

## RECENT TRENDS IN THE CAREER SERVICE IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES\*

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It would be grossly pretentious to claim that recent trends in the career service on European countries could be adequately sketched in 15 or 20 pages. Civil service systems in European countries differ considerably. In principles trends can only be properly understood in the context of the development of each system and the particular socio-political situation of the various countries: For instance, what may be considered in one country as a move towards a high degree of politicisation of the civil service may in an other country be seen as a low level of politicisation. A short survey can, therefore, do not justice to the variety of situations and trends in the various countries nor to the backgrounds of those trends. It is also impossible to describe trends which are typical for one particular country, such as the efforts in the Federal Republic of Germany to unify the public service statutes.

It appears, however, that in spite of the differences in the civil service systems and in local conditions, there are several trends which are common to a number of countries, although their effects may differ. It is on these common trends that the emphasis will be placed in this paper.

There are three major aspects of the public service which deserve attention. In the first place the politicisation of the public service has been considered one of the most striking trends as well as a hot issue for public debate in recent decades (chapter I). Secondly the role of the public service with regard to the society and the citizen has undergone gradual changes (chapter II). And finally there is a wide range of elements of personnel policies and practices which deserve attention (chapter III).

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The information in this article will be limited mainly to Western and Northern European countries. East European countries are not included in this paper. I should add that information on trends in the career is often scant and very dispersed. Moreover information is very uneven, and in many cases incomparable among countries.

## 1. THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM

### 1.1. *The traditional bureaucratic model*

Whatever may be said about the realistic quality of the Weberian model of bureaucracy – coined by himself as an ideal model – many elements of it can be traced in the traditional public bureaucracies in European countries. And for a long period these elements served as norms for a proper public bureaucracy. That there often existed a gap between norm and reality was in a sense immaterial.

The Westminster model is, in its own way, representative of the Weberian model: loyalty (to the Cabinet or Minister), proficiency in the administration, anonymity, and sacrifice of some political rights, in return for permanency in office, adequate remuneration and pension.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the neutral civil servant was born.

In countries on the European Continent much of these features could be found in public bureaucracies with the exception, in a number of cases, of the constitutional or legal right to express political views as a citizen.<sup>2</sup> Besides, on the European Continent the legal context of the Civil Service (or in French *«la fonction publique»*) has long been considered the principal set of norms and rules by which the public servant's conduct was determined. This was a logical consequence of the *«Rechtstaat»* notion, and of the concept of the public service being the instrument for the application and enforcement of rules. Very little attention was given to rule making as a function of the public servant, this area being considered to belong almost exclusively to political bodies – although undeniably public servants became increasingly involved in the actual preparation of laws.

On the other side of the Atlantic Woodrow Wilson initiated his own version of the demarcation of tasks or roles of political organs and the public service, the politics-administration dichotomy, as a normative model. It was a reaction to the prevailing spoil system in the USA and the intensive interference of politics in the administration. In fact it has also been used as an

analytic model.

These views on the relationship between politics and administration lead to the norms that on the one side the civil servant, as such, should not be involved in politics, be neutral and loyal to his political masters: and on the other side political interference by ministers, members of Parliament or political parties with the work of civil servants was considered as a degeneration of the public service.<sup>3</sup> Because of their neutral position (higher) civil servants could constitute the element of continuity and permanence in administration. In all European countries this has been stated as a primary role of the higher civil service. In this respect the US system is markedly different.

The concept of neutrality could, however, lead to an ambivalent situation, as was stated for France, although it occurs undoubtedly in other countries as well. On the other hand, civil servants could hide between the (elected) political organs. On the other hand they have a certain degree of autonomy or discretion as a result of their neutrality position; this enables them to give a certain priority to their own views.<sup>4</sup> It stands to reason that the degree in which they can, depends partly on the degree of stability of the government concerned.

### *1.2. Changes in views on and practice of the public service*

All these models have gradually been undermined, as descriptive-analytical models as well as normative models. Social science research has revealed that the functioning of the public bureaucracy, the civil service (or »la fonction publique« in France, or the collectivity of »state administrative officials« in the so-called socialist states) is determined largely by other group and individual norms, values and facts. Studies of public policy and decision making have made it clear that public servants are, and even should be, strongly involved in policy making.

Although many civil servants believe, rightly or wrongly, in the ideal of neutrality and deny that their own values, norms and political views affect their behaviour and way of performing their office, there is a general awareness and evidence that civil servants do play an important role in policy and decision making. Their role in the governmental and political system is therefore now different than it has long been conceived.

In actual fact a certain group of civil servants have therefore changed from instruments of political organs to an integrated part of the governmental and political system.<sup>5</sup> This may be more strongly felt in some countries than in

others. Evidently this development has a considerable effect on the career service, which is to a large degree based on the traditional models.

There are a number of causes of this trend that moves away from the traditional model. In the first place, the civil service is the (intermediary) source of expertise and knowledge for political decision making organs. It is the holder of information on which policy proposals and policy making are based. This puts civil servants in a very strong position *viz à viz* their ministers, the Cabinet and Parliament. It is one of the reasons for their becoming a »fourth power« in the governmental and political powerstructure. Control over the bureaucracy by the political organs has therefore become difficult and weakened. The growth of semi-autonomous bodies, »quangos«, »organisations parastatales«, public corporations and public enterprises has reinforced this trend. They are mostly only marginally controlled by the political organ.

