

PUBLIC
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WORK CONTEXT
AND REFORMS
IN SERBIA

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RESULTS FROM A LARGE SCALE SURVEY OF SENIOR PUBLIC EXECUTIVES

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Hertie School
of Governance



SOCIAL INCLUSION
AND POVERTY
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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the first large scale comparative study about the reform of the Serbian public administration. The report is based on results of a survey of 1349 senior civil servants, which was conducted as part of the *Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future* (COCOPS) project.

The aim of the report is to describe the population of senior civil servants and assess their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, investigate the work context these managers operate in and report their evaluation of PAR and the impact of international organizations on reforms. We argue that these are crucial factors in the success—or failure—of future efforts to reform the Serbian public administration.

Our study has shown that large scale civil service reform has yet to take place in Serbia. Reforms are characterised as partial and unsuccessful. The current administrative culture is based on rule compliance rather than performance and characterized by a high degree of risk-aversion. A very low degree of goal clarity is reported throughout the senior civil service, with lower management levels reporting a higher goal ambiguity. This goal ambiguity is accompanied by a high concentration of power within the appointed level of civil servants, with executorial civil servants reporting extremely low levels of policy and budgeting autonomy and low levels of career mobility—the experience of ‘plateauing’ is common. Very high levels of political interference in the functioning of the civil service is identified across the senior civil service as undermining effective policy making and implementation. The vast majority of surveyed civil servants recognize the beneficial impact of international organizations on the content of reforms and on the pace and extent to which they are implemented.

We argue that top decision makers should operationalize strategic plans by setting clear goals and targets and formalize these into management practices through utilizing objectives and results frameworks. This will not only allow political leaders to hold the senior public executive accountable for their performance, but also protect senior executives from the fickleness of national politics. In turn, senior public managers should use the clarity and stability of such frameworks to delegate more management autonomy to lower management levels, thereby stimulating internalization of collective goals throughout the civil service. Reforms should then be undertaken to increase the career mobility of executorial civil servants. Our findings suggest that such management reforms will lead to higher job satisfaction and engagement at all layers of public management.

We conclude that the engagement of all layers of the administrative executive is a necessary condition to successfully implement public administration reform and execution of public policy in general. Changing the work context within the civil service should be a priority for both civil service executive and political leaders.

Introductory Letter

Serbia's accession to the European Union is a process that entails many, at times demanding, changes that society should carry out. The ultimate objective of the whole process, in addition to the EU membership, is that the Republic of Serbia becomes a fairer and better society to the benefit of all citizens.

In light of the pending membership negotiations and harmonization of Serbian legislation with the European *acquis communautaire*, it is important to point out that the institutions have a particularly important role to play in the entire process, and that the quality and the length of EU accession process depend on their readiness to adopt and implement reforms, as part of which they are undergoing changes themselves.

Most often institutions constitute the principal mechanism for the implementation of laws. At the request of the European Council, in 2010, a group of prominent individuals and experts presented the report 'Project Europe 2030 – Challenges and Opportunities', which, in addition to many proposals and ideas for the better functioning of Europe, also sent out an important warning: "When ambitious objectives are pursued with limited resources and weak implementation mechanisms, we have a recipe for disappointment". In order to prevent this from happening, it is necessary to keep advancing and improving the work of institutions.

Serbia has recently joined the European-wide project *Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future – COCOPS*¹, funded by the European Commission. This project endeavours to assess in quantitative and qualitative terms the impact of public sector reforms in European countries, relying on the experiences of civil service experts from 13 countries².

¹ See more about the project at <http://cocops.eu>

² In addition to Serbia, the following countries participate in the project: Austria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, Lithuania and Portugal.

Serbia has been subsequently involved in the implementation of the project after its inception thanks to the commitment of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence. The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit has had the privilege of providing support to this important survey.

Given that civil service reform in Serbia is ongoing, it is crucially important to identify the views of the people holding senior positions, decision-makers and managers of internal units in the civil service, about the current public policy-making process and the status of reform implementation. Their experiences are comparable to the experiences of their peers in other European countries covered by the COCOPS survey. Serbia's involvement in Europe's biggest civil service research project provides direct support to public sector reform in the Republic of Serbia.

Serbia's participation in this European programme has been possible thanks to many institutions and individuals, who have invested resources and energy to implement the programme as successfully as possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration and the European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for their generous support, as well as Nataša Čorbić, Irena Cerović, and Gerhard Hammerschmid for their exceptionally useful advice and comments. We would like to thank in particular the respondents who have made the survey possible.

