

The Implementation of Civil Service Reforms in Ethiopia: The Promise for Civil Service De-Politicization of Tigray National Regional State

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Abstract

The origin of the 'modern' civil service in Ethiopia dates back to the Menelik II Era 1907. Yet, it was few years after the downfall of the military government that the civil service system was drastically transformed. The current Ethiopian government has conducted a continuous reform since the early 1990s to restructure the civil service system with the intention of instituting multi-party democracy and market driven economy. It was with this intention that autonomous civil service institutions were established and the civil servant was begun to serve with merit principles. It is believed that successful merit based Human Resource Management (HRM) is the cornerstone in building government institutions to implement public policies and strategies, which in turn can have a direct impact on the development performance of the country. However, some empirical studies indicate that the promise to have a neutral policy implementer civil service is inhibited by politicization of the civil service among other things. Therefore, the objective of this article was to examine the promise for practicing civil service de-politicization during the implementation of the Civil Service Reform (CSR) in Tigray. To describe the level of de-politicization in practice based on the promised merit principles, relevant data was collected both from primary and secondary sources. Survey instrument was used to collect primary source data. The researcher utilizes Chi-square to analyze the data and identify the factors that impede de-politicization of the civil service. The research found out that regardless of the institutional framework in place, the promise to make the civil service a neutral policy implementer in Tigray region was highly inhibited by unnecessary political interference, poor separation of power, poor accountability system, ill networking in the civil service and poor oversight from above.

Key Words: Civil Service Reforms, De-Politicization, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The expectations on government function in contemporary social order have completely changed since 1980s. Globalization and the dynamics of ICT expansion contributed to a new impetus of societal maturity and to an innovative insight of the optimal organizational arrangement and techniques of institutional management. Hence, as an alternative to the traditionally hierarchical and authoritative model of public administration, the New Public Management model is desired (Vidaeak, 2000). According to Minongue (2001), since 1980s, there has been continuous public sector reforms as a shift from the inefficient traditional public administration model to the New Public Management (NPM). The NPM is considered as a new paradigm shift to provide high quality services, increasing managerial autonomy, evaluating and prizing both the performance of an organization and individual public servant, capacitating public managers in terms of human resource, financial and physical asset as well as technological support to achieve the expected outcomes (Polidano and Ewalt, 2001). Civil Service Reform (CSR) is one of the most visible and comprehensive areas of administrative reform. The efforts to reform the civil service all-round the world is stressed on the need for increased de-politicization of the civil service, promoting the model of neutrality and merit-based civil service. However, in all nations, especially in developing countries, pure merit based systems are the exception and political appointments are common in most civil services assignments (UNDP, n.d.).

In line with this, the developed capitalist nations of the world were started reforming their civil service in 1980s as a response to the realization of poor performance of civil service evidenced in expanded government size, over expenditure in wage bills and politicization of the civil services (Lane, 1997). Likewise, according to Bratton and Walle (1997) cited in Getachew (2006), the governance system in most developing countries was largely typified by expansion, patronage, and authoritarian rules. Bureaucratic rationality was also compromised by the high degree of centralization in decision making within the political executive. However, by the end of the

1980s, a new nature of civil service was begun to emerge with the change in political context that ensure the competent civil service to be “merit-based and politically neutral; well-structured, ‘right-sized’, and well-paid; accountable, professional, and generally corruption free; relatively autonomous, responsive, and representative; well-trained, performance-oriented, and relatively open” (MDGD, n.d.).

Historically, the origin of the modern civil service in Ethiopia dates back to the Menelik II Era 1907 when the Emperor initiated the formation of few ministries aimed to establish effective civil service system by restructuring the Imperial institution. Since the modern civil service was instituted, Ethiopia has had a formal merit based civil service system (Getachew, 2006). Though, historically the initiative to CSR in Ethiopia dates back to the Menelik II Era, it was few years after the downfall of the military government that the current Ethiopian government has conducted a continuous reform to restructure the civil service with the intention of multi-party democracy and market driven economy (Tilaye, 2007). Therefore, the main role of the civil service is changed and civil servants begun to serve based on merit principles and autonomous institution (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2004).

The current Ethiopian government has taken the initiative of reforming the civil service since it came to power in 1991. The purpose of reforming the old civil service system was to avoid the undesired practices that hindered public service delivery and socio-economic development of the country. The current government tried to restructure the civil service as three phases. The 1st phase (1991-95) was a Structural Adjustment Program to skip from the Socialist Ideology to Federal System, the 2nd phase (1996-2002) was instituted to build a Capable Civil Service to promote democracy, federalism and good governance, provide citizens with friendly service delivery and support government’s socio-economic development policies and the development of private sector and the 3rd phase (2003 to date) was launched and great emphasis was placed on improving Quality Service Delivery. The agenda for quality service delivery in Ethiopia was designed intentionally to strengthen the public institutions by establishing a de-politicized civil service, improve managerial effectiveness, and empower private and civic society organizations and higher education (Tilaye, 2007).

Therefore, the main objective of this Article was to examine the promise for civil service Neutrality in Tigray region in executing government policies and strategies. Based on this main objective, the Article tried to address the research questions:

1. Is the civil service an autonomous institution in Tigray Region?
2. How neutral is the civil service in executing government policies and strategies?
3. What practical challenges are faced the Neutrality of the civil service in Tigray Region?

The overall objective of CSR is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector. Therefore, regarding to the significance of the study, the civil service matters can’t be discussed in segregation from government structures especially its forms of administration, level of merit system, de-politicization and autonomy of its civil service. This is because civil servants are the lifeblood for operating the day to day institutional activities to provide quality service for citizens and the implementation of government policies and strategies (MDGD, n.d.). However, many scholars agree that, politicization and lack of autonomies civil service institutions are among the critical challenging factors that impede the effective public employee administration. Therefore, this study will have an attempt to contribute towards filling the gaps in Neutrality of the civil service, Merit principles and institutional autonomy. The methodologically, the article was conducted on a case study method. The data were collected from primary (questionnaire, interview and FGD) and secondary (document analysis) data.