The powerful position of the higher public service, in particular, is further strengthened by the fact that *coordination* of policy proposals which are the result of elaborate coordinative activity of civil servants from different organisational units of government are for ministers and Parliament hard to change. This is even more so if there has been an intensive consultation by civil servants with societal groups.

This brings me to a second cause of shifts in the position of civil servants; Their frequent contacts outside the administration, with interest groups, citizens and outside experts, and with political parties. These features will be treated later. It leads to a different role performance and probably role perception by public servants, which is contrary to the traditional model. This may put the concept of career civil servants under pressure. Closely related to this development is the widespread feeling among public servants that they cannot and should not be value-free. In this line of thought de-personalisation, or in French, the much debated concept of »dé-ontologie«,<sup>6</sup> cannot exist, and should not be. The young Turks in American public administration of the late 60-ies, proclaimed that civil servants should have policy, and thus in fact political, views, and that they should aim at realizing them.<sup>7</sup> Although European public administration systems differ considerably from the USA, similar trends can be found in European countries. The right to have political views, and, in one's role as a civil servant, make efforts to realize one's own socio-political objectives gives the civil servant even more clearly and patently an active role in the political system. Politicisation of the civil service is an almost natural consequence of it as it invites the conclusions that political masters will have to recruit their closer collaborations among persons (from inside or outside the bureaucracy) who hold similar beliefs, values and possibly interests.<sup>8</sup>

It is in these two areas, the linkages with politics and linkages with society, that important developments have occurred in European countries. They will therefore receive special attention.

There is one element of the traditional model which seems yet in general to be systematically maintained, namely the ministerial responsibility. This is deeply rooted in constitutional thinking and in political philosophy of western democracies. And it is an essential element of the traditional model of the career service. However in reality, also this element of the traditional model seems to be on the decline, although formally it is still maintained. Increasingly in a number of countries higher civil servants give public statements on policies. This is to some degrees the result of a different view of civil servants on their role in society and the political system in general, and of their responsibilities. But it also goes hand in hand with politicisation of the public service. Both encouraged the trend that (higher) civil servants make public statements on policies, including statements which are contrary to those of their own ministers.

Politicisation entails that the civil servants become more of a political advisor and collaborator of the minister. He thus becomes more clearly responsible for policy making and its effects. This has a consequence that, in certain cases he should be answerable for «his» policies to political organs and the public. Hand in hand with this goes that new ministers are dismissing higher civil servants.

All these developments have a considerable effect on the nature of the career service. In a number of European countries there is another noteworthy development. That is growing bureaucratic element in elected bodies. This leads observers to state that there exists a *mutual* penetration between the public service and political organs.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. *Politicisation of the Public Service*

Politicisation of the public service is one of the most striking development in public personnel affairs since 1945. It was one of the responses of political organs, and specially governments or cabinets to the growing power of bureaucracy, in an attempt to regain political control. Two aspects of this issue will be discussed.

#### 1.3.1. *Political appointments*

The most widespread trend is clearly that towards political or party political

appointments. It means in more than one sense a breakdown of the basic principles of the traditional concept of bureaucracy. On one hand, experience and research had taught that the concept of pure loyalty to political masters is not realized in many cases. On the other hand, ministers and cabinets were frustrated by the resistance or lack of motivation of (higher) civil servants regarding the policies advocated by the political leadership. This has been felt in particular after a change of the ruling party or coalition. Top civil servants were often considered to be, and in fact sometimes were, a main impediment for developing and implementing new policies. Only the appointment of persons from a Minister's own political party, or at least persons who would support the Minister's views and policies, would remove this obstacle. There were, however, several other reasons for political appointments; people who are active in the party or who have rendered important services to a minister, may be appointed. Furthermore political parties may wish to have a certain control over policies, from within the bureaucracy. Finally, there may be the motive of a »fair« distribution of important positions among the main political parties.

By and large three types of politicisations in the form of political appointments may be distinguished. In various countries one can, however, observe a combination of different types.

a. Political appointments as a deviation from the general accepted system of the »neutral« public service

In this case the image of a neutral public service is by and large maintained, at least formally. The United Kingdom is perhaps the most outspoken example. There, contrary to most other countries, the civil service system, its recruitment and promotion system reduce the possibilities of political appointments. Nevertheless, specially during the Thatcher period, there has been an increasing number of appointments which were inspired in a general sense by politics. The Netherlands is another example, but also in that country there has been a tendency among ministers to appoint one or more political advisors and in some cases to have persons appointed to top posts who share similar political and societal views. In fact, in countries belonging to this type politicisation concerns specially top positions. In some countries even one post is formally reserved for a political appointment. In Germany and Sweden the function of the state-secretary in each ministry is a political post.

