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PROCEEDINGS

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MILITANTISM IN THE CORE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This topic is highly relevant following the official opening of negotiations for EU membership, as the aspiration of the Albanian people to meet European integration standards requires strong administrative capacities and the creation of an intellectual elite with integrity and professional competence. Through the empirical method, the observant eye of a civil servant with extensive experience in public administration reaches important conclusions for improving legislation and building functional institutions to address the challenges of managing the civil service in independent institutions, particularly within local government structures.

Keywords: *Civil Service; Civil Servant; Merit Principle; Militantism; Local Governance*

INTRODUCTION

This study examines how legal reforms in the civil service can effectively ensure the recruitment of individuals with integrity and professional competence in local government. The civil service, as the intellectual backbone of the state, must remain professional, politically independent, and stable despite fluctuating political forces. The research contrasts two opposing models:

- Merit Principle – a value-based system prioritizing competence and fairness in appointments to deliver quality public services;
- Militantism – a politicized approach where appointments reward electoral loyalty rather than merit, undermining professionalism and integrity.[1]

The central question addressed is: What reforms are necessary to establish a professional, merit-based public administration committed to serving citizens effectively?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The scope of this research combines an observation that goes beyond the superficial image of reality reflected by the civil service framework. Extensive experience within local government public administration has enabled direct observation of various situations involving mismanagement of human capital by political leaders with weak legal awareness. To avoid remaining within the limits of individual experience, reports from civil service monitoring institutions in Albania, as well as foreign and domestic literature, have been utilized. The empirical method is intertwined with normative, comparative, and legal synthesis approaches to validate the hypotheses raised throughout the study.

The confrontation between the content of civil service legislation and its practical implementation focuses on challenging questions:

- What are the underlying causes of pronounced militantism in local government public administration in Albania?
- Have civil service reforms achieved their goal of creating a stable and professionally competent civil service capable of meeting the challenges of European integration?

- How can the career and stability of a civil servant with integrity and professional competence be guaranteed in a reality plagued by militantism?

In the effort to identify the root cause of human capital mismanagement in public administration, all paths lead to militantism—the virus of incompetence that has infected every cell of the state apparatus in Albania. Militantism has produced severe consequences even in consolidated democratic states, such as the United States, where the employment of political loyalists in the state bureaucracy in the early 19th century undermined the intellectual capacity of public administration. Even today, many scholars criticize militant tendencies in the U.S. under Trump's leadership, justified in the name of increasing public administration accountability toward reforms.[2] The most entrenched and damaging politicization in post-communist states stems from the legacy of party dominance over the state. In Albania, militantism has deepened in recent years, eroding state capacity through systemic incompetence. The absence of political rotation—marked by the ruling party's fourth consecutive mandate in May 2025—has further reinforced this trend. Although the 2013 civil service reform sought to build a professional and accountable administration aligned with EU integration goals, its impact has been limited due to the lack of genuine political will. At the local level, reform objectives remain unfulfilled, as decentralized management of recruitment and promotion within independent institutions continues to hinder meritocracy and sustainability.[3]

Meanwhile, the challenges faced by local government are substantial. In 2015, through an organic law, its functions were significantly expanded, increasing the burden of responsibilities for municipalities in numerous areas. These include infrastructure and public services, social services, culture, sports, environmental protection, agriculture, rural development, public forests and pastures, nature and biodiversity, local economic development, and public safety.[4] Albania's path toward becoming part of the European Union family is progressing rapidly in the initial phase of opening numerous chapters of EU legislation. However, the greatest challenge will be its implementation. Considering that 70% of EU legislation must be enforced by local government, strengthening the administrative capacities of local governance is of particular importance.[5] Drawing on extensive professional experience within the Civil Service Commission, where human resource management has often been subject to politicization and competition outcomes influenced by institutional leadership, it is evident that the decentralized management model in independent institutions undermines the meritocratic principle. Comparative research on post-communist countries demonstrates that civil service reforms have been more effective under centralized management structures, ensuring consistent implementation of legislation in accordance with the core principles of European public administration.[6]

Despite extensive analysis of challenges within independent institutions, civil service reform in Albania continues to apply a dual approach by dividing civil service institutions into two categories. The first encompasses state administration bodies, managed centrally under the Department of Public Administration, while the second includes independent institutions, where human resource management remains decentralized and handled internally by their respective administrative units.[7] But can the merit principle truly be applied in the selection of human capital within independent institutions when civil service management is left entirely to their own human resource units? Extensive interviews with local civil servants and reports from Albanian monitoring bodies reveal widespread irregularities and legal violations in civil service management within independent institutions, particularly at the local level. Although limited in number, these interviews were highly qualitative, conducted confidentially with human resource management officials in local government to ensure anonymity and protect them from potential pressure by institutional heads. Meanwhile, oversight by the Commissioner in 2024 found that about 30% of civil service positions were unlawfully filled, with 87.4% of these cases occurring in local government. The Civil Service Commission's findings confirm that noncompliance with legal standards is especially prevalent in local institutions. This disparity between independent and central bodies is evident in both transparency and recruitment practices, as centrally managed institutions under the Department of Public Administration demonstrate more consistent application of group recruitment and technological innovations.[8] However, in independent institutions, the two main innovations introduced by the Civil Service Law (2013)—the electronic competition system and group recruitment—are not applied. These mechanisms are essential for enforcing the merit principle and enhancing professionalism within civil service institutions.[9]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that militantism remains a major obstacle to developing a professional, merit-based civil service in Albania, particularly within local government. Despite 2013 legislative reforms, decentralized management in independent institutions continues to undermine meritocracy and foster practices that compromise transparency and professionalism. Empirical evidence confirms that politicization in human resource management erodes institutional integrity and efficiency.

To meet the challenges of European integration, Albania must strengthen centralized oversight, enforce uniform recruitment standards, and adopt technological innovations such as electronic competition systems. The selection and promotion of talent in local governance require a national collegial body of field experts to ensure consistent application of civil service legislation. Its members should be appointed through an open, competitive process supervised by a commission including representatives of the ruling majority, opposition, and civil society, guaranteeing transparency, fairness, and independence from political influence.

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