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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE ALBANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Human resource management constitutes one of the fundamental pillars for the effective functioning of public administration. In the context of the political, economic, and social transformations that Albania has undergone over the past decades, public administration has faced numerous challenges related to professionalism, efficiency, depoliticization, and the modernization of the civil service. Human resource management in the public sector is not limited solely to staff recruitment and administration, but also encompasses professional development, motivation, performance evaluation, ethics, and the strengthening of institutional capacities.

Within the Albanian context, public administration has transitioned from a centralized and politically controlled model during the communist period toward an administration that seeks to align with European standards. This transition has brought about significant legal and institutional changes, while simultaneously revealing structural issues such as nepotism, the lack of meritocracy, low levels of employee motivation, and insufficient professional capacities.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of human resource management within the Albanian public administration, focusing on the principal challenges and future development prospects. Through an analytical and comparative approach, the study will address the legal, institutional, and practical aspects of human resource administration, as well as the impact of administrative reforms on improving public service delivery.

Keywords: Public administration, human resource management, integration, civil service.

1. Introduction

Human Resource Management represents one of the most significant components of an effective and sustainable public administration system. In modern governance, the quality of public services and the level of institutional efficiency are closely linked to the professionalism, integrity, and performance of public employees. In the Albanian context, public administration has undergone substantial reforms during the last decades, particularly in the framework of European Union integration, democratization, and the establishment of the rule of law. Despite these developments, the management of human resources in the Albanian public administration continues to face numerous structural, legal, and organizational challenges.

The study examines issues related to recruitment procedures, merit-based promotion, political influence, employee motivation, professional training, performance evaluation, and administrative accountability. Particular attention is devoted to the implementation of civil service legislation and the extent to which transparency, impartiality, and professionalism are effectively guaranteed in practice.

The paper further explores the impact of digitalization, administrative modernization, and international standards on the development of public sector human resources. It argues that while Albania has adopted an advanced legal framework aligned with European principles, practical implementation remains inconsistent due to institutional weaknesses, limited administrative

capacities, and political interference in decision-making processes.

1. The Evolution of the Albanian Public Administration

The Albanian public administration has undergone several historical stages of development, evolving from a centralized administration characterized by political control and a lack of institutional autonomy during the communist regime, to the continuous contemporary efforts aimed at establishing a democratic administration based on transparency, meritocracy, equality, and aligned with European standards.

Following the collapse of the communist regime, Albania entered a new phase of political and economic reforms. Among the primary objectives was the establishment of new state institutions founded on professionalism and meritocracy, through the reform and creation of a democratic public administration reflecting a society aligned with European Union standards. The European integration process has exerted a significant influence on the reform of the Albanian public administration. The European Union has consistently required the establishment of a professional, efficient, and depoliticized administration as a prerequisite for advancing the integration process.

The first step toward establishing a transparent and efficient administration was undertaken during 1995–

1996 with the adoption of the first Civil Service Law³, although it was never effectively implemented. In 1998, within the framework of civil service reform and with the assistance of SIGMA, the OSCE, and the World Bank, a new civil service act⁴ was adopted, bringing the Albanian legal framework closer to widely accepted European standards and principles.

During the period 1999–2002, a series of by-laws were adopted, and implementing institutions were established, including: the Department of Public Administration (DAP)⁵, serving as the central managerial unit; the Civil Service Commission (KMSHC)⁶, functioning as the supervisory authority responsible for monitoring the implementation of civil service legislation and handling administrative complaints; and the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA)⁷, responsible for the training and professional development of public officials. These institutions continue to exercise their functions to this day.

On 12 June 2006, the Republic of Albania signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union, the primary objective of which is the country's accession to the European Union. The Agreement establishes reciprocal rights and obligations while creating frameworks for cooperation across various sectors. One of these obligations consists of developing an efficient and accountable public administration, with particular emphasis on institution-building, the development and implementation of transparent and impartial recruitment procedures, human resource management, career development within the public service, continuous professional training, and the promotion of ethics and e-governance at both central and local levels of administration⁸.

For several years, Albania has maintained a well-defined strategic framework for Public Administration Reform, encompassing five principal strategies:

1. The Crosscutting Strategy for Public Administration Reform;
2. The National Crosscutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance;
3. The Public Financial Management Strategy;
4. The Crosscutting Anti-Corruption Strategy;
5. The Crosscutting Strategy "Digital Agenda of Albania."⁹

2. The Legal Framework of Human Resource Management in Albania

Human resource management within the Albanian public administration is supported by a broad legal and institutional framework. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania establishes the fundamental principles governing the functioning of public administration and guarantees the rights of public employees.