Administrative Reform: The New Measure of Public Organizations

Governments all over the world have attempted to reform or reorganize the public organizations to make it productive and competent. Administrative reform according to UN (1983) is an intentional utilization of authority pushing forward to conduct new measures to an organizational scheme to modify or transform its ambitions and configuration procedures with an outlook to improve it for developmental purposes. In the early days of 1970s, significant changes occurred in the sphere of public administration all over the world with a criticism that the roles and scopes of government and the pattern of administration were inefficient. This criticism comes in relation to the economic problems of that time: governments were too large and consuming too many limited resources, involved in too many activities while alternative means of service provision existed for many of these, inflation was growing and excessive costs occurred, and excessive bureaucracies resulted from state intervention (International public Management Journal, 2004).

The other criticism was related to pattern of administration. The traditional public administration was rejected as being incompetent, costly, rigid, corrupt and unaccountable, and inappropriate to an age seeking more dynamic models of socioeconomic development. The NPM seeks to get rid of age-old bureaucratic practices and replace these by businesslike management principles focusing on structure, processes, and function (International public Management Journal, 2004). The decentralization of power and empowerment of citizens, greater synergy between various agencies and government programs, rationalization of public systems and

means of national financial assistance, improved access to formal justice system, CSRs and harnessing the power of technology for governance have been recognized as the key priorities in the NPM era (ibid).

However, despite their perceived importance, administrative reforms in developing countries like Ethiopia have not been able to break the shackles of administrative inertia. Failure has remained a stark reality in most developing countries. For this, there are many literatures that identify numerous factors inhibiting the implementation of administrative reform. State incapacity, the more centralized system of government control, lack of strategic visioning in public service reform, corruption, lack of political commitment, bureaucratic resistance and politicization of administration system among others were the practical challenges in the implementation of the reform agenda (McCourt, 2002).

Civil Service Reform: The Move from SAP to Service Delivery

Civil Service Reform is of the most visible and comprehensive areas of administrative reform. The need for reform arises when part or the whole system fails to function to expected standards and hence the need for modification or to repair the whole system (Ntukamanzina, 1998 cited in Lukumai, 2006). Similarly MdG (2011) asserted that:

Civil service arrangements have emerged as important mediating institutions which interface between the state and the public. Traditionally civil service organizations were massive, highly centralized, influential structures with immense power over governance of affairs of a country, and often irresponsive to the changing needs of governance and public administration. But, nowadays many governments in the world have realized the importance of greater efficiency in service delivery. That's why governments throughout the world have initiated large-scale reform in their civil services to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and responsiveness.

The historical development of reforming the public sector in Africa dates back to the 1980s and it was passed through a series of phases focusing on macroeconomic stability to performance and civil service management then service delivery. Therefore, the three phases of the reforming agenda are discussed as follows categorized as 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation based on their time period.

First Generation Civil Service Reform Program of Ethiopia, (1980s - early 1990s)

The 1st generation CSR program which was conducted from 1980s to the early 1990s was more of quantitative in outlook and focused on macroeconomic stability. Basically, it was a structural adjustment orientation taking the concepts of NPM at the center with large scale donor loan conditionality. The intention of Structural Adjustment Program was sought to make public institutions efficient using cost cutting and containment measures, particularly in rationalizing the government machinery, retrenching redundant staff, divesting non-core processes, removing 'ghost' workforce from the payroll, freezing employment and adopting measures to control wage bill and extra personnel based expenditures (Batley, 1999).

However, the 1st generation CSR program encountered several challenges like ignoring the historical evidence about the origin of the civil service problem in Africa such as low productivity and incompetency that originated from the economic crisis of the 1970s; the reforms overlooked the basic facts about people and organizations, ignoring the notion that people make organizations work and therefore, motivated workers are the lifeblood for organizational efficiency. Hence, it failed to address livelihood concerns of civil servants; lack of ownership of reform and the real downsizing scheme was not achieved (Ayee, 2008). The period was generally known by the problems of moonlighting, absenteeism, low morale, poor capacity and politicization of the civil service. It was due to these challenges that African governments tried to look for the 2nd generation CSR program (Satish, 2004).

Second Generation Civil Service Reform Program of Ethiopia, (Mid 1990s - 2000)

This phase was declared taking the problems identified during the 1st generation. It was a deliberate action to capacitate the civil service and was focused on capacity building program to ensure performance and effective civil service management. The 2nd generation CSR emerged somewhat from the limited recognition that downsizing and pay restructuring alone might not convey the expected outcomes. Civil service training was a pronounced element of capacity building for many years in the public service. The second generation was, therefore, a remarkable shift to capacitate the public sectors. This was because the failure observed in the cost-reduction and structural orientation of the 1st generation CSR was assumed due to the poor capacity in the public bureaucrats (McCourt, 1998).

The second generation CSR scheme was also called the era of capacity building in which governments in developing countries tried to take several intervention measures. To this end, as asserted by Kiragu (2002), the intervention undertaken in the 2nd generation CSR program in Africa was to enhance civil service skill, improve management systems and structures, restoring incentives and improving pay and the work environment. However, though remedial actions were taken, the problems observed in implementing the 2nd generation CSR program were: one-size-fit-all approach that ignores country-specific managerial attributes of

public organizations; created a quagmire for employees, for instance, reduction in government needs that salaries and no-wage remuneration remains low, due hiring freezes, underpaid and inadequately provoked staff were being admonished to assume additional responsibility and to lead efforts at improving efficiency; issue of relativities not addressed; brain drain continued among other (Hyden, 1983 and Olowu, 1999). These multifaceted challenges also shoved African leaders to rethink ahead for the 3rd generation CSR agenda.

Third Generation Civil Service Reform Program of Ethiopia, (2000 to date)

Unlike the first and second generation, this phase was initiated following the publication of World Development Report 1997 focused on service delivery. The new generation programs since then is focused on the responsive and effective service delivery system. Thus, for public servants, it attempts to take into consideration the opinions and demands of their clients and the public, to design their own performance development schemes that involve service delivery standards monitored by both responsible public managers and public servants (Ayee, 2008). The 3rd generation CSR program allowed civil servants to engage in self appraisal exercises, in that they are supposed to meet and discuss on customer feelings regarding the quality of their service and crop-up with performance improvement plans, which would then form the foundation of performance agreement with the government (ibid).