Žarko Šunderić

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1.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of the survey 'Coordinating for Cohesion in the Public Sector of the Future' (COCOPS) is to provide insight into the personal experiences and views of senior civil servants about public governance and the application of reforms within Serbia's public administration. The survey encompassed a representative sample of senior civil servants, who are, more than any other group of actors within the government, directly responsible for the implementation of reforms and the day to day management of the public administration.

The survey was distributed to 47 central government institutions, targeting all senior civil servants in management positions, ranging from group leaders (lowest targeted rank) to state secretaries (highest targeted rank). Of the 2522 civil servants operating in the targeted institutions, 1349 (53.5%) participated in the survey. To our knowledge, the resulting database represents the largest and most comprehensive study of the views and opinions of senior civil servants ever undertaken in the Republic of Serbia.

The COCOPS questionnaire covers a wide range of topics, from coordination quality and management tool implementation to the motivational and psychological attitudes. While most of these topics are crucial aspects of public administration evaluation, unfortunately they cannot all be covered in a single report. Rather than attempting to cover all them³ the

current report aims to provide policymakers and stakeholders involved in public administration reform with an overview of the challenges characterizing the administrative environment in which Serbia's senior civil servants currently operate. The survey results are used to evaluate how this context affects job satisfaction, engagement and organizational commitment among civil servants, which consequentially impacts on civil servants' productivity and potential willingness to accept reform. To our knowledge, this is also the first large scale study of the management culture within Serbia's civil service.

The report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 briefly describes the status quo of public administration reform in Serbia. Chapter 3 briefly introduces the COCOPS project, describes the implementation and access strategy in Serbia (section 3.1), and provides a short description of the survey sample (section 3.2). Chapter 4 describes gender balance among central government executives (section 4.1), education and training (section 4.2), public and private sector tenure (section 4.3), and job satisfaction and organizational commitment (section 4.4). Chapter 5 then digs into the work context in which Serbia's senior civil servants operate, covering goal congruence (section 5.1), autonomy and centralization (section 5.2), and civil service politicization (section 5.3). Chapter 6 covers respondents' evaluation of previous reforms (section 6.1) and the influence of international organizations on the reform process (6.2). Chapter 7 presents the report's conclusions.

³ The authors hope to address these topics separately in future research.

2. CONTEXT AND STATUS QUO OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SERBIA

Following a period of administrative Socialism in the 1990s, Serbia's public administration was inefficient, unpredictable and lacked transparency (Milenković, 2013). The public administration was highly centralised, with a pyramid-like structure in which decisions were made and duties and tasks assigned at the top (Džinić 2011). Civil servants' commitment to organisational goals was poor due to weak correlation between their performance and remuneration. General politicization from the earlier Socialist era persisted, with ideological and political eligibility valued more than technical and managerial competence (Meyer-Sahling, 2009). The consequence was an inefficient and inflexible public administration that was unaccountable to citizens and which existed exclusively to 'exercise its powers' (Lilić, 2011; Milenković, 2013).

The 'agents of change' in October 2000 demanded the comprehensive democratisation of society, including economic reforms and a push towards a market economy. In this context, as an alternative to the existing structure, a 'New Public Management' model emerged, which proscribed that public institutions should adopt management practices and behaviour typical of the private sector, imbued with the values of efficiency, effectiveness and constant improvement of performance (Box, Marshall, Reed & Reed, 2001).

Immediately after the democratic changes in the year 2000, a process of designing the course and pace of public administration

reform was set in motion, resulting in the adoption of the Public Administration Reform Strategy in 2004. Under the pressure exerted by the International Monetary Fund, the Serbian Government also embraced measures aimed at streamlining the public administration so as to reduce public spending (Janićijević & Bogićević-Milikić, 2011).

Considerable legislative activity in the past thirteen years has aimed to modernize the public administration. Some laws have recently been enacted but are not yet being implemented, so it is too early to assess their impact. However, what we may appraise in these cases are the objectives laid out in the laws and the activities being carried out to implement them (Kovač, 2007). Significant changes have been planned to further professionalize the public administration. As part of these changes an appraisal system, based on merit and ability to 'advance in service', has been introduced for executorial civil servants, which also affects remuneration (Milenković, 2013). Special rules for the recruitment of appointed civil servants have also been introduced, in an attempt to depoliticize the public administration. Managers may, however, still use their discretion when making a final decision on appointments (Džinić, 2011). A Government Training Centre has been set up and training curricula have been designed to support professional development. However, according to other studies, coordination between the institutions organising trainings is poor and attendance by senior civil servants is low (Meyer-Sahling, 2012; SIGMA, 2012). In regard to the streamlining of public

administration, available studies point to the persistent problem of the duplication the same or similar jobs in different organs of the government and that the (SIGMA, 2011; SIGMA, 2012; World Bank, 2010).