The principal legal acts regulating human resource management in the public sector include:

- The Civil Service Law;
- The Labour Code;
- The Law on the Organization and Functioning of State Administration;
- The Law on Ethics in Public Administration;
- The Code of Administrative Procedures.

The Law "On the Civil Servant" represents one of the most significant legal frameworks through which the principles of meritocracy and professionalism are intended to be institutionalized within the Albanian public administration. Among other provisions, this law guarantees transparent and competitive recruitment procedures, professional training and development, as well as objective performance evaluation mechanisms.

The Department of Public Administration (DoPA) plays a central role in the management of human resources within the state administration. This institution is responsible for:

- Drafting and supervising the implementation of state policies concerning the civil service;
- Preparing draft laws and sub-legal acts related to the civil service;
- Monitoring the implementation of civil service legislation within public institutions;
- Providing opinions on every draft act proposed by other institutions concerning state administration;
- Approving and monitoring the implementation of training programs within the civil service;
- Preparing the annual recruitment plan for state administration institutions;
- Representing, together with the Ministry of Finance, the Council of Ministers in negotiations and consultations concerning the general terms of employment in the civil service with trade unions or representatives of civil servants;
- Administering the Central Personnel Register;
- Supporting and providing guidance to institutions in the implementation of the relevant legislation;
- Preparing general guidelines and manuals to ensure the uniform implementation of civil service legislation across state administration institutions;
- Submitting to the Prime Minister, upon proposal by state administration institutions, their organizational structures and staffing schemes, in accordance with the legal provisions governing budgetary system management in the Republic of Albania;
- In accordance with the legislation in force, drafting and cooperating in the development of salary

³ Republic of Albania. (1996). Law No. 8095/1996 on the Civil Service in the Republic of Albania

⁴ Republic of Albania. (1999). Law No. 8549/1999 "Status of the Civil Servant".

⁵ Department of Public Administration. (n.d.). Official website. <https://www.dap.gov.al/>

⁶ Civil Service Commission (Komisioneri për Mbikëqyrjen e Shërbimit Civil). (n.d.). Official website. <https://kmshc.al/>

⁷ Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA). (n.d.). Official website. <https://aspa.gov.al/en/>

⁸ Republic of Albania. (2006). Law No. 9590, dated 27 July 2006, Article 111, on the ratification of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the Republic of Albania and the European Communities and their Member States.

⁹ Republic of Albania. (2022). National plan for European integration 2023–2025 (p. 32). December 2022.

structures for civil servants and employees of both central and local public administration¹⁰.

Furthermore, the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) plays a significant role in the training and professional development of civil servants. ASPA is responsible for providing professional education through the implementation of the following programs:

- The Advanced Training Program, through which candidates for membership in the Top-Level Management Corps (TND) are prepared;
- The Continuous Training Program, through which civil servants of all categories, as well as any other individuals outside the civil service, receive ongoing professional training related to their duties and professional responsibilities¹¹.

3. Recruitment, Selection, Evaluation, and Promotion in the Civil Service

3.1. Recruitment and Selection in the Civil Service

Recruitment constitutes one of the most important functions of human resource management. A transparent and merit-based recruitment process is essential for the establishment of a professional and efficient administration.

Albanian legislation, *inter alia*, provides that admission to the civil service shall be conducted through a national competitive procedure. The selection process is based on the assessment of candidates' competencies, including written examinations, structured oral interviews, and any other appropriate forms of skills verification.

The law stipulates that first-time admission to the civil service within the executive category is conducted through an open competition procedure, which is carried out in two stages:

a) Preliminary Verification

This phase determines whether candidates fulfill the general requirements, namely: being an Albanian citizen; possessing full legal capacity to act; having proficiency in spoken and written Albanian; being in appropriate health conditions to perform the relevant duties; not having been convicted by a final court decision for the commission of a criminal offense or an intentional misdemeanor; and not being subject to disciplinary measures that have not expired according to the law. Candidates must also satisfy the specific requirements related to the level of education, professional experience, and other qualifications required for the relevant category, class, group, and position, as announced on the official website of the Department of Public Administration. This procedure is conducted by the responsible unit.

The institution responsible for organizing civil service recruitment procedures within state administration institutions is the Department of Public Administration (DoPA), whereas for Local Self-Government

Units, this responsibility belongs to the human resources unit established within the respective institution.

b) Candidate Evaluation

Following the written examination and the structured oral interview, the successful candidate is selected based on obtaining more than 70 percent of the total evaluation points awarded by the permanent admission committee.

Within the Albanian public administration, recruitment procedures are regulated by law and are based on the principles of meritocracy, transparency, and equal opportunities.

"The administration of the civil service is governed by law and is based on the principles of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, merit, transparency, professionalism, and political impartiality, while guaranteeing the stability of civil servants in office and the continuity of the civil service."¹²

Different European Union member states apply diverse approaches regarding candidate evaluation processes.

