

FALLING BETWEEN TWO STOOLS – THE CASE OF THE LITHUANIAN CIVIL SERVANT REFORM OF 2013

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Corruption and political favouritism is a pervasive and persistent problem in the Lithuanian public administration. A possible solution to the problem is the Human Resource Reform of 2013, which creates a roster of eligible civil service candidates through qualifying exams. However, the authority to employ at the discretion of each department falls between the two stools of a unified and a departmentalized civil service. The risk is that the reform will fail to fulfil its purpose if authority is not clarified and the reform continues to be politicized.

Key words: Lithuania; public administration; Human Resource Reform, political favouritism; corruption.

1 INTRODUCTION

Corruption still thrives at all levels and sectors of the Lithuanian society.² This is not to argue that investments in anti-corruption legislation, committees, and campaigns (see, e.g., Johannsen and Pedersen 2011) have been fruitless, although both Schmidt (2007) and Batory (2012) stress the meagre results. However, it underscores that once ingrained in society; corruption is very difficult to root out (Uslaner 2008). Furthermore, simultaneous efforts at capacity building both before and after EU accession (Verheijen 2007), on the one hand, appear to have resulted in an improved civil service but, on the other hand, not in reducing the core of corruption. The civil servants themselves recognize the problem and recommend further administrative reforms (Johannsen and Pedersen 2012).

Corruption is associated with political favouritism or, in other terms, patronage and is not unique to the Lithuanian public administration. As Bearfield (2009) has observed, political appointments are based on exchange of favours and

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² Corruption in Lithuania appears to be high and constant as evident by evaluations on perceptions of corruption made by the Transparency International since the millennium (www.transparency.org).

patronage and a general risk in all administrations where the government can replace administrative personnel at their whim, either to secure loyalty or in need to secure political support during election times through co-optation and spoils. Since political favouritism is at odds with a professional and meritocratic civil service, it is not surprising that a Human Resource Management (HRM) reform has been on the agenda in most Central and East European countries (CEECs) since the beginning of the 1990s. The agenda has emphasized that increased professionalization, understood as both expertise and meritocratization, and de-politicization are not only part of the administrative *acquis communautaire* but the bedrock of modern public administration (Nunberg 2000; SIGMA 1999). Furthermore, several insightful analyses of developments in post-communist administrations have stressed that HRM reforms, consistent with a Weberian model, should be in place before experimenting with other managerial approaches such as those advocated in new public management (Verheijen and Coombes 1998; Drechsler 2005, 96; Meyer-Sahling 2011, 240).

In Lithuania, below average administrative capacity (Nakrošis 2001; Pedersen and Johannsen 2004), strong interests from ministers to personally appoint their own civil servants (Johannsen 2003) and persistent corruption (Johannsen and Pedersen 2008; Johannsen and Pedersen 2011) have created cross-pressure for reform. However, following several incremental steps, the HRM reforms culminated with the Department of Civil Service taking over the responsibility for the pre-selection of all civil service personnel in 2013. With this step, Lithuania strengthens the aspects of a unified civil service model, thus, departing from the previous mixed model where each department in practice set its own criteria for recruitment. Acknowledging that the temptation to recruit public personnel according to personal or political closeness is highly context sensitive, Sundell (2014) argues that if the risk for patronage is high, a regulated recruitment system may be preferred while private-style practices can be more successful if patronage is less prevalent. Thus, the questions asked here are how the 2013 HRM reform in Lithuania fits into the context of corruption in the Lithuanian society, and second, if the political context leading to the reform may explain if and how the reform addresses the problems of corruption and favouritism at stake.

Section two outlines the logic of departmentalization versus a unified civil service with respect to the likely outcome of the different approaches in terms of the risk of corruption and favouritism. Section three; outline the pre-2013 practices in Lithuanian civil service recruitment, followed by section four, which discusses the character of corruption and favouritism in a Lithuanian context. In the concluding section, we demonstrate how the political background has placed the reform between two stools, strengthening examinations at the entry level while keeping flexibility in the selection phase.