The phenomenon of political appointments is in fact particularly evident at the highest echelons of the bureaucratic hierarchy. In the United Kingdom there is for the very senior levels a clear interest on the part of the Prime Minister who is normally consulted.<sup>10</sup> However, apart from temporary per-

sonal aides to ministers, there would be hardly any direct nominees from a political party or other outside groups.<sup>11</sup>

A somewhat similar situation exists in France. In this country recruitment and promotion is highly influenced by the system of the *École Nationale d'Administration* and the «grand corps», an elite school and elite corps of civil servants. The President of the Republic may have a considerable influence on appointments of top civil servants, and select them partly on the basis of their (party) political affiliations. Thus, with a change of government appointments of top civil servants have taken place in many ministries which were inspired by political affiliations. Under President Mitterand the role of the President in appointments has increased. On the other hand Prime Ministers (who all belonged to the public service) have often selected their top civil servants from their former close collaborators in the public service.<sup>12</sup> Most members of the Prime Minister's Cabinets deny, however, that they have a clear common political orientation; and few of them have followed a political career.

In both United Kingdom and France the recruitment of semi-political appointees for the higher level posts takes mainly place from the public service itself and only seldom from outside. In France officials who have to leave their post after a change of their Minister, are returning to their former department or placed in another position in the public service.

A higher degree of true party-political appointments can be found in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Sweden. In the latter country two categories of public posts are officially recognized as political appointments, the state secretaries («chief political officers») of the ministries as well as the information secretaries. These are closely linked with the machinery of the party, or parties in power.<sup>13</sup> However, it was clear that after many decades of socialist rule, many more civil servants had a background in party political work. The majority of top administrators were replaced after 1976 when the socialists were no more in power. The great majority of these vacancies were filled through internal recruitment. There is no reason to assume that the changes were the result of a political purge.<sup>14</sup>

For Germany it is stated that politicisation has been spreading considerably.<sup>15</sup> The recognition, in the Federal statute, of political appointments of state secretaries and ministerial directors is justified by the very reason that ministers should have top civil servants who are in agreement with the fundamental opinions of the Government. However, also the lower levels of the bureaucracy have been increasingly politicized. It has proved to be difficult to limit political influence in appointments by legislation.<sup>16</sup> The participation of personnel councils is, as also in Sweden, a more effective

instrument for limiting political factor in appointments and promotions. Nevertheless, the possibility of external recruitment which the Federal Statute of Germany provides for is heavily used for party political appointments. In making their appointments below the level of state secretary, Ministers are in fact strongly tied to their party for appointments to essential political functions. The main parties have their own appointment committees. This procedure, which is called »party-book administration», has resulted in a high degree of identification of high civil servants with the various political parties.<sup>17</sup> In fact one may conclude that the Federal Republic of Germany is moving towards the third type, mentioned under c.

#### b. Ministerial Cabinets

Ministerial cabinets exist in a number of European countries such as Belgium, France and Italy. Their main purpose is to provide ministers with a small group of close collaborators with similar political views, or at least the staff of the cabinets change with incoming ministers.

The practice of recruiting staff of ministerial cabinets differs among countries. Often, if not mostly, they are recruited outside the normal procedures of recruitment; and often the normal requirements for qualifications are waved. In Belgium the origin of the system was, in fact, the desire of ministers to have a group of young assistants coming from outside the administration, either directly from universities, or from political parties. The minister is free to choose the members of his cabinet. In recent decades, however, many of the issues of policy making have become so complex and specialized that ministers tend to recruit members of their cabinets more and more from the civil service itself.<sup>18</sup> When a new minister wants to change the composition of his cabinet, its members can return to their original departments or are placed in semi-public organisations.

In fact, the Belgian system has thus become similar to the French system according to which traditionally most members of ministerial have been recruited from the »fonction publique». The difference with normal civil service thus is that the formal criteria for the recruitment are not applicable, and secondly that the composition of this part of the ministerial personnel is changing more rapidly, according to the political affiliation of the minister concerned.

#### c. Politicisation of the public service as a principle

The word »principle» should not only be conceived in legal terms, but also as a politico-administrative culture. In Belgium, for instance, although there are strict legal rules for recruitment and promotion (see section IV), the

informal procedures of the socio-political reality are at least as important as, unwritten, rule.

Politicisation of the public service in Belgium has become an integral part of the public service, although the degree of politicisation differs among ministries; in Finance and Foreign Affairs it is low, in the Minister of Education high.<sup>19</sup> In Belgium politicisation takes the form of a distribution of jobs in the public service among the parties of the coalition government or rather among the three major political parties (which has been complicated recently as result of the division of the country into three partly autonomous language regions). The documents in which these arguments on distribution are laid down, remain confidential. It is, though, a well known fact that the ministers individually, or the Council of Ministers, form an unofficial network where decisions on the distribution are worked out. Under recent governments an interparty working group was established in the Cabinet of the Prime Minister which holds the string of job allocations and assures a system of distribution.<sup>20</sup> It would, however, be wrong to allude here only to political parties as these are in close touch with and are influenced by interests groups. These exercise an indirect influence on the distribution and appointments. Particularly influential among them are trade-unions, and specially civil servants unions.

Other countries where traditionally there has been a strong element of politicisation of the civil service are Austria and Finland. In Finland<sup>21</sup> party politics in appointments has increased particularly from the 60-ies on. There is a trend towards giving posts in state administration to the members and supporters of one's own party, partly as rewards for party service, but mainly in order to strengthen the party's influence on administration. Although this was originally a practice for appointments to the higher posts in the administration, the phenomenon has been spreading to lower levels of the hierarchy of administration. In Finland, also, efforts are made to come to an agreement on distribution of higher posts among parties, a »fair« distribution in what is called government jobs package deals. Under this device a large number of posts to be filled are decided upon at the same time in the Council of State, enabling parties in the government coalition to agree among themselves about the distribution of those posts.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes even new posts are created in order to make the balance more perfect.<sup>23</sup> The main political parties have set up specialized organs (or appointed persons) to prepare proposals regarding appointments.<sup>24</sup>

As was suggested earlier the Federal Republic of Germany seems to be moving more and more in the direction of this type of politicisation of its bureaucracy.