This brief critique of public administration reform testifies to the fact that the process has only 'scratched the tip of an iceberg' (Kovač, 2011), with only partial and inconsistent implementation so far. We shall consider this hypothesis further in section 6.1, through an analysis of the opinions of senior managers in Serbia's public administration, the very people who are the most responsible for implementing reform in practice.

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3. THE COCOPS PROJECT

Utilizing the responses of high level public servants in thirteen European countries, the COCOPS Executive Survey on Public Sector Reform in Europe aims to gain insight into the current status quo of public management and administrative reform, as well as the impact of reforms across Europe. The survey, launched by a team of researchers in ten European countries, is based on a full census of high ranking officials at central government ministries and agencies, as well as additional executives in the areas of employment and health. The survey's 7034 respondents (corresponding to a response rate of 27.1%, see table 1) from thirteen countries⁴ represent the largest and most representative body of systematic and comparative data regarding administrative reforms in Europe. Launched in 2012, the survey is based on an original 231-item questionnaire, translated from English into the participant country languages and administered online. For an overview of the survey's methodology see Hammerschmid, Oprisor & Štimac (2013). By the end of 2013 the survey will be rolled out in four additional countries: Denmark, Finland, Ireland and Sweden.

⁴ The survey was initially conducted in 13 countries and has since been conducted in 2 more. Table 1 presents data from the initial round of surveys.

References

Hammerschmid, G., Oprisor, A. & Štimac, V. (2013): COCOPS Executive Survey on Public Sector Reform in Europe. Research Report. Available at www.cocops.eu.

Table 1. Invitations sent, number of responses and response rates (comparative COCOPS)

Country	Invitations Sent	Responses	Response rate
Serbia	2,522	1,349	53.5%
Austria	1,745	637	36.5%
Estonia	913	321	35.2%
Norway	1,299	436	33.6%
Portugal	1,234	371	30.1%
Netherlands	977	293	30.0%
Hungary	1,200	351	29.3%
Lithuania	1,850	500	27.0%
Germany	2,295	566	24.7%
France	5,297	1,193	22.5%
Italy	1,703	343	20.1%
Spain	1,778	321	18.1%
United Kingdom	3,100	353	11.4%

3.1 COCOPS in Serbia – Sampling, access strategy and survey implementation

For Serbia the core COCOPS questionnaire was extended with a number of optional questions used in other COCOPS countries⁵ and two questions on the perceived extent of corruption in the public administration. In total, the Serbian questionnaire consisted of 37 questions (268 items). The English language questionnaire was translated into Serbian and sent to a number of stakeholders for feedback.

The sample access and survey implementation strategy for Serbia was developed by identifying and combining best practice from the countries where the COCOPS survey had already been implemented. Specifically, previous experience showed that there are a number of factors (listed below) that positively contribute to both response rates and the quality of the final database, all of which were utilized in Serbia.

- Securing high level political support (in case of Serbia the Minister of Justice and Public Administration),
- Mapping the target population of civil servants using records obtained from the Ministry,
- Establishing focal points in the hierarchy of each target institution surveyed prior to the implementation of the survey, and securing their commitment,
- Use of a paper based questionnaire rather than the online surveying tool, which largely eliminates the incidence of incomplete questionnaires.

Following this strategy, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFPE) team approached Mr. Nikola Selaković, the Minister of Justice and Public Administration, who agreed that information garnered through the survey would be highly beneficial to the further planning and implementation of public administration reform in Serbia, particularly in the area of civil service professional development (April 2013). The BFPE and SIPRU then worked together to identify the appropriate mechanisms for sample identification.

It was agreed with the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration that the survey should target one political level of administrators (State Secretaries), all appointed civil servants (with the exception of the Attorney General and Heads of Districts), and executorial civil servants occupying managerial positions such as Head of Sector, Head of Department and Group Leader. The Ministries of Defence and Interior were excluded from the sample, due to the complexity of legislation regulating classified information in these ministries. In addition, it was agreed that only civil servants operating in central government–Ministries, administrative bodies within Ministries and special administrative bodies–would be addressed.

⁵ The English version of the COCOPS questionnaire can be viewed here: www.cocops.eu/work-packages/work-package-3. The optional questions in the Serbian questionnaire were OPT 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7, see www.cocops.eu/survey/serbia/cocops_serbia_questionnaire.pdf

Upon receiving a statistical overview with sample segmentation from the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration (May 2013), the BFPE proceeded to identify and contact coordinators in each targeted ministry or institution. Ministry Secretaries (or equivalent) were chosen for this purpose. The next stage (June/July 2013) involved the printing, packaging, and distribution of questionnaires to all targeted institutions. The delivery of questionnaires was supplemented by a presentation of the project to the relevant Secretary.