The modern CSR is both difficult and lengthy because it entails a variety of critical institutional changes. At its most fundamental level, it involves rearranging human configurations and modifying human behavior (Satish, 2004). Hence, during the implementation of the 3rd phase, Performance improvement plans and beneficiary surveys have not been properly organized, provision of services for the poor is still a far reaching, in spite of participation, poverty reduction strategy plans have not achieved their objectives and quality of service not improved (Kiragu, 2002). The effective implementation of government policies and strategies is becoming the concern of any modern governance to ensure the public interest. So that, a competent civil service with the characteristics of merit-based and de-politicized, sound structure, right-sized and well-paid, accountable and relatively corruption free, relatively autonomous, representative and well trained, performance oriented and relatively open matters (Peters and Pierre, 2004).

Politicization of the Civil Service

The term politicization can have different connotation for different scholars. However, in this article, politicization refers to the substitution of political criteria in to merit based selection, placement, promotion and rewards in the civil service among others. In many developing countries, patronage appointment is a common practice. However, to enhance efficiency and fairness of the civil service, there is a need to protect the institutions from political party control. Although an institution can never be made fully apolitical, it must be protected from direct forms of partisan control (Peters and Pierre, 2004). The civil service both in developed and developing nations had experienced the bitterness of politicization in the sense of partisan selection of public employees. The historical development of human resource management shows that, the passage of Pendleton Act in 1883 was provided the guiding principles of the foundation of the merit based civil service system. The central theme of the merit system is the process of hiring and promoting government employees based on their ability rather than on their political connections (Frances, 1988).

Experience shows that the spoils system creates favoritism and limited efficiency and continuity in delivering government programs and services, and therefore, the distribution of benefits was justified as a means of building political careers. Political patronage generally refers to political influence in hiring and promotion public servants. The assumption that politicization is the best way to gain control over the civil service is to have the capability of appointing one's own faithful to positions that influence or control public policy. The increased meddling of politicians deep in to the civil service system can brought in bad results and the perception of citizens towards politicization is negative.

The Theory of politicization is a kind of deep-rooted introduction of party-politics in to the civil service. The danger behind politicization is therefore, it undermines merit based employment and promotion in the civil service, jeopardize bureaucratic integrity and, it harmfully affects the professional quality of the civil servant and its decision making processes. On the other hand, patronage can sustain political parties and ensures party loyalty but it allows corruption, cronyism, government profiteering and nepotism (Pashaj, 2010). The purpose of politicization of the civil service in the advanced western democracy system is said to be to control and implement policy rather than just supply jobs for party members. Even so, some scholars connote it in developing countries as giving extra privileges to party member so as to dominate the system. However, there is a need to distinguish between politicization in the partisan sense on one hand and politicization meaning tight control over the civil service by elected officials on the other hand. Political appointments serve many functions which are critical to democratic government such as policy choice and accountability. Thus, leaving few spaces for political appointments at the top helps the government of the day to have control over bureaucracy (Peters and Pierre, 2004).

Neutrality of the Civil Service

Neutrality (De-politicization) of the civil service is an extensively applied idiom that explains about the political neutrality. The perception that civil servants are the permanent employees of a government points-out that civil servants are able to serve governments of any party with the same degree of commitment. De-politicized civil service in policy implementation is vital to consolidate the democratic nature of an organization. Having a non-partisan civil service means out of the political appointee at the top, the civil servant under him serves the government of the day. The non-political aspect of the institution relies on neutral competence and the provision of policy advice which presents options rather than priorities (Peters and Pierre, 2004).

Neutrality, in the sense of political non-partisanship in the civil service is a precondition for ensuring public servants regardless of their political orientation to be treated fairly and equitably by stressing on professional ethics, competency, and the overall merit principles. These values are important to ensure justice and public servants to be accountable for the government to deliver its policies and strategies effectively (Fenlon, n.d.). The structural modernization of public organizations, strengthening organizational capacity and introduction of new bodies with controlling roles are all pertinent factors in the formulation and implementation of government schema. To ensure these dynamics, De-politicization of the civil service provides administrative decisions to be free from political rent-seeking. The secret behind civil service Neutrality is therefore, autonomy, competency, professionalism, ethicality, harmony, equality, impartiality, responsibility and prosperity, efficiency and effectiveness, accountability and many more good symptoms (Philip, 2002). Therefore, to enhance the efficiency and fairness of the civil service, there is a need to protect the institution from direct forms of partisan control.

Civil Service Reform and the Promise for De-politicization

There is an open secret behind the CSR that the promise for de-politicization of the civil service almost in all nations worldwide. The issue of civil service professionalization and the need to strike a new balance between political and professional criteria in civil service management has been the focus of CSR agenda since the 1980s. Civil service reform is a challenging endeavor for both developed and developing countries alike. In Africa, governance was largely epitomized as employer, patronage, and authoritarian rules. Bureaucratic rationality was also compromised by high degree of centralization in decision making process (Lane, 1997). Nevertheless, by the end of 1980s, a new nature of civil service began to emerge with the political change in most developing countries to rationalize the large demands for civil service efficiency, organizational capacity and wider democratization (Bratton and Walle, 1997).

In view of realizing a comprehensive state transformation in relation to the proposals forwarded by the World Bank, similar to the other most African nations, the current Ethiopian government has embarked on manifold organizational reforms since the early days 1990s. Moreover, in 2003, extensive government restructuring was undertaken to commence a National Capacity Building Program which offered a new momentum to the civil service (Getachew, 2006).

As has been mentioned above, the traditional bureaucratic public administration was claimed and replaced because of its inefficiency and ineffectiveness. As to many writers, this was also due to lack of professionalism, poor government structure and politicization of the civil service among others. In recognition of the danger behind politicization, and the recommendation of the World Bank and IMF, many governments in the world has tried to reform their civil service to balance and separate the role of politicians and civil servants. Ethiopia is among these countries that allow the civil service autonomy as its decentralization agenda by publicizing the civil servants proclamation since the Imperial Era. However, in practice it was not free of political patronage until the Socialist Era. Constitutionally, the current Ethiopian government has allowed each region to have their own regional civil servants proclamation under the national merit Umbrella.

