

CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the formation and development of civil service in Armenia. It draws attention to the institutional arrangements supporting civil servants' recruitment, retention and attestation and makes a particular emphasis on the challenges and the way forward.

Key words: *civi service, Armenia, recruitment, retention.*

The issue of human resource management of the state plays a key role in implementing a new model of public administration and in addressing issues related to establishing a democratic, jural and civil society. The effective settlement of these issues significantly depends on people directly dealing with them.

In 1991, following the declaration of independence, the Republic of Armenia stepped into a transitional period. Due to radical socio-economic changes, the public administration system was undergoing its initial stages of development: everything had to be started from scratch. State officials lacked experience in public administration. Undoubtedly, an orderly and regulated system of human resource policy could not have been shaped under such conditions overnight. The legal basis for the new human resource policy was established through adopting the Law of the Republic of Armenia on "Civil Service" (hereinafter the Law) on December 4, 2001 by the National Assembly. Upon coming into force on January 9, 2002, along with a number of other civil service principles, the Law established and adopted a new approach to appointing civil servants to positions in certain public administration bodies which was seen as an unprecedented step towards professionalisation. Resulting from the administrative reforms, this approach aimed at establishing a sustainable and qualified reserve of civil servants and had as its goal the regulation and systematization of state human resource policy.

In order to implement a common state policy of the civil service in the Republic of Armenia, the Civil Service Council of the Republic of

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Armenia (hereinafter the Council) was established by the Law. The Council was the result of public administration reforms and of anti-corruption policy, tasked to carry out a common, efficient human resource policy, to recruit skilled personnel with high ethical values for positions within the state machinery, irrespective of the changes in the correlation of political forces, to ensure the legal safeguard of civil servants and to protect their legitimate interests.

The Council consists of seven members: the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, and the five members. The members of the Council are appointed for a six-year term; they are appointed to office and relieved from office by the President of the Republic of Armenia upon submission by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. The Council has developed and adopted relevant laws and sublegal acts.

It is necessary to note that the Law regulates the basic principles of civil service in the Republic of Armenia, the classification of civil service positions and grades, the issues related to civil service position appointments, to the attestation and trainings of civil servants, and to the personnel reserve of civil service; it defines the legal status of civil servants, the organizational and governing principles of civil service, etc.

The operation of the Republic of Armenia's Law on "Civil Service" extends to 7601¹ persons occupying positions envisaged by the Roster of Civil Service positions in the following 46 state bodies:

- a) The Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia;
- b) The Staff of the Government of the Republic of Armenia;
- c) The Staff of the Republican Executive Bodies of the Republic of Armenia;
- d) The Staff of state bodies acting in the administrative field of the Republic of Armenia's Ministries;
- e) The Staff of Marzpetarans /Regional Governor's Offices/ of the Republic of Armenia;
- f) The Staff of permanently operating bodies created by the laws of the Republic of Armenia, with the exception of the Central Bank of RA.

Since the formation of the civil service system, structural and content based reforms have been carried out through several phases which resulted in the formation of the civil service system and in

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working out of a relevant legal and methodological basis essential for organizing and holding competitions, attestations, and trainings; also tools and mechanisms ensuring their implementation were designed.

The civil service system of the Republic of Armenia is a formal/regulated system, which is governed by clearly defined laws and other sublegal acts.

In organizational terms, the civil service system is a mixed system with promotion oriented elements and components determining the peculiarities of recruitment, attestation, and training systems.

Currently, the public administration system of the Republic of Armenia is undergoing reforms, and the civil service reforms are being carried out in parallel and in full harmony with public administration reforms. Since 2009 an e-government system and an electronicsystem of developing action plans (including civil servants) were implemented in the country's state bodies, incorporating such modules as developing working plans, performance assessment, or workflow documentation.

The Bodies for Management and Organization of Civil Service

The following are the bodies for management and organization of civil service:

1. The Civil Service Council;
2. The Chiefs of Staff.

The Council is the body responsible for developing the policy of the Republic of Armenia's civil service system, its implementation, the coordination of the functioning and controlling of the system.

Classification of the Civil Service Positions

The civil service positions are classified into the following groups:

- a) The highest Civil Service Positions;
- b) The chief Civil Service Positions;
- c) The leading Civil Service Positions;
- d) The junior Civil Service Positions.

The group of the highest civil service positions is broken down into Subgroups 1 and 2, while the groups of the chief, leading and junior civil service positions are broken down into Subgroups 1, 2 and 3.

The general description of each group of civil service positions is approved by the Civil Service Council.

Classification Grades of Civil Service

The following classification grades are granted to civil servants:

- a) highest positions: the classification grades of State Counselor of the 1st or 2nd class of the Civil Service of the Republic of Armenia are granted to civil servants occupying the highest Civil Service Positions.
- b) chief positions: the classification grades of Counselor of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd class of the Civil Service of the Republic of Armenia are granted to civil servants occupying the chief Civil Service Positions.
- c) leading positions: the classification grades of Leading Servant of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd class of the Civil Service of the Republic of Armenia are granted to civil servants occupying the leading Civil Service Positions.
- d) junior positions: the classification grades of Junior Servant of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd class of the Civil Service are granted to civil servants occupying the junior Civil Service Positions.