### 1.3.2. *Linkages between public servants and political parties*

The question of the acceptability or rejection of linkages between civil servants and political parties is closely related with politicisation. In the United Kingdom where politicisation takes mainly the form of appointments in line with the current prevailing political tides, there would be hardly nominees of political parties.<sup>25</sup> Here direct linkages use to be very rare, but for temporary personal aids to a minister. In some other countries, such as France and Netherlands, overt linkages between civil servants and political parties are also limited.

In many countries, however, the increasing politicisation of the public service has resulted in strong linkages between public servants and political parties. The influence between them is mutual.

On the one hand political parties exercise influence on ministerial policies through party members. They have access to governmental policy making and implementation through their »representatives« in the bureaucracy. This is particularly true in those cases where political parties as such are actively involved in appointments as is the case in Austria, Belgium, Finland and Germany. In Germany, for instance, there exist within ministries, besides the official hierarchy, civil servant groups of the big parties. These groups consult frequently with their respective Parliamentary fractions, thus exercising a considerable influence on the policies of those fractions.<sup>26</sup> In Finland intrusion into bureaucracy by political parties (and the societal groups behind them) provided the parties »with branches and areas of their own« in the administration.<sup>27</sup>

It seems justified to hypothesize that with the decline of the position and relative influence of Parliaments, the constitutional instrument for political parties to exercise influence, it becomes more important for them to infiltrate the administration, by their party members.

There exists, on the other hand a trend in the opposite direction, the exercise of influence by civil servants in political parties. It is nowadays a common phenomenon in many countries that civil servants are members of expert groups of their political party, and even participate in framing the program of their party. Undoubtedly they also advise their party and members of the Parliamentary fraction of their party on what action to undertake or what position to take in parliamentary debates. This leads an observer in Germany to conclude »that with us the political parties are solidly in hands of the civil service, at least for special parts of policy«.<sup>28</sup>

### 1.3.3. *Public servants in elected organs*

Finally, attention has to be given to an other aspect of the political role of civil servants. Earlier I mentioned already the feature of the French politico-administrative system which scholars have called the mutual penetration of administration and politics («l'interpénétration de l'administration et de la politique»)<sup>29</sup> The one side, that is the penetration of politics and political parties into the administration, was described in 3.1. and 3.2. of this section.

The other side of the coin is the penetration of the public servant element into the elected organs, the Parliament, regional and local councils. In the French National Assembly there has been a marked increase of the percentage of its members coming from public service: in 1973 31.5 %, in 1978 40.7 %, and in 1981 53.5 %. Only a portion of them, however, are coming from central administration, many being from the educational profession. In Germany there is also concern about the increasing number of public servants in the Parliament of the Federation and the »Länder«. In fact, in this country public sector employment is frequently merely a material basis for a party political career.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. THE PUBLIC SERVANT AND SOCIETY

The role of self-perception of the public servant in relation to society and the people has changed profoundly in European countries. This change has taken place over a long period but especially since the fifties. It has been gradual, although certain political, societal and administrative developments gave particular impulses at certain times and in certain countries. Some common trends can be clearly observed in many European countries. The main line in these trends is from a self-perception of public servants as arbitrators between societal interests, remote from society, towards involvement in societal developments and relationships, and consequently often the promotion of certain societal interests.

### 2.1. *From traditional model to a new profile of the public servant*

In the traditional model public servants considered themselves as totally impartial in the handling of public affairs, that is in their advisory function with regard to the political organs as well as their implementation activities with regard to society or the citizens. As soon as he entered into the public

service, the civil servant as an official gave up his previous links, his ties with his original environment, and freed himself from allegiances. At the same time he placed himself above social cleavages. He had only the general interests of society in mind. He saw as a primary obligation to realize affair balance between the various societal interests and to act as an arbitrator among them. And he had to see to it that citizens were treated equally. In view of his special position in society and his education, the civil servant had no feeling nor liking for changes and innovation. He was above all concerned with regularity and legality rather than with dynamic values, and with precedents rather than an evaluation of each individual case.

This sketch of the central government officials in France in the past was given in a recent publication.<sup>3 2</sup> This sketch would have been by and large the same for other European countries. I concede that it is an excessively black and white picture. There were undoubtedly also civil servants who assumed a more active role, a role of innovator, such as Chadwick in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact this picture fits remarkably well in the model of the neutral civil servant who loyally executes the will of his political master, whoever he is.