Civil Service Reform during the EPRDF Era

The Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), currently ruling party, comes to power after 17 years struggle for liberty and egalitarianism against the Military government. The May 1991 change of government (Socialist to Federal) was therefore a turning point for the civil service. Though, historically the initiative to CSR in Ethiopia dates back to the Menelik II Era, it was few years after the downfall of the Military government that the current Ethiopian government has conducted a continuous reform to restructure the civil service system with the intention of multiparty democracy and market driven economy (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2004). In the early days of the EPRDF Era, the reform measures were intentionally to change the ideological bureaucracy of the Derg regime (single party hegemony to multi-party system) and to recover the old civil service system in Ethiopia (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2004). During the first phase reform (1991-95), Political Measures such as ratifying the federal constitution, change of single party to multiparty democratic system, devolution of powers to the regions, appointment of Task Force to assess problems of the civil service and come up with reform suggestions in one hand and Economic Measures included changing the centrally planned economic model to market oriented model, privatization of public enterprises,

freezing an unauthorized recruitment of civil servants, redeployment and retrenchment of redundant employees, lifting the ban on salary increments on the other hand were parts of the reform measure (Tilaye, 2007).

However, as explained by AH Consulting, the first phase reforms that took place in the early days of EPRDF rule was politically motivated by aiming to root out an entrenched but articulated section of the national elite that remained from the past regime. Following the consolidation of power, the government acknowledged the deep institutional constraints to basic functions such as policy making and public service delivery. The profound organizational challenges were seen as core public management systems at federal and regional levels were hampered by outmoded civil service legislation and working systems, absence of medium term planning and budgeting framework, inefficient financial and personnel management controls, inadequacy of civil service wage and inappropriate grading systems, and poor capacity for strategic and cabinet-level decision making (AH Consulting, 2010).

Recognizing the constraints in the 1st phase, the Government embarked on a comprehensive CSR program as a second phase from 1996-2002. The reform measure at this stage was instituted following a comprehensive assessment of the civil service system. The comprehensive CSR program was therefore formulated on five major sub-programs. These are Top Management System: to reorient civil service institutions' planning management and performance on strategic management issues, HRM: to develop merit based recruitment, selection, promotion and training and results based employee performance appraisal, Expenditure Management and Control sub reform: to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure management like legal framework, budget classification system, new accounting system, medium term planning system, cash and asset management, procurement, and the financial management information system, Ethics sub reform: to develop code of ethics for civil servants and heads of public bodies, ethics education, and establishing an anti-corruption organ, and Public service delivery sub reform: to introduce best practice methods to promote efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery and ensure open/equitable treatment of clients (Getachew, 2006).

However, despite some progress, the implementation of the 2nd phase of the Ethiopian CSR in the EPRDF Era, top leaders in the civil service were not supportive and competent, low level of civil servants' performance and morale, inefficient service delivery, inappropriate utilization of public resources, and unethical practices in service delivery were of the fundamental short comings in the civil service (Adebabay, 2011). To skip from the difficulties which were observed in the second phase and the desired to improve service delivery, the government was placed greater emphasis on improving quality service delivery during the third phase which was from 2003 to date. It was since the 3rd phase that the concepts of NPM was introduced with the major objective to transform the civil service from the bureaucratic, unaccountable, inefficient and ineffective to a fair and flexible, responsible and participative, accountable and efficient, ethical and transparent civil service institutions that promotes accelerated and sustained socio-economic development to build good governance and democracy. Besides, this phase was intentionally designed to strengthen the working systems, improve organizational effectiveness and rapidly develop human resource in the public, private, civic society and higher education (Ministry of Capacity Building, 2004).

Civil Service Reform in Tigray Region

In Ethiopia, the mandate to formulate the comprehensive national CSR program was given to the Ministry of Capacity Building which currently called Civil Service Minister. Hence, the Minister sectioned the entire ongoing CSR in to five major sub-programs as discussed above. All regions in Ethiopia are expected to cascade and regionalize the entire national CSR program. Therefore, the Tigray Region CSR was reoriented with this sentiment. The legal organizational framework to implement CSR in Tigray Region was derived basically as part of the larger national CSR implementation program. All the components of national CSR programs are also parts of the Regional CSR implementation program. Like the federal, the government of Tigray Regional State devolved the mandate to Civil Service Bureau of the region to regionalize and adapt the CSR program as well as to follow up its implementation. Hence, Top Management System sub reform was intended to provide and strengthen regional strategic planning by setting pre-stated standards and objectives, enhance regional inter-organizational communication, measure and manage regional performance, develop regional structures and system for reporting, regional program and project management, managing regional value for money among others (Tigray CSR document, 2007).

In addition to this, the HRM sub reform program was instituted to create a legal regional framework that provide merit based recruitment, selection and promotion, ensure workforce training and result based performance appraisal, to improve effectiveness, efficiency and productivity of the civil service, to ensure affordability and sustainability of the civil service, to develop and introduce more efficient HRM systems, procedures and manuals at regional level, to organize and utilize HRM information system, to assist regional and lower tier government institutions in the region. Likewise, the Tigray Region Expenditure Management and Control sub reform was established to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure management intentionally to have a legal regional framework, budget classification system, new accounting system, medium

term regional planning system, regional cash and asset management, ensuring regional procurement system, and the financial management information system. On the other hand, the Public Service Delivery sub reform program was determined to promote effective and efficient regional service delivery and to ensure open and fair treatments of customers. However, Ethics sub reform was a deliberately acquired section to develop the code of conducts at regional level for civil servants and heads of public officials, to provide ethics education, and to launch an anticorruption organ (Tigray CSR document, 2007).

As part of the administrative reform, the Ethiopian district level decentralization discloses the five levels of government structure (Federal, Regional, Zonal, Woreda and Kebele). In Tigray Region, unlike Amhara, Oromia and SNNPs regional state, the Zone administrations lack some administrative structures. The zone administrative system in Tigray is organized without elected councils and at the same time it lacks the lower tier of all Bureaus at zonal level. Nevertheless, the Zones are functional for some mandate given by the regional government as they have executive committees and other assistances of the zone administrators. However, the Woredas and Kebeles are considered as essential elements of government ladder and by law, these levels of regional government have elected councils and executive committees that are responsible for local governance, provision of public services and socio-economic developments. Besides, in all Woredas there are sector offices equivalent to the regional Bureaus which are very crucial to implement the CSR.