The highest classification grades of State Counselor of the 1st and 2nd class of the Civil Service of the Republic of Armenia are granted by the President of the Republic of Armenia. The president also reserves the right to degrade and deprive the civil servant of the classification grade.

Recruitment System

The legal framework which regulates the recruitment system is comprehensive, clearly defining the principal procedures and requirements, the responsible institutions and their competences. This area is regulated by law as well as by a number of sublegal acts. The competitions for vacancies are held according to clear and simple procedures. Presently, there are two main recruitment methods applied: open competitions and out-of-competition appointments.

We distinguish between two types of competitions:

- competitions that are organized and held by the Civil Service Council of the Republic of Armenia for occupying the highest and chief Civil Service Positions

- competitions that are organized and held by the relevant state body for occupying leading Civil Service Positions.

From 2011 onward, the Council has been holding centralized testing for candidates for occupying civil service junior positions at least once in 3 months. The testing is performed by the Testing Committee created by the Civil Service Council. Those participants who overcome the testing assignments receive certificates for occupying civil service junior positions. The certificate is valid for a one year period. The citizen holding the certificate may apply to relevant state bodies for the vacant civil service junior positions.

The announcement on holding a competition for occupying the civil service vacant position is published no later than one month prior to the competition, in a press outlet and other mass media (incl. online media).

The competition is held in two stages: testing and interview. The testing can be held through computer or in writing. Tests for checking the participants' knowledge are built out of the questions installed in the computer and questions selected randomly from these according to the procedure determined by the Civil Service Council.

Those participants who give correct answers to at least 90 per cent of the test assignments obtain the right to participate in the second stage of the competition – the interview. The interview with the participants is held through written question cards that check their professional knowledge and capability, practical abilities and management skills. After answering each question of the question card, each member of the Commission evaluates the participant's answer with the maximum of 10 points. At the stage of the interview, the percentage expression of the points scored by the participant must be at least 75% to pass the interview stage.

Three participants, who pass the interview stage by obtaining the maximum total percentage of both the testing and interview, are declared winners of the competition. The competition results are declared on the same day after holding the competition.

After the competition results are declared, these results may be appealed by the participant or by a member of the competition commission, in a written form.

In the event of the emergence of a temporary vacant civil service position, by the discretion of the official having jurisdiction to appoint him/her to the position, this position is occupied by a substitute civil servant envisaged by the passport of the given position for a period of up to 6 months, or by the civil servant registered in the short-term civil service personnel reserve, but in case of impossibility, by signing a term employment contract with a person registered in the long-term civil service personnel reserve, and in case of impossibility, by signing a term employment contract with another person.

Attestation of the Civil Servant – Performance Appraisal

Attestation system is the indivisible part of the civil service system. The attestation system, which is currently applied, is very well regulated, too. It is regulated by law and by a number of sublegal acts that define the applied procedures, the responsible institutions, their functions, responsibilities and competences.

Every year at least one third of civil servants representing the corresponding body is subject to mandatory attestation. The regular attestation of civil servants is carried out once every three years. The extraordinary attestation of civil servants can be carried out at least one year after the regular attestation is held. It is carried out on the basis of a reasoned decision by the official having jurisdiction to appoint him/her to the position.

The attestation is carried out with the immediate participation of the civil servant. The civil servants subject to attestation are informed about the attestation no later than one month prior to the attestation.

The attestation is held in the following ways:

- documentary;
- testing and interview

The civil servants, who have higher civil service classification grade, envisaged by this Law for the subgroup of the position occupied, are subject to documentary attestation. The documentary attestation is held through an interview. The civil servant has the right to become acquainted with the attestation results and appeal

against them if needed. Since 2009, performance appraisal system has been introduced in the Republic of Armenia which is entirely conducted electronically.

The Civil Service Personnel Reserve

The types of civil service personnel reserves are:

- a) Short-term personnel reserve
- b) Long-term personnel reserve

The persons released from the civil service position are registered in the short-term civil service personnel reserve on the grounds envisaged by the Law (reduction of the staff, etc).

The following persons can be registered in the long-term personnel reserve: persons, whose one-time period in the short-term personnel reserve is over, participants of the competition for the civil service vacant position who have been considered winners but have not been appointed to the position.

The one-time maximum period for the civil servant to be enlisted in the short-term personnel reserve is six months while in the long-term personnel reserve is one year but not longer than his/her having attained age 65.

New Policy

Along with fulfilling the obligations envisaged by the Law, in 2009 the Republic of Armenia's Civil Service Council jointly with the EU SIGMA support made an assessment of the system resulting in development of a new "Policy Paper on Civil Service Reform of the Republic of Armenia" in 2012. At this stage, the format and the period for reform implementation is being discussed with the stakeholders.