But after 1945 the wave of the Welfare State ideology and practice brought about a considerable change. The administration was bound to become involved in many sorts of societal developments as a result of the increased state intervention. The public servant at different levels of government and administration became motivated to promote societal developments in general, specially in his own policy sector. However, in many European countries a new breed of civil servant began to inhabit the government offices. He was eager to play an active role in societal developments through the public service. He identified himself with the people's interests, and more often than not, with special sectors of society. Many of them were politically motivated. In France, for instance, a good number of people from the resistance movement joined the «fonction publique». Generally, in many countries a younger generation inspired by ideals of the new society which should come after the war, occupied important posts in the public service. Of course, these changes did not equally affect all government departments. They were most noticeable in new departments or sections of them which were set up with the rise of welfare society. However, it seems that some of the traits of the traditional model and more generally, of the bureaucratic model and attitude, gained again strength in the civil service when those new departments had been established for some time and their tasks were routinized to a large extent. A second wave of an increase of social and political involvement arose by the end of the sixties; societal involvement – in particular among new

government departments in charge of such matters as environment and emancipation – together with the trend of politicisation affected the values of the public service.

## *2.2. Causes of the changed profile of the public servant*

There are a number of causes of the change in the role of civil servants.

### **a. Expansion of government tasks**

This has strengthened the role of civil servants. It is the public servant who prepares plans for government legislation and action. As the result of overload representative organs and to a considerably degree also members of the government are unable to play an active role in these activities. This leaves much room for civil servants to make an imprint on policy making and policies based on their own views on society and their own values.

### **b. Increased discretion as a result of less hierarchical organisation**

Whilst the expansion of governmental tasks lead to a greater discretion for public servants, this trend has been reinforced by a widespread inclination towards a less hierarchical organisation. Thus not only the command structure between minister and civil servant has become looser, but also that between the head of an organisation and his subordinates has become less strict. This may regard the policy making activity of public servants, but is particularly true for activities in the area of policy implementation. As policy implementation affects individual citizens and societal organisations, a greater discretion of the public servant has direct effects for the relationship between public servants and society. It is likely to result in a more open contact between public servants and citizens, in a greater opportunity of negotiations, and in some discretion for the public servant to decide and act on basis of his own judgement on the situation concerned. Generally this has had a positive effect on the relationship between public authority and the public.

### **c. The public servant as articulator of wishes of the people**

Recent policy making theory and more in particular theory of agenda building, has emphasized the importance of articulation of wishes and aggregation of demands, and selection of political issues. The overload of members of representative organs and executive organs, has made them relatively inaccessible for the citizen. The signaling of demands and selection of political issues rests therefore increasingly with public servants. It is they who through

different devices learn most about wishes and demands from the public. This may have a positive effect. More demands from society, and specially from those groups and individuals who have little access to political organs and political parties, can gain a place on the political agenda, thanks to public servant's action. It seems that this is a recent trend of some importance in several European countries. On the other hand it is a common complaint that public servants also manipulate political organs by withholding information from them or passing on one-sided and possibly distorted information. This may rather create short-cuts between public authority and public, than facilitate their relations.

d. Consultative mechanisms public authority – society

A very important link between public servants and society has gradually come into being in the form of consultative arrangements. The need for such arrangements has increased with the decline of an autocratic attitude of governments with regard to society. The greater openness of public authorities viz à viz society and the awareness that the effectiveness of policies in terms of feasibility to implement them would be enlarged by including societal organisations in the policy making process has given an impulse to the development of an extensive network of consultative arrangements. These may have a variety of forms. In these consultative arrangements there are mainly public servants who deliberate and negotiate with representatives of societal groups in their own policy sector. This provides public servants with an opportunity to hear wishes and demands of societal groups which is crucial to their new role. It is evident that consultation with societal groups strengthens the position of public servants in their relationship with the members of the political organs.

The development of consultative arrangements has resulted in a vast and complex network of mechanisms for consultation and cooperation between government departments and representative organisations of society. Many of them have become influential bodies of advice to ministers and the government. According to some observers they tend to contain elements of corporatism that is the splitting up of society in organised clusters of public and private organisations representing the joint interests of that cluster. In fact the participants in a given consultative arrangement are usually the public and private organisations of a certain policy sector or parts of it. The partners in such arrangements tend to make a front against the outside world in defence of their common interests, although internally they may be divided. Agriculture and environment are illustrative examples of a strong and rather homogeneous, and of an internally divided and weak front. In such arrange-

ments a sort of alliance between civil servants and societal organisations may play an important role. In fact public servants or, generally, sectors of the administration, may be rather dependent on societal groups. In the first place they often need the support of societal groups for the acceptance and realisation of their Minister's (or their own) policies. Secondly, they may be dependent on the expert knowledge of societal groups. This happens specially in the case of new policy fields such as recreation, and environment. These two fields are demonstrative of a new relationship between the public service and society.

All these developments have increased and intensified the relationship between public servants and society. Moreover, in countries with a relatively open civil service system there are additional causes for close linkages. Sometimes members of the staff of societal institutions move to the public service and specially to organisational units in the policy sector to which the societal institution concerned is related. On the other hand, a public servant may be appointed director of such institution. Moreover, a public servant may join the board of such institution. In such cases there is a chance that the cooperation of the public organisation concerned is heavily influenced by the institution concerned.

### 3. TRENDS IN POLICIES CONCERNING THE PUBLIC SERVICE

#### 3.1. *General factors influencing personnel policies*

Policies and measures concerning the public service are often influenced by, or are part of more general policies. They can, therefore, only be understood in the context of such wider policies. The following factors are relevant for trends in personnel policies for the public service in European countries.

##### 3.1.1. *General policies regarding the role of the State*

For a prolonged period, beginning after 1945, most European countries moved rapidly towards a welfare state (or whatever it might be termed in the various countries). This implied a continuous expansion of public tasks and consequently a vast increase of public personnel at the different levels of government and administration.