Results and Analysis

Public management as a discipline acknowledges the knowledge and noble contributions of civil servants to development and intensification of public interest. In a contrary, the civil service is often blamed for its insufficient response to changes in the priorities of political leadership. According to Peters and Pierre (2004), the civil service systems have some level of political involvement by upholding the merit foundation. This notion is observed in Ethiopia in general and in Tigray Region in particular. In Tigray, as clearly stated in the Proclamation for Disclosure and Registration of Assets No. 198/2011, both political appointment at the top and the merit system have a legal foundation. The political appointment in the region helps the government of the day to translate policies created by elected officials into agency specific details so that they can be implemented. In addition to that, they are mandated to oversee the execution of policy to ensure that the results match the expected outcomes. As affirmed by Pashaj (2010), politically appointed officials assist to secure the chain of accountability.

The Establishment of an Autonomous Civil Service Institution in Tigray

As an inception the public interest first modal and a denial to centralization and politicized civil service, governments in different parts of the world have been conducting their administrative reform and particularly the CSR to decentralize and depoliticize the HRM. Many literatures pointed out that, the main objective of the CSR was/is to modify, repair or transform the public service institutions. The CSR in Ethiopia is therefore typically a supporting strategy for the administrative decentralization. It was with this intention that, the Ethiopian government has decentralized the civil service not as an end in itself but in need of well-organized, autonomous, neutral, competent and motivated staff, better service and to manage public resource efficiently among others (CSR main document, 2004).

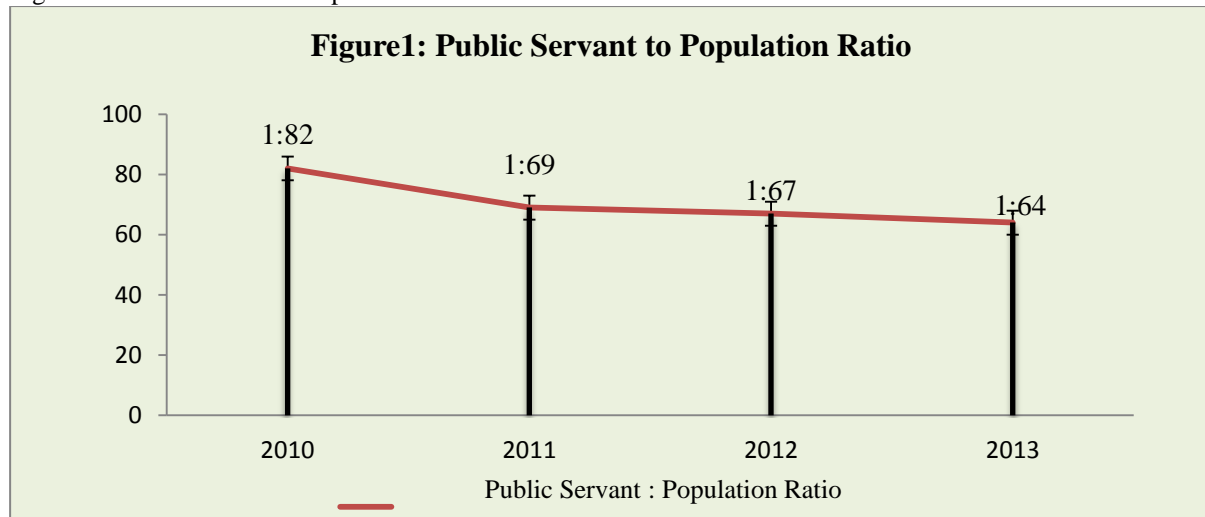
The orientation of the Ethiopian CSR was a top agenda of the EPRDF government since 1991. The HRM sub reform was of the vigorous ingredients of the larger CSR in Ethiopia in general and that of Tigray region's in particular. One of the major objectives of the HRM sub reform in Tigray was to create a legal framework both at regional and Woreda level. For this reason, the government of Tigray regional state has established a legal framework for the civil service under its jurisdiction. One of the vital aspects of decentralization is the devolution of power. With this in mind, the power to recruitment, selection, promotion, assignment, grievance hearing and inspection as well as transfer within the Woreda and human resource development through short, medium and long term trainings were given to the civil service Bureau and the Woreda civil service offices under the Tigray civil servants' proclamation No 189/2010.

In Tigray Region, HRM is considered as the fundamental resource to implement strategically the CSR. This vital resource fixes the implementation of government policies and strategies, and the CSRs. The regional government deems that, proper management of this vital resource is essential to sustain socio-economic development of the region, widen democratization and execution of laws. Hence, the human resource in Tigray is responsible for the implementation of any policies and strategies of the regional government.

As a stamina to implement the CSR effectively, both the federal and regional civil service was established with merit based HRM. The Federal Civil Servants' Proclamation No. 515/2006 in general and the Tigray Civil Servants' Proclamation No 189/2010 in particular clearly stated the merit principles. The merit based HRM statement declares recruitment and selection as well as promotion to be on merit after fair and open competition, to treat staffs and applicants fairly and equitably, to provide equal pay for equal work and reward first-rate performance, to maintain high standards of integrity to ensure public interest, to manage civil servants efficiently and effectively, to retain or separate civil servants on the basis of their performances, to educate and

train staff and to protect employees from improper political influence among others. The district level decentralization program and the CSR in Tigray National RegionState has brought service closer to the people. The civil service structure of the region reaches up to kebelelevel particularly the major government sectors like health, agriculture, education and civil service office among others. Figure 1 below indicates the declination in proportion through time which means service is become closer to the local people.

Figure 1. Public Servant to Population Ratio



Source:Tigray CSB HRM Department (2013).

However, despite such improvements, most of the respondents revealed that, the merit based HRM in Tigray Region is more functional in drafting regional Proclamations, Rules, Regulations and Guidelines than implementing accordingly. During the implementation of the intended merit principles, there exist unnecessary political meddling in recruitment, selection and promotion, ill networking in appointment, poor rewarding system, lack of skill gap analysis, politicization of the civil service and lack of clearly stated timeframe in monitoring and evaluations were identified as of the major challenging factors of HRM. The negative pressure in HRM can have direct impact on ineffective CSR implementation of the region. This is because civil servants are of the vital assets of it.