2 HOW DO CIVIL SERVICE RECRUITMENT SYSTEMS LINK TO FAVORITISM?

The evolution of national civil service systems from the spoils system, where personal ties to the king mattered more than professional merits, to their modern variants, has resulted in a multidimensional variation complicating classification and comparison. Attempts to reduce the complexity by grouping patterns of public administration in “families” based on differences in the relationship between the civil service and political institutions identify up to

nine “families” with different national colours (Painter and Peters 2010). Drawing on the distinctions made by Ridley (1983) and Bekke and Meer (2000), we suggest a categorization into two opposing approaches – the unified versus the departmental approach – according to the merit sought, entry requirement, structure and resulting career patterns for the civil servants.

In the unified approach, the generalist is king. Administration is the art of judgment, and merit gained through qualifying exams and honed through experience. Thus, the civil service is a corps where individual civil servants career pattern develops through rotation between departments. In the departmental approach, the expert is king, possessing the specific knowledge needed for the specific position in a department. Recruitment is decentralized and standards set at each department tailored to the specific needs. Such systems have less mobility in the civil service but more between the public and the corresponding private sector. For example, the Department of Social Affairs may look for employees from sociology, social workers, and specialized lawyers, depending on the individual job description. Consequently, in the departmental approach, individual career paths depend not only on individual merits but also on competition from outsiders possessing the specific job-related qualifications. This contrasts with the unified model, in which career opportunities are unchallenged by competition from the outside. Here the civil servants only gain merit, beyond the entry requirement, through experience within the administration.

Dichotomizing recruitment in two basic approaches is obviously a simplification and serves more as Weberian ideal models than a description of the real world. Taking a general view on examples of the two approaches, no specific geographical or historical pattern appears as both approaches are in use among the European countries. Even if some of the traditional European colony empires (the UK, France, Spain and Portugal) all have versions of the unified civil service, the Netherlands have a departmental model with decentralized recruitment. The choice is, however, not irrelevant as each model carry a specific risk of corruption.

The recruitment and career patterns of civil servants on the basis of their merits are at the core of the Weberian bureaucratic model and, argued, not only to curb favouritism but also other forms of administrative corruption. The virtue lies in the legal-rational selection mechanism of hiring and promoting civil servants to life-long careers. Thus, the job protection decreases the temptation to abuse office (Rubin and Whitford 2008) because the protection is linked to gained merit. Furthermore, according to Dahlström et al. (2012, 3), a closed bureaucracy with a self-managed organization is thought to generate an “esprit de corps” fostering impartiality and non-corrupt behaviour. The consequence is a professionalization of the public administration where formal qualifications are more important than personal loyalties and political affiliations (O’Dwyer 2006, 30–31).

An alternative train of thought questions the degree of centralization of the HRM systems – certainly an aspect of the two competing approaches. Comparative research has sought to establish a link between the degree of centralization and corruption. In a study of EU-27 HRM systems, Demmke et al. (2006) find no direct influence, but in another study based on the EUPAN 2011 report, Demmke and Moilanen (2012, 92) find that almost half of the member states are of the opinion that decentralization bears new ethical challenges, namely the risk of corruption. This appears to be a paradox. There is no direct

correlation between corruption and HRM decentralization but strong fears to decentralize.

The inconclusive results may make more sense if we take a closer look at the risks of corruption comparing the unified with the departmentalized approach to recruitment and career patterns as centralization and decentralization provide different risks and drivers of favouritism and corruption. It is important to recognize that the question is not one of meritocracy as both approaches can fully accommodate meritocracy and only differ on the substance of what counts as merit. When Dahlström et al. (2012) see internal promotions as evidence of a professional bureaucracy, they are in reality ascribing the unified model more value up front rather than making the distinction between different forms of merit and the logic of recruitment. Thus, when analyzing the sore spots in terms of favouritism, the question rather concerns entry requirements, the career patterns of civil servants and the character of the “esprit de corps”. These sore spots drive different networks and forms of corruption. Building on Klitgaard’s (1988) path-breaking formula as corruption equalling monopoly and discretion minus accountability, we assess the impact of the two models with respect to the inherent risks of corruption and favouritism.