However, by the end of the 70-ies and beginning of the 80-ies the charm of the welfare state and its steering mechanisms began to decline. Conservative

parties gained power in many countries which lead to a dominant policy of reducing state intervention and to privatisation and deregulation. But also socialist parties, the main advocates of state intervention and planning in the Post World War II period, have lost in several countries a good deal of their faith in a high degree of intervention, either because of a change in views on the application of socialist principles or because practical experience in government and administration have shown its defects.

The stabilisation or reduction of the quantity of public tasks has begun to show its effects on the size of the public service, specially at the central government level.

### *3.1.2. The economic-financial situation*

Since around the mid 70-ies the general economic situation as well as the financial situation of governments in Europe has deteriorated. By the end of the 70-ies this lead to continuously growing public debts. This caused a serious drain on the state's finance. It forced governments to first stabilize and later reduce their budgets.

The large public service which had developed during the period of economic growth and relative public financial strength, became a heavy burden. It is understandable that governments, rightly or wrongly, tried to solve their financial problems partly by either diminishing the size of the public service, or by reducing otherwise the expenses for this service.

### *3.1.3. Employment policies*

Over a long period unemployment was hardly a problem in most European countries. It began to become serious in the first part of the 70-ies and has gradually become one of the major ailments. Policies concerning public service employment are necessarily related to general employment. When unemployment became serious, governments have tried to partly solve it by increasing public service employment.

However, more recently policy makers in the field of the public service have been confronted with the conflict between on the one hand the economic financial emergency situation of the state, on the other hand the government's responsibility for employment. And that in a double sense; in the first place the need to come back from its previous policy of increasing public service employment; and in the second place maintenance of working conditions,

that is its responsibility as an employer.

There are other aspects of general employment policies which have had an effect on public service employment. Attention will be given later to such matters as early retirement, employment of special groups such as youth, women, ethnic groups. Employment policies with regard to the latter two groups are part of general policies concerning emancipation and equal treatment. In fact, governments have often committed themselves to play a role as pioneers in this respect.

#### *3.1.4 Privatisation and decentralisation policies*

In many European countries privatisation, deregulation and decentralisation have recently been key words in governmental policy making, though often less so in action.

Privatisation and desentralisation have different effects for the public service. Privatisation implies the reduction of public service jobs. Desentralisation on the other hand results in the transfer of tasks from central government to regional and local authorities. Central government jobs decrease, local authorities jobs may increase; more often than not much of the financial burden is passed on to the local authorities. Both privatisation and desentralisation lead to a reduction of central government jobs, and thus have consequence for the central government career service.

### *3.2. Public service employment policies*

The analysis of these policies regards more in particular the central government service.

#### *3.2.1. Size of the public service*

As I indicated above in most European countries there has been a shift from expansion to stabilisation and later to reduction of the public service. The expansion or reduction has not been evenly divided among policy sectors. In many countries expansion took place specially in such sectors as education, public health and welfare. More often than not, however, later these sectors have been specially hit by cut-back policies. In some countries the reduction in recent years have been marked: in 1984 the size of the British Civil Service

was as its lowest since 1945. Also in Denmark there has been a clear reduction.<sup>33</sup>

In a number of countries personnel plans have been or will be established regulating the size of the personnel per organisational unit (government department) e.g. Germany, Netherlands. In the Netherlands the government decided to implement a 2 % reduction of central government personnel. In several cases the reduction of public personnel concerns special services which are being rationalized such as P.T.T. The reduction of personnel takes often place in the form of not filling vacancies (Germany, Netherlands). Dismissal of personnel is yet rather rare mainly as a result of pressures exercised by civil servants' unions.

In order to solve the conflict between on the one hand the need to reduce personnel expenses, and on the other hand to limit reduction of personnel many governments have resorted to part-time or reduced time employment.

### 3.2.2. *Early retirement*<sup>34</sup>

The possibility of early retirement has been introduced as a general labour policy in many countries. There were two motives for promoting early retirement as a general policy and as a public personnel policy. In the first place optional early retirement has been considered as a means to reduce the total number of years of work, and to augment the years of leisure time, for workers at large as well as for civil servants. More recently, however, early retirement has been promoted for reasons of reducing public personnel, thus avoiding the need for compulsory lay-off. It is considered a preferable personnel policy to encourage individual members of the public service to terminate their work, by making conditions for early retirement attractive. Thus in most countries full pension-rights are guaranteed in case of early retirement. The age for early retirement differs among countries but there is a tendency to lower this age gradually to 60 years (Austria, Belgium, Germany, U.K.). On the other hand some countries are experimenting with a system under which personnel has the choice to retire between, say, 60 and 67, thus permitting public servants to continue after normal retirement age, under certain conditions.

### 3.2.3. *Working hours: full time – part time*

There is a universal trend to give personnel a greater freedom to choose for

part-time work, and to determine their own working hours. The main reasons for promoting part-time work are:

- to enable public servants to reconcile the needs of their private life, in particular their family life with their work. In many countries provisions for part-time work have been made specially with a view to women with children under a certain age (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Portugal)
- to increase the number of persons employed in the public service whilst keeping the amount of work (and therefore posts) stable. Thus, stabilisation or even increase of persons employed can be combined with reduction, resp. stabilisation of public personnel expenses
- other motives may play a role. In the Federal Republic of Germany; for instance, part-time work was introduced in those areas of the public service where there exists a public interest to provide employment to those who have been specially educated or trained for jobs which exist only in (that part of) the public service.