The Promise for De-Politicization of the Civil Service in Tigray

Civil service de-politicization is the inspiring of civil service organizations through merit based HRM and avoiding unnecessary political dogmatism. The foundation of the Ethiopian CSR was intentionally to restructure the civil service organization to skip from having a politicized civil service taking lessons from the Socialist Era. As asserted by Pushkar (n.d), apart from some exemptions, politicized civil service is a symptom of anarchism, it drives the nation towards failure, cause organizational conflict and impede the socio-economic and political development process, amplify corrupt practices and power maltreating. Furthermore, a Politicized civil service kills citizen's expectation and it badlyattacks professionalism (Peters and Pierre, 2004). Recognizing this scenario, in Ethiopia, there is a clearly defined proposition that publicize civil service de-politicization. Both the Federal and Regional civil servants' proclamation pronounced that, any civil servant shall be loyal to the public and the Constitution and devote his whole energy and ability to the service of the public. This sentiment was introduced because of the politicized civil service failed to fulfill public interest during the previous regimes.

The civil service experience in Tigray Region was bear-out that, a politicized civil service lacks the essential characters and practical capability for that it stands for. Thus, to make the civil service more successful, transparent, service-oriented and legally responsible, De-politicization of the civil service in Ethiopia as well as in Tigray was urgently internalized to neutralize the civil service from politicization after the down-fail of the Derg regime. Human resource management is of the vital aspects of CSR implementation at any circumstance. For this reason, the proclamation for Disclosure and Registration of Assets No. 198/2011 evidently stated that, the Government of Tigray has established a legal foundation both for political appointment and the merit system. However, as summarized in Table1 below, in the promise to practice to have a neutral policy implementer civil service, there observed unnecessary political interference against the merit based HRM in the Region. Based on this study finding, 34.7% of the respondents appreciated the problem that there is a broken promise of de-politicization. 45.9% of the respondents agreed that there was not free of this symptom because it indicated the

somewhat neutral rejoinder. Of which only 19.4% of the respondents were supported that the civil service was a neutral policy implementer.

Table 1. Promise for Practicing De-Politicization of the civil service

		Civil Service De-Politicization			Total
		It is Neutral policy Implementer	It is Somewhat Neutral	There is a Broken Promise of De-Politicization	
Male	Count	31	98	63	192
	%	16.1%	51.0%	32.8%	100.0%
Female	Count	26	37	39	102
	%	25.5%	36.3%	38.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	57	135	102	294
	%	19.4%	45.9%	34.7%	100.0%

Table 1. above clearly indicated that in comparison to the Male to Female response, large numbers of Female respondents (38.2%) were indicated the merit practice in Tigray was violated due to the broken promise for de-politicization of the civil service. However, 51% of the Male participants were suggested their observation by responding the Tigray civil service was somewhat neutral in government policy implementation. The somewhat assumption of the Male respondents shows that, the Tigray civil service was not free from politicization. Some scholars assert that the fruitfulness of democratic governance is directly proportional to the productivity of the civil service. Hence, it is important to have a de-politicized civil service for better democratic governance. The fact that, political appointment helps the government of the day to pursue policies into sector specific for implementation and oversee the execution of policy to ensure the expected outcome is pronounced. However, there is a need to distinct politicization in the partisan sense and politicization for tight control over the civil service by elected officials.

By law, in the Tigray civil service organizations, political appointees are the Bureau head and vice head, Woreda office head and vice head and their equivalents to control the bureaucracy and implement government policy as effective as possible. However, in explaining the question why is politicization in the civil service? Most respondents of the sample Woredas and Sub Cities reflected that, it was a deliberate action to gain political support by controlling the bureaucracy. They also stated as no choice rather than joining the trend. Because, to hold the coordinator positions in local agriculture and rural development programs, local health centers, Kebele managers, and the like, you are supposed to be a party member. Nevertheless, to be primary or high school directors you need to pass an entrance exam at the first stage but after you hold that position you are also expected to be a party member if you were not because you have double task to lead the school and to influence the nonparty members to join partisanship. Besides, the contributors added that, a competent nonpartisan civil servant might not acquire those positions. Moreover, the process coordinators at the Woreda level are as well assigned only if they are party members. Some of the respondents also confirmed that as there was no competition even within the party members to hold those position even though it is not expected to so and someone who is the right-hand for the appointer is picked and appointed. This all is, not to privilege all the party loyalists but to those who are networked with individual beneficiary officials to gain support and defend for official's poor performance to stay in an office. This approach is danger not only for the violation of merit principles but also to the entire CSR implementation and the political system of the government.

The doctrine for de-politicization comes with the concepts of merit system. The NPM revolution also consolidated the de-politicization agenda because the NPM movement was considered as a paradigm shift from autocracy to democracy creating political pluralism (Polidano, 2001). This way of thinking provides high quality services, decentralize public organizations to reduce central agency control, measure and reward both group and individual performance, capacitate managers in human resource and support with technology to meet their expected outcome and make room for competition and build open mindedness in the civil service serve in accordance with targeted standards. The theory for NPM is about getting things done better (Ewalt, 2001). As an introduction of the NPM discipline, creating competent professionals and measuring and rewarding for first rated performer was of the main objectives of the Ethiopian and that of Tigray's CSR. With this in mind, respondents were asked about the merit based promotion system based on civil service competency and Table 2a. depicts this scenario.

Table 2a. Merit based promotion is applied by using civil servants Competency

		Merit based promotion on Competency				Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Male	Count	20	66	90	16	192
	% within Sex	10.4%	34.4%	46.9%	8.3%	100.0%
Female	Count	9	50	33	10	102
	% within Sex	8.8%	49.0%	32.4%	9.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	29	116	123	26	294
	% within Sex	9.9%	39.5%	41.8%	8.8%	100.0%

Table 2b. Merit based promotion (Chi-Square Tests Result)