TABLE 1: RISK OF FAVOURITISM IN THE UNIFIED AND DEPARTMENTALIZED CIVIL SERVICE

	Unified approach	Departmentalized approach
Entry requirement	Sub-standard examinations give leeway for discretion in final selection	High degree of discretion when requirement is defined according to each department and position
Career pattern	Internal patronage, i.e., old-boys network	Networks extended to private sector
Administrative culture	Esprit de corps covering the entire administration	Localized administrative culture
Assessment of corruption risks	Low risk but increasing if corruption and favouritism is systemic	High risk but depending on local virtues creating islands of excellence versus infested swamps

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The departmentalized model is per se vulnerable to the discretion in setting and interpreting the exact requirements for the position. By decreasing the span of recruiters’ discretion, standardized examinations in the unified model, counter the problem. However, if the entry requirements are substandard i.e. every applicant can pass it or requirements can be waived through “equivalent experience”, discretion increases. In a similar fashion, requirements are made more accountable in the departmentalized model by setting certain degree requirements, for example, a Master of Food Engineering in the Veterinary and Food Administration. The risk remains but discretion can be reduced in both models.

With respect to career patterns, both approaches are vulnerable to the creation of stable informal networks. The argument is that for the corruption to thrive, stable networks are important, not only because of the reciprocal character of corrupt deals but because of the transaction costs involved in finding partners you can trust without the risk of detection and exposure (Lambsdorff 2007; Della Porta 1997). As Della Porta notes, bribery does “not create victims, but accomplices” (1997, 39). However, two different types of networks emerge from the unified and departmentalized approaches. In the unified model, the rotation between departments and the stringent focus on entry requirements rather than on specialized merit gained through experience will result in the internal job market being dominated by an “old-boys” network distributing and coordinating favours throughout the system. The departmentalized approach

with its flow of personnel between the public and private sectors is more vulnerable to repeated favours or the illicit promise of future high-paying private positions, turning the responsiveness of the civil servants towards this end.

Administrative culture is more readily described than precisely defined. In their discussion of the stereotypical “clean north” and “corrupt south”, Pujas and Rhodes (1999) quickly turn to principles of ethics and norms forming an administrative culture. The administrative culture is more than standardized rules such as the “arm’s length principle” or the social obligations between members of the administration; it is a question of whether these rules, norms and obligations guide both the expected and actual behaviour of the public employees. That is, the rules and norms form an internalized ethos or a common set of values directing the understanding of what is right and wrong.

The two approaches do tend to back different cultures of corruption. According to Bardhan (1997), a threshold exists where the cost of remaining uncorrupted outweighs the cost of being corrupt. Thus, public administrations at the department level will gravitate towards being either uncorrupt or totally corrupt, which makes up a situation of systemic corruption where “wrong-doing has become the norm ... so regularized and institutionalized that organizational supports back wrong-doing and actually penalize those who live up to the old norms” (Caiden and Caiden 1977, 306). The question is how approaches to recruitment and career foster either a vicious or a virtuous circle.

In the unified approach, all civil servants have to pass the same entry exams, which, together with job rotation between departments, enhance an overarching administrative culture better suited for creating a virtuous circle of integrity. Poorly implemented entry requirements, however, allow for discretion and the inner rotation for the patronage system of “old-boys” networks quickly spreading favouritism across the service. In contrast, the departmentalized approach is more prone to localized cultures. In these settings, favouritism is better described as a matter of degree rather than in terms of absolutes. Depending on the local setting, a departmentalized system can create either “Islands of Excellence” (Verheijen 2007) or “Infested Swamps”. In other words, while part of the administration may carry virtuous values inhibiting favouritism, other administrative segments carry the rot. Given the exposure and rotation of personnel with the private sector, the issue of favouritism becomes one of buying influence on the promise of highly paid jobs in private firm following the public sector career. In order to assess the HRM reform of 2013, the next section addresses the character of corruption and favouritism from the point of view of Lithuanian public employees.

3 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM PRIOR TO 2013

At the eve of independence in 1991, Lithuania inherited a Soviet-style public administration characterized by politicized decision-making and a strict legal-rational code resembling Weberianism. In reality, however, it was an antithesis to weberianism due to the politicization of the administrative system (Jowitt 1983, 277). Membership of the Communist Party was the ticket to the nomenclature positions that is in effect a patrimonial system of favouritism (Goetz and Wollmann 2001, 865). Moreover, the existence of an informal system of blats presented “a distinctive form of social relationship or social exchange articulating private interests and human needs against the rigid

control of the state" (Ledeneva 1998, 7). Thus, as noted by Shleifer and Vishny (1993, 605), it was "always clear who needs to be bribed and by how much" in these systems, and it can be questioned if there was and still is a "culture of corruption" (for a discussion, see Miller et al. 2001).

