo-Weberian model of State. It was hoped that the reforms pursued by these countries will show the sustainability implying ongoing attempts/efforts at the implementation of defined initiatives and actions. A reform is deemed sustainable, when states continuously invest in the enhancement of the civil service professionalism even if it meets the EU standards in all senses – in accordance with the formal requirements and prevalent attitudes of civil servants (Meyer-Sahling 2009: p. 22). Such causes might be different, but it is worthwhile discussing the prospects of universality of the common European public administration principles, and their relationship with the national administrative traditions (Knill 2001: p. 35–54).

The reform initiatives do not always translate into successful changes because reform programs do not guarantee success (Peters 2002: p. 454). It can be said that the context of each country had determined the different outcomes of European administrative institutionalisation (Torma 2011: p. 150), because political elites are surrounded by economic and socio-demographic, political and intellectual, administrative factors (Pollitt, Bouckaert 2011: p. 32–45). Excluding these factors, the efforts of Lithuanian political elites to implement Europeanisation in the civil service were examined.

### **Extents of initiatives aimed at the improvement of Lithuanian civil service and Europeanisation**

From 2003 to 2008, civil service policy has been focused on improving the functions of the civil service and gradual 2002 version of the Law on the Civil Service of the Republic of Lithuania. The project of the Law on the Civil Service (2002) was adopted with a view to EU membership. Lithuanian civil service experts confirm that the EU had a major influence on civil service reform at that time, but the influence of the EU institutions on civil service policy decreased after Lithuania's accession to the EU, when EU political criteria were no longer applied (Nakrošis 2011: p. 65–98). The first significant initiative to improve the Lithuanian civil service system during the period of EU membership took place during the period of activity of the 15<sup>th</sup> Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2008–2012) (Valstybės tarnybos aktualijos 2009: p. 48–50). The main objective of implementing the civil service reform priority was flexibility, complementarity of the career civil service model with the post system elements, contracting and elements of project management (Nakrošis 2015: p. 117), successful implementation of the objectives would have distant the Lithuanian civil service system from civil service status and traditional values, which is close to the Neo-Weberian civil service model (Kaselis, Pivoras 2012: p. 141–142). However, the Government deviated from the original provisions of its civil service policy (Nakrošis 2015: p. 117) and at the later stage of reform implementation focused on EU recommendations (Johannsen et. al. 2015: p. 43–44). Major change was made only in selection of civil servants system implementing semi-centralised selection (Tuménè et

al. 2014: p. 2). The 16th Government of the Republic of Lithuania submitted for public hearing in a draft of the new project of the Law on the Civil Service. Consistently, all parts of the project were linked with the competency model (Buckienė 2015: p. 164–170). It was unofficially known that this project had been drafted in coordination with the Civil Service Department of Lithuania, which was in cooperation with the EU institutions. However, consideration of the draft of Civil Service Law based on the competency model had taken quite a long time. The adoption of the law has been delayed in parliamentary committees and was not accepted (Statneckytė 2020: p. 78–81).

The 17th Government of the Republic of Lithuania were ambitious in reforming a large part of the state areas of governance and in many cases have taken initiatives. The same happened with the Lithuanian civil service reform. Government of the Republic of Lithuania, when making proposals for a new draft Law on Civil Service of the Republic of Lithuania, in certain respects construed changes in conformity with the administrative Europeanisation agenda: there were such proposals regarding the optimisation of civil service and remuneration schemes. The initial proposals by the administrative elites to downgrade the status of civil servants by excluding general functions from the job of a civil servant were akin to the idea of administrative Europeanisation, such proposals, however, failed to reach the finishing line in the legislative procedures and thereby highlighted a long-term discussion on the scope of Lithuanian civil service (Statneckytė 2020: p. 81–110). It can be said that the efforts of these Government also were not directly related to the administrative Europeanisation agenda implementation.

### **Parliamentary elites' positions: values *versus* works?**

The positions of the parliamentary elites on the reform of the civil service are primarily described by the election programmes of the political parties. However, the party's programme is usually the result of work and position of the entire political party, and only a part of the party structure receives the mandates. Therefore, in order to find out more information about the positions of the parliamentary elites, the interview can be helpful as a research method. This section reveals the ambitions of parliamentary elites (2016–2020 term) to carry out certain tasks in civil service reformation and personal positions of parliament members towards the issue of administrative Europeanisation of civil service, as well as the institutional factors that influence it.

On the basis of quantitative discourse analysis of the programmes of Lithuanian political parties that won a majority of seats in the 2016 elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, it can be said that the largest number of proposals concerning the improvement of the civil service system were put forward by the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS–LKD), the Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS), the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP), and the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS), and yet there was not a single election programme that addressed every aspect of human resource management, which indicates that resolution of only currently urgent issues remains in the focus of parliamentary elites (see *Table 2*).

**Table 2: Distribution of speeches on the improvement of the civil service system in party programmes by codification categories of European integration (based on the election programmes of Lithuanian political parties in 2016)**

	LVŽS	TS-LKD	LRLS	LSDP	LLRA-KŠS	TT	DP	LS	LŽP	LCP
A. Recruitment of civil servants	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
B. Optimisation of the civil service system	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
C. Rights and obligations of civil servants	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
D. Training of civil servants	2	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
E. Civil service evaluation system	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
F. Salary system in civil service	1	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
G. Senior Civil Service	0	1	3	3	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: Statneckytė 2020: p. 113–114.