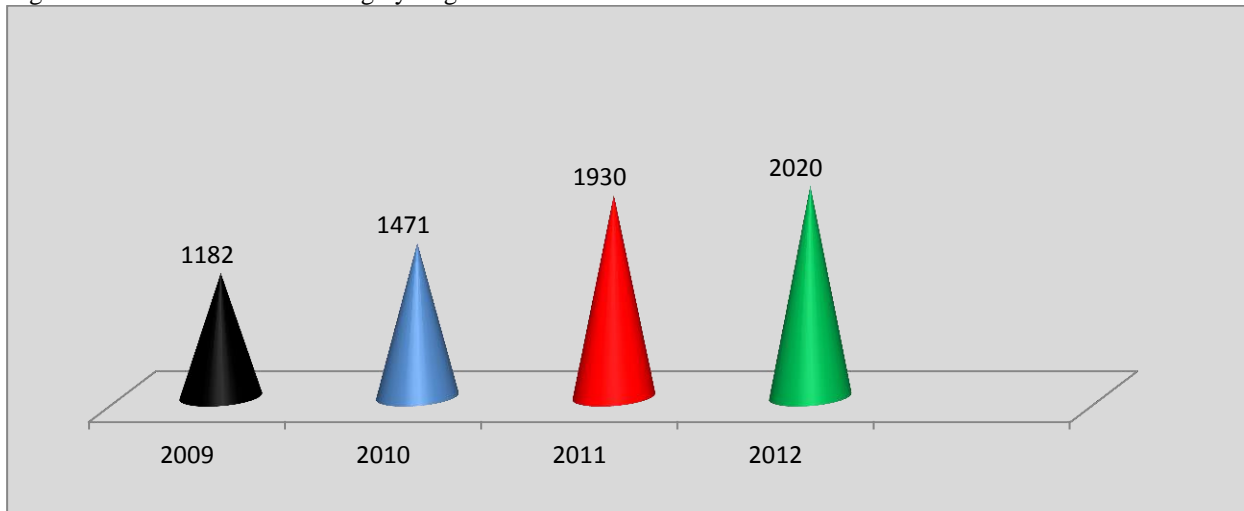
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.313 ^a	3	.063
Likelihood Ratio	7.344	3	.062
N of Valid Cases	294		

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5.
- b. The minimum expected count is 9.02.

As indicated in Table 2b. above, though civil servants merit based promotion is expected on the bases of their relative competence in Tigray region the result showed a different outcome. This was because the acceptance (50.6%) and rejection (49.4%) rate of the respondents on the issue were almost identical. The problem of civil service promotion based on their competency was also higher in Female civil servants. 49% of the female respondents disagree compared to 46.9% of the male respondents which agreed on the merit based promotion that was applied on the bases of civil servants competency. Civil service neutrality shades light that the neutral competence to select and recruit as well as promote the civil servant helps to have a motivated workforce so as to implement effectively government policies and the CSR. The failure in doing so is compromising not only the civil service de-politicization but also the effective implementation government policy. The Chi-Square test also indicated that, the Pearson chi-square value 7.3, with a P-value of 0.063. Hence, we reject these odds as it was statistically insignificant and there was no relationship between the application of merit based promotion in both sexes of civil servants and their competency. Both sexes were more likely challenged by lack of merit based promotion on the bases of their competence.

Unlike its practice, the Regional government has clearly stated the legal ground to control the bureaucracy through the legal base of merit based HRM to implement its policy and strategy effectively. The progress in this way was also impressive. To address the public interest, the government has also justified the 'right size' and forms of civil service as a fundamental element to implement the CSR of the Region. As in many literatures, there is no an internationally accepted spectrum of right size for the civil service. The size is determined by the needs of the government. With this respect, the Ethiopian civil services as well as the Tigray's Region are limited by rules and regulations which are defined in the national and regional civil servants proclamation. Based on our secondary data, Figure 2 and 3 below depicts that, the civil servants and politically appointed officials increment through time at a relatively acceptable proportionality rate. The Neutrality Model shades light to leave few spaces at the top for political appointment and leaving the ground for technocrats to moderate the bureaucracy.

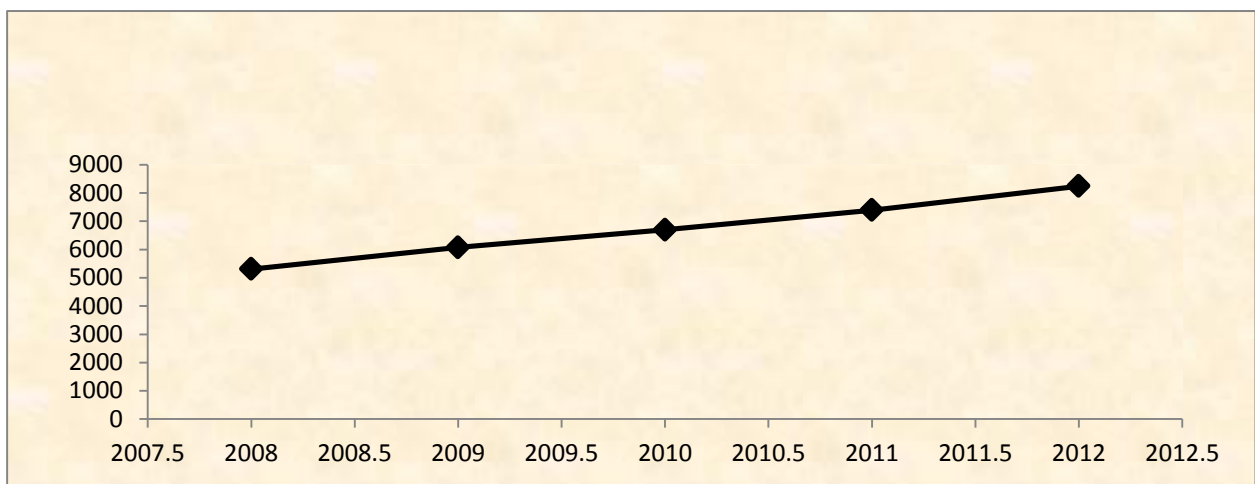
Figure 2. Civil Servants of the Tigray Region



Source: Tigray CSB HRM Department (2013)

However, the paradox is that, while this is the legal ground to political appointment to control the bureaucracy, as discussed above, the imposition of political criteria to appoint in merit position was the symptom for lack of civil service neutrality in the region. If continued, this will frustrate the civil servant to run their real position which intern leads to weaken the merit based HRM and poor performance to implement the CSR. In Tigray, political affiliation in the civil service seems a deep root practice. Figure 4 below illustrates that, the periodical increments of party loyalists in the sense of partisan membership.

