

Proposed changes and amendments for the Law on Civil Servants - a path towards depolitization of the Civil Service?

Reforms in the Law on Civil Servants were put in front of Macedonia's authorities as a main precondition for getting positive remarks in the EC Annual Progress Report. Therefore, the Ministry of Justice had proceeded with the drafting of changes and amendments in the

Five segments that the Proposal focuses on:

- *the range of civil servants;*
- *redefinition of role and competencies of the Civil Servants Agency;*
- *employment of civil servants aiming at shortening of deadlines and reducing the duration of the procedure;*
- *mobility (advancement) of civil servants through introduction of internal call; and career supplements.*

existing law and made them open to the public and the members of the parliament. According to the minister of Justice, Mihajlo Manevski, the proposed changes will produce positive effects on the overall functioning of the Civil Service and thus all obstacles that prevented the Civil Service from being independent, autonomous and in serve of citizens will be eliminated.

On 24th of August 2009, the Law entered in the parliamentary procedure for first reading in the parliamentary commissions. It was initially expected that the changes and amendments will be approved with consensus until 15th of September 2009. However, based on the initial reactions by the opposition and some prominent experts, who were determined that the changes and amendments proposed do not move lagging issues forward, the consensual approval of the amendments was under a question mark. Vlado Buckovski from the biggest opposition party (SDSM) says that it is illogical that Civil Servants will be provided with the opportunity to advance in the hierarchy starting from the lowest level up to the highest one, for a period of only five years. The first amendment discussion was characterized with rough debates accompanied by 80 amendments filed from the political parties. The main amendment filed by the ruling party (VMRO – DPMNE) had to do with removing of the article which states that the Head of the Civil Service might be discharged from the position if the Parliament does not approve its Report. Albanian parties' main concern had to do with existence of mechanisms in the legal provisions which would guarantee implementation of equitable representation of all ethnic communities in the Civil Service.

Surprisingly, most of the amendments were accepted and the changes and amendments were approved with wide consensus. Both parties (ruling and opposition) were significantly satisfied with what was achieved. Furthermore, it was one of the rare situations when both sides appraised each other for being rational and constructive, giving priority to country's interest for EU accession instead of daily political outmaneuvers.

At this stage, it can only be concluded that due to the achieved consensus, the new legal frame has strong political backing and is good enough to ensure depolitization. However, the next challenge will with no doubt be its full implementation.