The underlying assumption of the Soviet legacy argument is that corruption as the norm and systematic favouritism of party members would prevail following a path-dependent or cultural logic of appropriateness. The contrasting argument, however, stresses that the break with Soviet occupation, the regained independence and a flavour of "returning to Europe" make values and norms antithetical to Soviet practices (Nakrošis 2001, 172). Moreover, as Lithuania's public administration inherited massive difficulties, an extensive change of personnel followed. Many left for available and lucrative jobs in private companies and participated actively in the privatization process, and others experienced budget cuts and lay-offs (Lazareviciute et al. 2001, 239). However, capacity building and professionalism has not been slow in coming. Although Pedersen and Johannsen (2004) find that only a minority of present and former ministers around the turn of the millennium thought that civil servants' professionalism had significantly improved, in retrospect, dramatic changes have taken place in little more than two decades.

In terms of legal changes, coping with corruption and favouritism began with the 1995 "Law on Officials", soon to be followed by the 1999 "Civil Service Law" codifying the rudimentary legal framework for the civil service and ethical principles. For example, article 17 in the Civil Service Law established "the arm's length principle", and "ethical rules for public servants" have been in force since 2002 (Palidauškaite et al. 2011, 59 referring to Government Resolution no. 968 of 24th June 2002). Based on a survey among public employees – the ACI-2011 data – Pedersen and Johannsen (2014) demonstrate that public employees' values with respect to integrity and neutrality generally blend in with a common European administrative identity.

With respect to recruitment and career paths, the system has been characterized as a mixed system but with emphasis on the career-based model including a pre-entry test (Meyer-Sahling and Nakrošis 2009; Pivoras 2010; Palidauškaite et al. 2011, 47). The problems with the 1999 system have been plenty but mostly related to practice. First, the written examination consisted of multiple-choice tests, which tested only knowledge of legal acts, and questions and answers were available on the internet and easily memorized. Second, the selection interview was conducted in a simple manner, partly because of limited time for interview boards and lack of skilled human resource specialists (Interview May 2011 and 2013). Thus, in reality, the selection favoured insiders over outsiders, paving the way for minimal competition. The main problem consisted of loopholes in the formal requirements, opening up for a less transparent and, de-facto, more departmentalized model embraced by outright favouritism:

... currently, [the] legal regulation allows setting [specific] requirements ... [to accommodate] a very concrete person... say size of shoes, hair colour and something else ... through these formal requirements only that very concrete candidate ... can go through". (Interview, 26 May 2011).

The public employees themselves are aware that further administrative reforms are necessary if corruption is to be reduced (Johannsen and Pedersen 2012). Survey data from VMU (2011) may shed more light on this as a strong correlation exists between the belief that political connections are important for

civil service employment and the suggestion to improve recruitment by including either HRM or independent experts in the selections boards.

Pending between a unitary and a departmental model, the question is if corruption and favouritism is systemic according to Caiden and Caiden (1977) terms, in which case the departmentalization may be a cure, or if departmentalization has localized corruption.

4 ACCESSING THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION AND FAVORITISM

International rankings such as the Transparency International estimate serious issues with bribery, favouritism and other issues of corruption in Lithuania. The extent of corruption is serious but continuous improvements go to record. With Transparency International scores of 41, 48 and 57 in 2000, 2005 and 2013 respectively, on a scale from 0-100 where 100 equals a society totally free from corruption remarkable progress is made. To illustrate, where Lithuania in 2000 was on par with Malawi and El Salvador in 2013 it had caught up with Slovenia albeit well below Estonia (Transparency International 2014). The core components of such international rankings are surveys where experts, businesspersons and the public are asked about their perception of the extent of misuse or bribery in a given country. This method has an inbuilt bias as respondents may overestimate because of the latest scandal, hearsay or general mistrust of politicians and administrators alike (Rose and Mishler 2007). Thus, as argued by Pedersen and Johannsen (2006), this method does not necessarily reflect the actual degree of corruption even if time consistency may give more validity to developments.