Figure 4. Trends of Partisan Membership



Source: TPLF Offices of All Sample Woredas and Sub Cities (2013)

Most of the interviewee and focus group discussants were disclosed that politicians are the policy decision makers and civil servants are appointed and promoted on the merit based HRM rather than on the basis of party affiliation. Even though, they negatively claimed the application of merit system and discussed in most civil service organizations, majority of the civil servants are member of the ruling party (TPLF). The government intention is having a large number of party member civil servants is encompassing a more committed employee that it has. Nonetheless, the party member civil servants have double accountability directly to their institution and the party office. The trouble was, though civil servants are expected to serve the public at minimum eight hours a day, during working time, the party office call its member for Gemgam (evaluation) and in the meantime there happened two fun dramas. One is, when service users come to an office seeking urgent response but no one can serve and treat them in the office. On the other side, as soon as the party loyalists have their chair in the

assembly room, the nonparty members leave their office and enjoy the working time as a weekend. Public time value is violated by partisan affiliation followed by lack of accountability.

The overall discussion about neutrality of the civil service manifests, politicization to control bureaucracy is viewed as a significant departure from the proper application of merit criteria. The Government of Tigray National Regional State in its Proclamation for Disclosure and Registration of Assets No 189/2011 clearly stated that, as few positions at the top are left for political appointments to enable the government of the day to achieve the expected policy outcomes that politicians were elected to implement. The malpractice in de-politicizing of civil service in Tigray, however, lead to deep rooted politicized actions which undermines the merit positions of the civil servants.

Challenges of Civil Service De-Politicization in Tigray Region

In Tigray, as of the national agenda to overcome the pitiful in the civil service, reforms were taken place as a mechanism to restructure and modify the civil service systems. Nonetheless, whatever smart policies, strategies, rules, regulations and proclamations, if not properly practiced and implemented, the whitepaper of such government directives cannot be fruitful. In addition to the above discussions, respondents were asked to describe their observation about the most practical challenges of civil service de-politicization. Table 3a below illustrates the respondent's opinion regarding the most practical challenge of Civil Service De-politicization.

Table 3a. The Most Practical Challenge of Civil Service De-politicization

		Challenged of Civil Service De-Politicization					Total
		Unnecessary Political Interference	Ill networking in the civil service	Poor Accountability	Poor over sighting from above	Poor separation of power	
Male	Count	75	24	26	21	46	192
	%	39.1%	12.5%	13.5%	10.9%	24.0%	100.0%
Female	Count	42	11	10	7	32	102
	%	41.2%	9.8%	10.8%	6.9%	31.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	117	35	36	28	78	294
	%	39.8%	11.9%	12.2%	9.5%	26.5%	100.0%

Table 3b. The Most Practical Challenge of Civil Service De-politicization (Chi-square Test)

Chi-square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.541 ^a	4	.472
Likelihood Ratio	3.601	4	.463
N of Valid Cases	294		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.71.

Table 3b. above indicated that, unnecessary political interference (39.8%), poor separation of power (26.5%) and poor accountability(12.2%) were of the most practical challenges of civil service de-politicization respectively in Tigray region. Both male and female respondents rated these problems at a relatively same rate from one to three. The Chi-Square test also indicates that the Pearson chi-square value is 3.54 and a P-value is 0.472. This means that it was statistically significant and there was a relationship between the sex of civil servants and the most practical challenges of de-politicization they faced. Both sexes were more likely challenged by unnecessary political interference, ill networking in the civil service, poor accountability system, poor over sighting from above and poor separation of power in the civil service.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian government as well as the Tigray Region has constitutionally granted a wider-room for civil service de-politicization. The legal foundation of the Ethiopian civil service is also deep rooted and smartly justified in the federal and regional civil servants proclamations. Furthermore, the district level decentralization opened a door for the creation of autonomous civil service institutions not only at Region and Woreda level but also at Kebele level. The other fertilecondition for civil service de-politicization is the institutionalization of HRM sub reform as part of the entire CSRprogram. The government act in this regard was by large impressive. However, as illustrated in the discussion, the overall promise to practice the civil service de-politicization was

compromised by unnecessary political interference among others. Hence, the following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis.

First, the civil service institutional framework in Tigray was well framed independently from Civil Service Bureau at regional level to Civil Service Office at Woredas/sub cities and down to the Kebeles at grass-root level. This helps to empower local people to participate in local development agendas and to make public service closer to the local community. However, regardless of the institutional framework in place, the promise to make the civil service a neutral policy implementer in Tigray region was highly inhibited by unnecessary political interference, poor separation of power, poor accountability system, ill networking in the civil service and poor oversight from above.

Second, civil service politicization is an old practice which by any means never fits to modern thinking, because of the potential danger that politicization undermines merit based employment and promotion, jeopardizes bureaucratic integrity, and it harmfully affects the professional quality of civil servants and its decision making processes (Pashaj, 2010). For that matter, the current Ethiopian government has experienced the danger of politicization from the previous regimes. However, in Tigray, there was observed a pendulum in separation of power politics. On the one hand, interest to create an autonomous civil service, on the other hand, the need to tightly control the civil services through party loyalists were observed.

Third, the merit principles more concisely dictate human resource managers to recruit and promote the most competent professionals. However, the civil service in Tigray is still a victim of that old practice of politicization. Politically appointed officials are exploiting the civil service to extract merit demanding positions for their potential partisans. The hand-pick and grant appointment for someone without competition and the imposition of political criteria to appoint in merit position was the symptom for lack of civil service neutrality in the region. Such symptoms generated from the need to control the bureaucracy giving privilege to party members. Thus, the assignment given to the civil service and other forms of merit principles were disturbed by the party loyalists. If continued, this will frustrate the civil servant to run their real position which in turn leads to weaken the merit based HRM.

Fourth, the doctrine for separation of power is clearly defined constitutionally in Ethiopia and that of Tigray region. The regional government has the three arms of government (legislature, executive and judiciary) at Regional, Woreda and Kebele level. Though limitation observed in practice, these government arms are functional. The problem was that, the absence of clear cut limits that separate the administrative government system and the role of the party system. The government administrative structure and the party office are placed top-down in parallel. The parallel structural assignment was intentionally to separate the role and function of the two. For that reason, the administrative power spectrum is stated on the basis of the three arms of government however in practice, the civil service regulatory role was at most dictated by party system than the government bureaucratic rule. If continued this overlapping bureaucratic mandate, the notion separation of power is the cornerstone of democratic governance will be compromised and dissatisfaction of civil servants that the government will have.

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