In many countries part-time work is encouraged by granting public servants who are working part-time, the same rights and social securities as full time personnel. The measures taken in this respect have in many countries resulted in a notable increase of part-time work, specially among women.

Special attention deserve arrangements which have been made for part-time work for youthful workers. With the view to the high unemployment among youth in the Netherlands, a decree was passed in 1983 aiming at reserving 30 % of the jobs in government departments for youthful persons (under 25 years of age). Jobs have to be specially earmarked for this purpose. The working hours will be 32 as a maximum. Transitional measures have delayed the implementation of this plan, so that the short term effects have been limited.

#### 3.2.4. *Women employment*

Among the groups which have been subject of special legislation and governmental measures for employment, women have taken an important place. In many countries women have formed rather strong pressure groups at the level of societal organisation as well as within the public service and in Parliaments. They often form a network which is able to exercise effective pressures on governments for the introduction and implementation of equal rights, nonetheless, «a long march» will be needed before the position of women and men in the public service will be equal.

Although in many national statutes equality between men and women is

imposed on the public service, reality gives a different picture. It shows that women in the public service are in a very unfavourable position. Although in numbers the women in the public service are not much in a minority or may even outnumber men in some countries, they are grossly underprivileged as far as the quality of their position is concerned. The vast majority of them are in the clerical class (secretaries, typists and such like) or in lower administrative work. In almost all countries the number of women in the very top post is negligible and a very small percentage of other higher posts is occupied by women. At the regional and local levels the situation of women employment in the public service is generally more favourable.

There are many causes for the existing situation of inequality in public employment. Firstly, many women are restricted in their employment possibilities in general as a result of family obligations. Secondly, in a number of countries the general level of education of women is lower, and in several cases even considerably lower than that of men; this has its roots in traditional social relationships. Thirdly, women are less mobile than men. And fourthly, the male domination and male culture of public organisations and in recruitment bodies has long been detrimental for the recruitment of women in the service as well as for their promotion to the higher echelons. Finally, there are in some countries legal impediments for women to enter into certain public posts, such as the military, the police, the fire service.

During the last two decades the pressures for recognition of women equality and the advancement of women in the public service have increased strongly. At the supranational level the European community has adopted a number of recommendations in that respect and has initiated the concept of positive action programmes for women equality employment. In several countries the national parliaments and governments have decided that they should take a leading role with regard to this element of women emancipation and therefore promote women employment in the public service.

In some countries (Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands) this had led to a policy of positive discrimination which meant that priority is given to a female candidate in case of equal qualities of candidates. Norway went a step further; an Act relative Equal Status between sexes opens the possibility of setting (minimum) quotas for female personnel. In other countries such as France and United Kingdom, positive discrimination is considered to violate the principle of equality.

Many measures of personnel policy are aiming at creating conditions facilitating women to take up a public post; I mentioned already part-time employment, maternity leave; some countries have created special training facilities for women. Equal payment has also been introduced in many

countries.

Although all these measures have led to a sometimes encouraging increase in female recruits for the public service, the net results are not satisfactory. In particular at the higher levels of the civil service women remain grossly under-represented in most countries.

### 3.3. *Recruitment and promotion*<sup>35</sup>

#### 3.3.1. *General*

I shall discuss here recruitment and promotion for the national administration. Political recruitment will only be marginally discussed as this has been treated extensively in section 1. The emphasis will be on that group of civil servants who are potentially recruits for higher positions in the civil service. This group stands out in the recruitment and promotion procedures as in many countries there exist special procedures for their recruitment, and in several recruitment is centralized to some degree.

It is difficult to discuss general trends with regard to recruitment for and promotion in the civil service. The systems of recruitment and promotion depend strongly on the public service system and statutes of the country concerned.

#### 3.3.2. *Recruitment for entrance into the civil service*

As recruitment systems are closely linked with the public service system trends can only be understood within the context of the public service system of the country concerned. The following aspects can be distinguished:

- a) recruitment at the beginning of the career
- b) recruitment at higher levels of the service

Systems of recruitment for the civil service mostly change only gradually. Attempts to drastic change often fail. An example is the proposal by the Fulton commission in the United Kingdom made in 1968 to introduce »preference for relevance« of preceding studies, that is that graduate studies should be taken into account in admission to the civil service: this proposal was promptly rejected by the Government, most probably under pressure from the civil service itself.

An important factor in the recruitment and promotion system is the

degree of centralisation of personnel management. In some countries the degree of centralisation is very high. In fact this is connected with a closed civil service system. The British civil service is the most outspoken example. To a lesser degree the French civil service is also centralized at least for the higher »fonction publique». In most countries a public service fixes general conditions and procedures for recruitment and promotion which, of course, has some centralising effect. However, the actual recruitment is mostly done by the individual units of government departments (mostly the departments).

a) Recruitment at the beginning of the career

Only in a few countries the admission to a civil service career, possibly leading to senior positions, is fundamentally based on entrance at a young age. The United Kingdom, and partly France belong to this category. In England all civil servants are in principle entering into the Administrative class of the civil service at the bottom level, after having finished their university education. It is worth mentioning, however, that in 1977 the civil service was found guilty of sex discrimination under the Equal Opportunities Act, and ordered to amend their age limits for recruitment on the grounds that too low an age limit discriminated against women, who might wish to enter the Civil Service after having raised young children. In France there is a small select group of young recruits to the Civil Service, who are admitted to the *École Nationale d'Administration* on the basis of a very competitive examination. They are destined to be promoted to the high echelons of the service.