Public employees and civil servants can provide a different perspective on the commonality of corruption and favouritism. Matching the perception answers with the civil servants own experience bribery attempts can indicate a more valid statement.

TABLE 2: EXPERIENCE WITH BRIBERY AND PERCEPTIONS OF MISUSE (LITHUANIA, CIVIL SERVANTS)

	Mean	Std.D	Distribution (percent)							Total	N
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Experienced bribery	1.57	0.97	63.9	23.9	7.2	2.4	2.0	0.2	0.4	100.0	498
Perceived corruption	5.27	1.47	1.6	2.9	8.2	14.8	25.0	22.1	25.4	100.0	244

Note: A Likert scale from 1 (never/totally disagree) to 7 (always/totally agree) were used. The differences in the number of respondents are due to a framing experiment with the misuse question. Source: ACI-data 2011.

In general, public employees perceive the extent of misuse as being much more prevalent than their actual experiences. The survey uses a Likert scale from 1 – never – to 7 – always. If we focus on the mean, experienced bribe is very low, leaning towards 1, that is, never – while perceived corruption leans towards the higher end with a mean just above 5. But at the same time, Table 3 reveals that bribery is a serious problem. More than 10 percent of the public employees report attempts of bribery, but the problem is less prevalent than perceived. Asked how often public officials think misuse of public positions takes place at different levels of society, there is a strong tendency to place misuse at the top administrative level and much less in courts and the police (Table 3).

TABLE 3: PERCEPTION OF MISUSE AT ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS (CIVIL SERVANTS, PERCENTAGE)

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Total
At administrative top levels	3.4	17.4	47.3	31.9	100
In regional and local administrations	5.2	22.2	46.2	26.4	100
In courts	7.4	36.5	36.1	20.0	100
In the police	4.9	35.1	43.6	16.4	100

Note: Data recoded from an original Likert Scale of 1 to 7 (1=1; 2 3=2; 4 5=3 and 6 7=4). Question: How often do you think misuse of public positions takes place at...? Source: ACI-Data, 2011.

The survey (ACI-data 2011) also, and reflecting Mathews 7.3,³ finds that public employees find much more corruption in all other places than in their own organization. Thus, employees at the sub-national level relate a perceived high level of corruption to the state level and vice versa. On the other hand, whether public employees are honest when it comes to their perception of corruption in their own organization is more questionable. Compared to other sectors, corruption in own organization is low, but it is there. Whereas the issue of bribery is overstated, a survey conducted by Vytautas Magnus University directly addresses the issue of political favouritism (VMU-data, 2011). The results listed in Table 4 are astonishing. More than 60 percent in the state administration will agree to the statement that political connections are used to influence recruitment. It provides little comfort that the problem appears smaller in municipalities with more than 55 percent agreeing to the statement.

TABLE 4: POLITICAL FAVOURITISM: POLITICAL CONNECTIONS USED IN (CIVIL SERVANTS, PERCENTAGE)

Type of institution	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Ministries and institutions under them	15.5	24.3	60.2	100.0
Municipalities and institutions under them	17.1	27.1	55.8	100.0
Other institutions	17.5	30.0	52.5	100.0
Total	16.2	25.8	58.0	100.0

Note: N=395. Data recoded from an original Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 2 =1; 3=2; 4 5=3) where 1 is fully disagree and 5 is fully agree N. Question: Do you think that political connections are used to influence recruitment in... Source: VMU-data, 2011.

The only consolation is that the question leans on the respondent’s perception rather than their experience and, as with the ACI survey, be overstated. A third supporting survey reveals that out of 545 respondents, 60 percent agreed that corruption was common when positions were filled in public administrations. Only five respondents, however, actually confessed to having bribed their way into the civil service (Map of Corruption 2011). Thus, parallel to the survey differences in Table 3, the actual level of favouritism is probably somewhat lower than what it is perceived to be.

Favouritism comes in two shapes. One is personal connections while the other is political spoil granting administrative position to those who have supported one’s election. The Map of Corruption (2011) directly asks about appointment for bribes, but according to a human resource specialist interviewed in Kaunas city municipality, the problem is that “everyone knows each other here” (Interview May 2013). This could indicate that the driver for favouritism may be more personal than political. Exact knowledge on this issue is difficult to obtain.

