

Civil Service Professionalism

A Key Element of Good Governance



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Civil service professionalism



- A system based on competence and integrity aimed at achieving public interest objectives.
- A professional civil service system is the opposite of a scheme where positions and rewards are obtained on the basis of for example connections and loyalty rather than professional merit.



Civil service professionalism: at the core of good governance



It captures and connects other aspects of good governance, first and foremost the idea of impartiality in public decision making.



Four pillars of civil service professionalism



- The best qualified are appointed and promoted;
- There is a proper balance between civil servants' duty of loyalty to the government of the day, their professional independence, and political neutrality;
- Civil servants protect the public interest, and not the interest of particular individuals or groups;
- Civil servants are regularly involved in government decision-making



The best qualified are appointed and promoted



- Make sure that the best qualified are appointed and promoted through pre-established transparent procedures, which are subject to judicial review;
- Make sure that civil servants are properly trained and their performance fairly and adequately monitored;
- Guarantee that civil servants cannot be arbitrarily dismissed or subject to arbitrary disciplinary decisions.



Proper balance between political loyalty, professional autonomy and neutrality



- Ensure that, although the civil service shall loyally and efficiently serve the government of the day, it must first and foremost fulfil its constitutional obligations;
- Encourage civil servants to use their professional expertise in the performance of their official duties;
- Make certain that the scope for political appointments and the rights and duties of appointees are adequately defined.



Civil servants protect the public interest and not the interest of particular individuals or groups



- Encourage the utmost loyalty of civil servants to the law and the legal order of the country;
- Exempt civil servants from having to implement illegal or ethically improper or questionable orders;
- Oblige civil servants to observe neutrality and impartiality in the execution of their duties through *i.a.* systems of incompatibilities and prevention of conflicts of interest;
- Include external mechanisms to ensure the legality of executive decision-making and the accountability of civil servants and political appointees.



Civil servants are regularly involved in government decision-making



For the merit principle to be effective:

- civil servants must be regularly involved in decision-making regarding administrative as well as political issues;
- they must be allowed to freely express their expert advice and enjoy effective protection from negative reactions whenever their assessments may conflict with party political preferences.



MoDs should be seen as integral parts of the state civil service system and not as something special



- Key challenges of the defence sector are often located outside the sector itself and relate to wider questions of administrative capacity and political governance.
- A system with regulatory fragmentation - where there are special regulations for individual ministries – entails significant risks.
- Today's security concerns cannot be handled by one single ministry.
- Having a civilian staff in the MoD that is competent and of sufficient size is a precondition for appropriate democratic and civilian control over the armed forces.



Why is professionalism important?



- Civil service professionalism will – all other factors being equal - support reliability, predictability and fairness – and thereby impartiality in public decision-making.
- Empirical studies document a strong, positive correlation between meritocratic recruitment to the civil service and low levels of corruption.
- Researchers claim that the introduction of meritocracy in the civil service as early as the 1700s and 1800s explains the low levels of corruption today in the Scandinavian countries