Possible alternatives to the selection process for civil service were poorly discussed in the election programmes. Prevalent proposals in the programmes of political parties include the optimisation of public administration, wage increases, and the improvement of training, only a few of the parties' proposals on training and optimisation were in line with the European integration agenda.

Considering that the establishment of a professional/meritocratic civil service has been and is considered to be the basis for reforming the administrative systems of the CEE countries in line with the EU principles, it is important to speak about the negative connotation of politicisation of the civil service and the need to improve the administration of human resources in such way that the public service institutionalises common principles in its activities. The study data collected as part of the survey of the members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of the 2016–2020 term of office on the issues of civil service reform have shown that the large majority of the parliamentary elite representatives prefer to support the need to prevent the increase of the current level of politicisation in civil service (see *Table 3*). This demonstrates the prevalence of pro-European values regarding the improvement of civil service among the parliamentary political elites.

**Table 3: 2016–2020 opinion of Lithuanian parliamentarians on the need to reduce politicisation in the civil service**

I very much agree, at the moment, the civil service is too tied to political ties	25.7 %
I agree that the political dependence of civil servants should be lower	51.4 %
I neither agree nor disagree	15.7 %
I do not agree, I believe that there is no need to restructure the civil service	7.1 %
I completely disagree, I am convinced that the civil service is transparent and dominated by merit-based human resource management	0 %
I have no opinion	0 %

Source: Statneckytė 2020: p. 123.

The position of the parliamentary elite on the need to improve the human resource management in the civil service was also examined. The aspects to be improved were formulated on the basis of the EU recommendations and the content of the Lithuanian civil service reform during the period of acting of current government (see *Table 4*).

**Table 4: 2016–2020 Lithuanian parliamentarians' attitude to the need to improve the principles of human resources in the civil service in order to achieve a more professional civil service**

	Median	Standard Deviation	Median	Standard Deviation
The selection of civil servants needs to be further centralised	3.33	1.05	3.33	1.05
There is a need to increase funding for the training of civil servants	4.01	0.95	3.98	0.53
It is necessary to improve the training system by distinguishing only the necessary competencies for individual groups of civil servants	3.64	0.86		
It is necessary to introduce more modern training methods for civil servants	4.33	0.65		
It is necessary to reduce the number of civil servants	3.92	0.80	4.2	0.60
It is necessary to optimise the duplication of functions in the civil service	4.49	0.65		

There is a need to clarify the evaluation system for civil servants	4.22	0.65	4.07	0.61
The links between the evaluation and training systems for civil servants need to be improved	3.93	0.82		
It is necessary to reduce the variable part of the salaries for civil servants	3.40	0.81	3.54	0.68
The system of allowances and bonuses for civil servants needs to be improved	3.92	0.71		
It is necessary to reduce the freedom of managers to decide the amount of salaries for civil servants	3.28	1.10		

Note: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither "yes" nor "no", 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree.  
Source: Statnekytė 2020: p. 126.

As it can be seen from the survey outcomes, all proposals to improve human resources management were supported by the parliamentary elites. The parliamentary elites supported the idea of optimising the civil service, but the original idea was abandoned during the legislative process. The proposals on the selection and remuneration system for civil servants received the least support. This is likely to be due to a poor governmental plan of measures to bring about the changes.

## Conclusions

The development of Lithuanian civil service was, to a large degree, influenced by the aspiration to join the EU, which entailed the adoption of the civil service law in line with EU recommendations, and a gradual improvement of that law and the civil service functions took place over the initial five-year period of the EU membership. However, the evolution of administrative Europeanisation requires the sustainability of civil service, i.e. its ongoing improvement. During the terms of the 15th, 16th and 17th governments of the Republic of Lithuania, the parliament nevertheless failed to make any changes in the legal framework of the civil service system that comprehensively encompassed a larger part of the changes in the civil service human resource management in order to increase the professionalism of the civil service directly related to the administrative Europeanisation agenda.

At the same time quantitative discourse analysis of the programmes of Lithuanian political parties that won a majority of seats in the 2016 elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania revealed that there was not a single election programme that

addressed every aspect of human resource management, which indicates that resolution of only currently urgent issues remains in the focus of the parliamentary elites. However, notwithstanding the fact that the proposals by political parties were not formulated as the immediate purpose of administrative Europeanisation, the content of the proposals was in line with the European integration agenda.

The research also has revealed the value-based Europeanisation, which has taken root among Lithuanian parliamentary elites, when the support is demonstrated for an agenda on administrative Europeanisation implying changes, and positive effects from the EU membership are recognised. However, on the basis of the analysis of the initiatives and decisions made on the improvement of civil service, it could be argued that administrative Europeanisation, as an objective for change, was a priority neither for administrative elites, which were in charge of preparing the content of the initiatives, nor for parliamentary elites, which are entitled to control the activities of administrative elites. The discrepancy between formal (legal framework) and informal (value framework) institutionalisation suggests the lack of administrative Europeanisation in Lithuania's civil service.

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