³ Matthew 7-3 “Why do you look at the speech of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

To investigate sensitive issues, the list experiment in surveys is a relatively novel method (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). In the experiment, respondents are, by random, divided into two groups. Each group is asked how many out of a number of options they find appropriate to do. However, as the control group only receives four items while the treated group receives five, that is, the sensitive option in addition to the four options in the control group, mean differences between the two groups are a result of the sensitive option. Checking for nepotism, the ACI survey included the sensitive option “if you wanted to hire a nephew even if qualified” and found no differences (ACI-data 2011). As the treated group has no way of knowing what the question actually reveals, this finding indicates that hiring family relations is not an issue and that the civil servants are well aware of the arm’s length principle.

Civinskas (2011) ascribes Lithuania to the group of least politicized systems among the CEE countries and although political favouritism is a declining phenomenon, it is still an issue. At the turn of the millennium, only two of 49 present and former ministers of government agreed that civil servants should be members of the governing coalition. More importantly, 43 ministers out of 51 interviewed thought it better that the right to appoint civil servants rested with the minister him- or herself. Furthermore, that right was exercised, as only 17 of 52 ministers would claim that the arrival of a new minister from another party did not lead to replacement in the ministry. In fact, 34 of 52 ministers would agree to the less imprecise statement that “less than half” was replaced (Johannsen 2003). Lithuanian ministers are no longer able to exercise the same form of power wholesale as they did in the 1990s as the Law on Civil Service formally separated public employees from politics (Pivoras 2013, 145). However, based on World Bank reports, Meyer-Sahling and Nakrošis (2009) find the turnover rate to be nine percent in 2006, and when the leftwing coalition took power in 2012, 286 out of 3564 civil servants (eight percent) left their position (Civil Service Department of Lithuania 2013a). Thus confirming that political favouritism is still in place, Meyer-Sahling and Nakrošis contend that political parties do place their supporters in the ministerial structure in addition to functioning patronage systems where personal connections matter (2009, 22).

In sum, it appears that favouritism and corruption in Lithuania is spread equally across different departments and sectors, with the exception of courts. Administrative reform is politics, and electoral constraints alone will foretell that something has to be done if the public shares the perception of an administration burdened by misuse and appointed through patronage. Centralized civil servant recruitment may be the answer.

5 FALLING BETWEEN TWO STOOLS?

Different HRM structures carry with them different risks in terms of corruption and favouritism. The question is if the reform was warranted by the situation or a result of political bickering? Two answers are proposed.

First, the 2013 reform may have been a simple reaction to continuing pressure from the EU. In 2009, an OECD-SIGMA report praised Lithuania for being a “regional frontrunner” in comparison with other new EU member states (Meyer-Sahling and Nakrošis 2009, 6). At the same time, however, the report finds that there is room for strengthening the civil service system, especially when it comes to curbing political favouritism in recruitment as well as

promotion procedures (Ibid., 22 and 25). Aligning to this, Palidauskaite argues “that changes in the observable written legislation may have served as lip service to a critical (EU) environment which had placed civil service system reform in a weakly defined public administration ‘acquis’” (2011, 205–206). Thus, many of the reforms were intended to appease the EU than to take effect in the administration. Second, as pointed out by Nakrošis (2001), Lithuania’s lack of sufficient state capacity was a critical impediment to Europeanization. While preparations for EU membership unleashed a second wave of reform, the reorganization of the civil service was mediated by internal interests and conditions (Nakrošis 2001, 176; Nakrošis and Budraitis 2012). Geddes (1991) argues that an increase in political competition endangers the spoils of the patronage system for the incumbent because a change in government is likely. Consequently, the incumbent may have an incentive to reform the recruitment system before losing the election and thereby lock in previous gains.

Looking at recent history, HRM reform has been piecemeal and slow in coming because of political bickering with the pendulum first swinging towards the departmentalized and later the unified model. In 2002, a number of amendments were made that eliminated the prior civil service experience as a requirement for senior administrative positions. In reality, this opened up for competition from the outside to the civil service, welcoming career shifts to and from the private sector (Pivoras 2013). The official reason to decentralize and open up the administration was an analysis stressing the need to import competences critical to the civil service in order to steer through the modernization and, not least, the requirements of the *acquis communautaire* (Židonis 2007, 353). An unofficial reason was that the left-of-centre government in 2002 wanted to make some of the senior positions available to its supporters in order to lock in the gains of the election (Pivoras 2008, 122).