For example, the Federal Ministry for the Civil Service ensures candidate assessment through procedures based on job descriptions, performance tests (including verbal and numerical reasoning, logical thinking and problem-solving, text comprehension, and foreign language skills), as well as computer-based testing.

Meanwhile, in Slovakia, the selection process is conducted through a commission that applies several assessment methods, including oral interviews aimed at identifying managerial, analytical, and conceptual skills, strategic thinking, the ability to work under pressure, decision-making capacity, adaptability, and related competencies, as well as written examinations and mandatory assessment tests for managerial positions.

It may be argued that, in order to further strengthen credibility, professionalism, and meritocracy, the recruitment process in Albania should be improved in several directions. These improvements should include the standardization of testing procedures, increased transparency, the digitalization of recruitment processes, and the strengthening of appeal mechanisms. Furthermore, greater emphasis should be placed on evaluating candidates' professional experience, qualifications, certifications, and educational background in relation to the respective position.

In particular, performance evaluations provided by supervisors should carry greater weight—at least 60 percent of the overall assessment—compared to the evaluation of legal knowledge, which may vary according to changing circumstances and should not be considered the sole or principal determinant of a candidate's professionalism.

3.2. Performance Evaluation in the Civil Service

¹⁰ Republic of Albania. (2013). Law No. 152/2013 "On the Civil Servant," Article 7.

¹¹ Republic of Albania. (2013). Law No. 152/2013 "On the Civil Servant," Article 9.

¹² Republic of Albania. (2013). Law No. 152/2013 "On the Civil Servant," Article 5.

Regarding the evaluation of civil servants, Article 62 of Law No. 152/2013 “On the Civil Servant,” as amended, provides that:

“1. Performance evaluation is the process of verifying the overall achievement of the objectives established at the beginning of the evaluation period, as well as assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the civil servant in carrying out duties, conducted every six months. Performance evaluation aims to improve the professional skills of the civil servant and the quality of service delivery.

2. A civil servant may be evaluated at one of the following levels:

- a) ‘very good’;
- b) ‘good’;
- c) ‘satisfactory’;
- ç) ‘unsatisfactory’.

Different countries apply varying practices regarding the frequency of civil servant evaluations. States such as Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, and Austria conduct evaluations once a year, whereas in countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Poland, and Portugal, evaluations may be conducted every two or more years.

The Albanian legislation does not provide any specific provisions concerning civil servants who, as a result of receiving a “very good” evaluation, demonstrate high work performance and achievement of objectives. It may be argued that this element should be explicitly reflected in the law, as it would encourage the establishment of a stable, professional, and merit-based civil service.

The Czech Republic, within its civil service legislation, has provided that civil servants may benefit from salary supplements depending on their performance results. If a civil servant achieves outstanding results, they may receive a salary bonus not exceeding 50% of the average salary for the respective position; employees evaluated as “very good” may receive a 40% supplement, those evaluated as “good” a 30% supplement, and those evaluated as “satisfactory” a 10% supplement.

Similarly, in Latvia, civil servants receiving the highest evaluations benefit from an annual bonus amounting to 75% of their salary level, in addition to extra paid leave.

In Hungary, performance evaluations are conducted in written form and carry several legal consequences, including a salary reduction of up to 20% or a salary increase of up to 30%. In cases of poor performance, disciplinary measures may extend to dismissal from the civil service.

3.3. Promotion in the Civil Service

With regard to career development, two distinct forms may be identified: functional promotion (advancement to a higher position) and salary promotion (progression within the salary scale without movement to a different position). Within the framework of functional promotion, two additional elements of career development may be distinguished:

1. Horizontal Promotion (“parallel movement”)

This refers to the advancement of civil servants to a position within the same or a higher class, but still within the same category (for example, from Specialist III to Specialist II or Specialist I, or from Head of Unit II to Head of Unit I).

2. Vertical Promotion (“promotion in office”)

This refers to the advancement of civil servants to a position belonging to a higher category (for example, from the executive level to the lower management level, or from lower management to middle management positions)¹³.

Considering that the Law on the Civil Servant guarantees the stability of civil servants in office and the continuity of the civil service, while also being based on the principles of professionalism, it may be argued that there remains room for further improvement in this regard, particularly through the adoption of best practices implemented by European Union member states.

Germany, for example, considers the civil servant as a long-term investment from the very moment of recruitment. Every German citizen has the right to hold public office based on their abilities, qualifications, and professional achievements. The promotion of civil servants is carried out on the basis of indicators such as professional competencies, qualifications, and performance, through which civil servants may advance to higher positions within the civil service hierarchy.