In the more open civil service systems there is no particular age limit for admission. However, in most countries where some form of entrance examination and possibly a period of practice in the administration are required, it is likely that people will enter service at an early age and the lower level of the organisational hierarchy.

But also in countries where there are no particular examination requirements the vast majority of personnel of government is entering the civil service at a relatively young age and stays in that service until retirement age.

b) Recruitment at higher levels of the civil service

Recruitment at the higher levels of the civil service is exception rather than rule. For closed civil service systems this stands to reason. In such systems recruitment for higher posts takes by definition place among civil servants as is the case in Britain and France. In the former country there may be two exceptions. In the first place political advisors to ministers are often or mostly recruited from outside. Another exception is the recruitment of persons with high managerial skill from the private sector. Also in France in some cases

top managers from entrepreneurial circles are recruited. In this country there is a relatively large measure of exchange between top posts in the administration, and in public corporations and public enterprises.

In open systems recruitment from outside occurs more frequently. I have discussed the phenomenon of political recruitment earlier. This type of outside recruitment may take place at an early age, in particular for ministerial cabinets where these exist, but also at any higher level of the service as well as in fact at the top level. Besides, in several countries there is a good number of cases of recruitment from outside the civil service, whereby political considerations play no or only a limited role. Such persons may come from regional and local administration, from universities (particularly for posts in research and planning sections), from a wide range of social welfare organisations, and very rarely from private enterprise. The Netherlands is an example of this situation. In fact in this country in recent years a number of top managerial posts have been filled by persons from universities and from city administration.

There are two opposing trends concerning recruitment from outside. On the one hand, when cut-back policies limited the possibilities of promotion within the service, civil servants' unions claimed that candidates from the own service should have preference. For a number of years this has impeded recruitment from outside. On the other hand, recent trends, initiated by governments, emphasize competitiveness which clearly favours also outside recruitment.

### 3.3.3. *Promotion*

Seniority and merit (quality) have always been the two dominant formal criteria for promotion in the public service of European countries. However, in reality seniority tended to prevail except perhaps for the top echelons.

The reasons for preference for *seniority* in the practice of personnel management are evident. In big public bureaucracies rules tend to become standardised and procedures become routinised. Seniority is an easy criterium to handle, it can be developed into an objective yardstick for promotion, so to say. When seniority has been accepted as part of the bureaucratic culture, as it was the case in most European bureaucracies over a long period, individuals do not easily feel to be treated unjustly when this criterium is used. In fact, in those countries where civil servants' unions have become involved in decisions on promotions, as is the case in Sweden for instance, seniority may well be emphasized. An increased role of trade unions may thus be counter-

productive to quality, just as much as it may be a safeguard against favouritism or political appointments.

The criterium *quality* for promotion gives in principle more room for subjective judgement, even in those countries where in principle examinations are required for admission to posts at various echelons of the civil service. Intentionally, I use the term »quality» instead of »merit», because this latter term seems to have been infused with seniority elements.

Three major trends in promotion systems deserve attention here: firstly an increased emphasis on quality, secondly mobility in the service, thirdly political elements in promotion.

There is a clear and almost universal shift towards more emphasis on *quality* rather than on seniority. Routine promotions are diminishing. Recent public personnel policy statements in several countries have stressed the importance of competition within the public service. In this context career development plays an important role. Training courses have been increasingly used as an instrument for career development. There is an evident shift in the outlook on the required qualities for senior positions in the civil service. Whilst on the European continent legal aspects of public administration tended to form an important part of curricula for entrance examinations at different levels, more emphasis has been recently placed on insight in policy and decision making processes, and on aspects of management in public administration. The recent dissatisfaction with public management has added fuel to emphasis on managerial qualities.

*Mobility* in the civil service, and in particular lateral mobility, has been used as an instrument for career development in a number of countries. This is easier to achieve in countries with a more or less centralized civil service system like the United Kingdom. In other countries vertical career development within the same department is a rule, also for senior posts.

Mobility has several advantages. It widens the views of civil servants on the public service as a whole, and it limits the risks of narrow sectoral views. It furthers the willingness and ability to coordinate or integrate policies, which is a particular asset for top civil servants. It is therefore understandable that in many European countries public personnel policies underline the need of a greater mobility. In the Netherlands an official policy proposal would limit the time that a person could occupy one and the same senior post.

*Politicisation* of the civil service is the third important trend in promotion systems. This has already been discussed in earlier sections of this paper. Politicisation disrupts seniority promotions, and is often also detrimental to promotions on the basis of quality. It may encourage mobility, as is the case in France, but on the other hand it may cause high stagnation, especially in

those cases in which political appointees are hard to remove, even when other political parties come to power (as is the case in Belgium).

Generally one might state that politicisation has a demotivating effect on the »normal« civil servants as it reduces their chances of promotion to high positions. Again Belgium can be quoted as an example.

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