In the following years, the pendulum began swinging back towards closure and a unified approach. Calls for a full centralization were, however, abandoned because of large foreseeable initial costs related to such a reform. Thus, Gediminas Kirkilas’ left-leaning government did not manage to lock-in the gains. Instead, an incremental reform to raise the standards of civil service entry was introduced. All prospective candidates had to pass written tests in a pre-selection phase. With the change of government in 2008, the incoming right-wing coalition government wanted to reform the civil service system. The government was, among other things, inspired by ideas from New Public Management and wanted to introduce fixed-term contracts (Civinskas 2011). However, disagreement between the coalition partners intensified. Not until after the replacement of the Minister of Interior, a compromise was reached. As often happens, the political bickering became locked in institutions. The status of the Civil Service Department was elevated in 2012 – no longer a subordinated unit to the Ministry of Interior – but made directly accountable to the Government Collegium, and the Civil Service Department did not gain the right of legal initiative – which still rested with the Ministry. The Civil Service Department was, however, assured operational independence from the Ministry (Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2012). Witnessed by the creation of a new structural division – the Selection Division – and according to the Financial Reports of the Civil Service Department 2012, a budget increase of 25 percent (Civil Service Department of Lithuania 2012, 2013b), in a time of fiscal austerity between 2012 and 2013, a powerful actor to support centralization was created (cf. Niskanen 1991).

With the compromise and the organization in place, the pendulum made another swing towards centralization. At the eve of the ordinary elections, the

Parliament passed amendments to the Civil Service Law. The amendment introduced a centralized test of general abilities and competencies in the recruitment procedure, and the administrative responsibility handed to the Civil Service Department (Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania 2012). The Conservative-led government could not fully close the issue before losing the elections in 2012. Thus, the new left government (instated in December 2012) seized the initiative and turned the "Concept for the Improvement of the Recruitment into the Civil Service of Lithuania" (TMDPartners 2013) into a government decree to take full effect by summer 2013 (Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2013). Although an impact of EU recommendation also played a role in this latest case advisors to the relevant ministers strongly underlined the importance of persistent and personal interest in the architecture of the reform (Interview A, May 2013), indicating a political commitment to reform.

The aim of the 2013 HRM reform is primarily to increase the general level of civil service competences. A second aim is to curb political favouritism and bribery. The selling point of the reform is the stated in the aim to increase transparency of recruitment in face of a sceptical public concerned with misuse in the political and administrative life of Lithuania (TMDPartners 2013; Mikalauskas 2013). That is irrespective of the decline in corruption reported by Transparency International it is not only still substantial but also political salient. The fast move by the government breaks the cycle of political protectionism. It is expected that an incoming government seize the opportunity to bring in "their own" civil servants. However, with an electorate perceiving favouritism and corruption to be paramount issues, the new government took the opportunity or trade-off between securing patronage and showing political initiative and strength.

With the reform, the previous priorities of flexibility and decentralized recruitment is abandoned, although not wholeheartedly, as the scrutiny of candidates are only made at the entry level through a pre-selection phase with a written test and, decentralized, oral tests and interviews as a second step. The pre-selection written test will have the effect of creating a rooster of eligible candidates, leaving the actual hiring at the discretion of each department. However, to maintain some control of the local hiring process, specialists from the Department of Civil Service can partake in the interview board.

The creation of a rooster will narrow down the base of selection, that is, raise the standard, but as a centrally placed interviewee concluded, politics and political patronage can take place as usual (Interview, May 2013). The reform therefore falls between two stools. It appears that although the reform centralizes recruitment, it also continues the inertia of previous and perhaps less successful attempts to introduce state examinations at the entry level while keeping actual decisions at departmental and local levels. Because the solution creates a hybrid between flexibility in selection, thereby muting protests against losing or, rather, not hiring the most competent people, and the rigidity of preliminary testing, which raises standards in the eye of the public – and hence the prestige of being a civil servant, the civil service itself has made relatively few protests.

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