

Image and Attractivity of Central Government Administrations

A Report for European Social Dialogue Committee in Central Government Administrations

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Background and objectives of the study

One of the key issues identified in the 2011-2013 Work Programme of the European Social Dialogue Committee in Central Government Administrations (SDC/CGA) is a poor or deteriorating image and attractivity of central governments as an employer, compared to the private sector or other parts of the public sector. The problem seems to result from a complex set of social, cultural, organizational and economic factors including everyday citizens' experience with public administration, satisfaction from service delivery, cultural patterns and existing stereotypes of public administration frequently shaped by the media and politicians.

According to deep-rooted belief, citizens' confidence and trust in public administration and public services is low, and has been declining in recent years. The credibility gap between the public and the civil servants has become a key element of a negative image of public administration. It results in growing concern of many governments and opinion leaders over citizens' dissatisfaction with public services and with the public administration's image as a whole. Such concerns frequently trigger public debates on functioning of public administration and its performance. In time of economic crisis, references to a negative image often initiate and legitimise proposals of austerity measures in public administration.

Studies on public attitudes do however not fully confirm low level and declining confidence in public administration . Some studies reveal considerable fluctuations

of public attitudes in selected countries. In other countries, public assessment of government administration is high and there are only slight modifications in public perception and level of credibility. Some studies show that a well-functioning public sector is necessary, but not sufficient for building trust in the public sector as there is no evidence of a direct causal link between the performance of government and citizens' trust in government. Negative opinions on public administration can often coincide with positive evaluations of specific services.

Therefore, many governments undertake many quantitative and qualitative studies such as public opinion surveys, focus groups interviews, media analysis or analysis of public discourse. Such reviews often lead to development of communication strategies aiming at improving communication with public, efficient delivery of policy objectives and public services, influencing public attitudes and behaviours or at creation of a trustworthy brand of public administration. In the long run, such endeavours could lead to better understanding of the role of public administration and to restore citizens' confidence and trust.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) on behalf of the SDC/CGA commissioned the study with a view to improve the image and attractiveness of the sector. The study was part of a project supported by the European Commission.

The aim of the project was to present an outcome-oriented report and contribute to social partners' policy development towards a better image and attractiveness of the government administration in particular to:

- Inform and stimulate debates among members and potential members of the social dialogue committee and other stakeholders;
- Provide a state of play and food for thought in terms of the image and attractiveness of the sector, including the identification of possible tensions or contradictions between how employees and managers perceive their work and public and institutional perceptions and messages conveyed about the sector concerned;
- Inspire the drafting by social partners a joint commitment on common principles, values and good practices of good administrations and a short campaign document addressed to a broader public.

The study consists of two parts:

1. Desk review of information available in 13 EU and candidate countries from the European Commission, national governments on public perceptions/satisfactions and image conveyed of central government administrations, surveys of public sector employees satisfaction, national campaigns that seek to promote a better understanding of the sector.
2. Complementary qualitative survey based on a sample of 78 employees and managers in 11 EU countries regarding their perceptions and expectations of their work and the role they play compared to public perceptions and the image conveyed by policy makers; the attractive and less attractive elements of the sector including for younger potential recruits; existing and future needs in terms of skills and competence development; initial impact of the austerity measures.

For the full study:

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