The Albanian legislation recognizes the Department of Public Administration as the institution responsible, *inter alia*, for managing the Central Personnel Register (CPR), where professional data relating to civil servants are recorded. This system simultaneously serves as a comprehensive database that facilitates the orientation of civil servants toward positions corresponding to their professional experience, positive evaluations, and qualifications.

For instance, a civil servant holding a Doctor of Science degree while performing duties in a position that requires only a Bachelor’s degree should be provided with the opportunity to be positioned within an organizational structure that corresponds to their academic qualifications and professional capacities.

4. Work–Life Balance

Following recent amendments to Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 568, dated 06.10.2021, “On the approval of rules on working time and rest periods, overtime, and their compensation in state administration institutions, independent institutions, and local self-government units,” civil servants are now entitled to an annual paid leave duration of 4 (four) calendar weeks, equivalent to 22 (twenty-two) working days. The decision also introduces, among other provisions, flexibility in working hours, which were previously strictly fixed, thereby providing additional support to civil servants.

¹³ Republic of Albania. (2010). Draft conceptual document for a new Civil Service Law in Albania (p. 34). 1 October 2010.

However, based on European practices—which aim not only at public service delivery but also at ensuring broader social well-being, including that of civil servants—these recent changes remain insufficient to fully guarantee an effective work–life balance. It is therefore considered necessary to further adapt the legal framework, as European Union member states are increasingly moving towards reducing working hours or even the number of working days per week. Such reforms aim to enhance employees' well-being within their family and social life. As a country aspiring to EU membership, Albania should take further steps in this direction.

II. Methodology

The scientific methodology employed in this article is based on research, analytical, and comparative methods. These approaches have been utilized to examine the concept of the civil service mechanism, its constituent elements, and to conduct a comparative analysis of specific civil service institutions with selected practices implemented in European Union member states.

Through a qualitative and analytical approach, the study highlights the necessity of strengthening meritocracy, improving professional training mechanisms, and ensuring greater institutional independence in personnel management. The paper concludes that effective human resource management is essential not only for increasing administrative efficiency but also for enhancing public trust in state institutions and consolidating democratic governance in Albania.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

Albania has placed particular importance on the civil service, with explicit constitutional provisions established in Article 107¹⁴. Over the years, the civil service mechanism has been progressively aligned with European legislative requirements, not only in terms of legal design but also in terms of performance and implementation. This progress is also reflected in the SIGMA Monitoring Report 2024:

“Albania remains a regional leader in public administration performance in four out of six thematic areas, particularly in public finance management, civil service and human resource management, as well as policy development and coordination for public administration reform. The appointment of a dedicated State Minister for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption in January 2024 is an important development that clarifies political responsibility for public administration reform. The attractiveness of the civil service as an employer has increased, together with satisfaction regarding salaries, following a 46% salary increase in the public sector. Working conditions affecting employee well-being (remote work arrangements, flexible working hours, consultations with employee representatives, and job

satisfaction surveys) are receiving increasing attention within the civil service. 86% of surveyed civil servants would recommend their institution as a good workplace, the highest result in the region.

Albania has made progress in establishing a stable legal framework for access to official information, and the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Personal Data Protection is an effective authority in ensuring the handling of information requests.

Albania has advanced in the digitalization of public services, with 95% of services now available through the e-Albania platform, improving online access for citizens and businesses.¹⁵

Despite these achievements, Law No. 152/2013 “On the Civil Servant,” as amended, requires further adaptation not only due to obligations arising from European Union accession but also due to broader social changes. This adaptation should follow best practices from EU member states, including:

- Standardization of testing procedures;
- Increased transparency in recruitment processes;
- Digitalization of administrative procedures;
- Strengthening of appeal mechanisms against administrative procedures;
- Greater emphasis on professional experience, qualifications, and educational level of candidates in relation to job positions, with performance evaluations by supervisors carrying at least 60 points compared to assessments of legal knowledge, which are subject to change over time and should not be considered a key determinant of professionalism;
- Strengthening of performance-based reward systems linked to evaluations, qualifications, and work experience, in order to motivate civil servants;
- Strengthening professional capacities by promoting civil servants with academic degrees into managerial structures;
- Further alignment of the legal framework with European practices, giving greater emphasis to work–life balance.

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1. ¹⁴ Public servants implement the law and serve the people.

2. Civil servants in public administration are appointed through a competitive procedure, except in cases provided for by law.

3. Guarantees of tenure and the legal treatment of public servants are regulated by law.

¹⁵ Ministry of Public Administration and Anti-Corruption. (2024). SIGMA monitoring report 2024: Albania – Regional leader in 4 out of 6 assessment areas. <https://mapa.gov.al/newsroom/raporti-i-monitorimit-sigma-2024-shqipëria-lider-rajonal-ne-4-nga-6-fushat-e-vleresimit/>

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