The respondents were given two weeks to fill out surveys and return them in sealed envelopes to the coordinators in their Ministry, who kept them until the deadline for the collection of questionnaires (July/August 2013).

Under the supervision of the BFPE and the guidance of the Hertie School of Governance, data entry was completed in late August 2013, after which the data were sent to the Hertie School of Governance for processing.

Table 2. Overview of targeted population of civil servants

Type of position	Invitations	Respondents	Položaji – Positions
political appointments	52	21	<i>državni sekretar – state secretary</i>
državni službenici na položaju (appointed civil servants)	316	178	<i>pomoćnik ministra – assistant minister</i> <i>sekretar ministarstva – ministry’s secretary</i> <i>direktor organa uprave u sastavu ministarstva – director of administrative organ within ministry</i> <i>pomoćnik direktora organa uprave – assistant director of administrative organ</i> <i>direktor posebne organizacije – director of special organization</i> <i>zamenik direktora posebne organizacije – deputy director of special organisation</i> <i>pomoćnik direktora posebne organizacije</i> <i>direktor službe vlade – director of government services</i> <i>zamenik direktora službe vlade – deputy director of government services</i> <i>pomoćnik direktora službe Vlade – assistant director of government services</i> <i>zamenik generalnog sekretara vlade – deputy secretary general of the government</i> <i>pomoćnik generalnog sekretara vlade – assistant secretary general of the government</i> <i>republički javni pravobranilac – Republic Ombudsman</i> <i>načelnici okruga – Head of District</i>
državni službenici izvršioi (executorial civil servants)	2154	1150	<i>ukupno službenika izvršioaca na rukovodilačkim pozicijama – total number of executorial civil servants in management positions</i> <i>načelnik sektora (head of sector)</i> <i>šef odseka (head of department)</i> <i>rukovodilac grupe (group leader)</i> <i>drugo (other)</i>

3.2 Sample description

The translated COCOPS questionnaire was sent out to all central government executives identified in the population mapping phase (2522 questionnaires, see 3.1 for access strategy). There were 1349 respondents, all at the central government level. 38.0% of respondents work in Ministries, 43.4% in administrative bodies within Ministries and 18.6% in special administrative bodies. The overall response rate was 53.5%, which is almost twice that of the COCOPS average of 27.0% (see table 1) and 17 percentage points higher than the second highest response rate (Austria) among other countries participating in COCOPS. The response rates are similar across hierarchical levels in the administration—40.4% of state secretaries responded, 56.3% civil servants in appointed positions and 53.5% of those in executorial positions (53.5%)—reducing the risk of response bias (table 2).

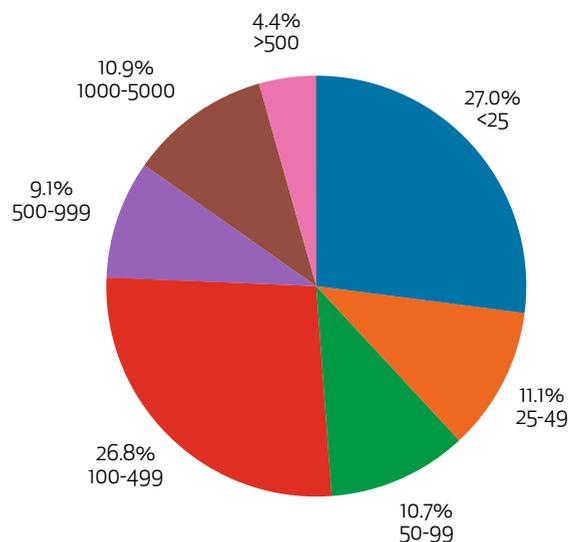
In our sample we find a reasonable distribution among different organizational functions⁶, with 337 (24.9%) respondents reporting that they work in organizations tasked with policy design and formulation, 441 (30.6%) in policy implementation, 130 (9.6%) in funding, financing and transfers, 365 (27.0%) in audit and inspection, regulation and supervision and 394 (28.9%) in service delivery.

⁶ Respondents were allowed to check more than one organizational function, hence the total sums up to more than 100%.

Figure 1 shows that roughly half of the respondents hold positions in relatively small organizations (<100 employees), about one quarter hold positions in organizations with fewer than 25 employees, and the remaining quarter hold positions in organizations with 100 to 499 employees.

Summing up, the sample provides a fair distribution among different organizational types, sizes and functions of the Serbian public administration. Taken together with the exceptionally high response rate, we are confident that our findings provide a fair view of the opinions and perceptions of senior civil servants in Serbia.

Figure 1. Share of respondents by reported size of organizations



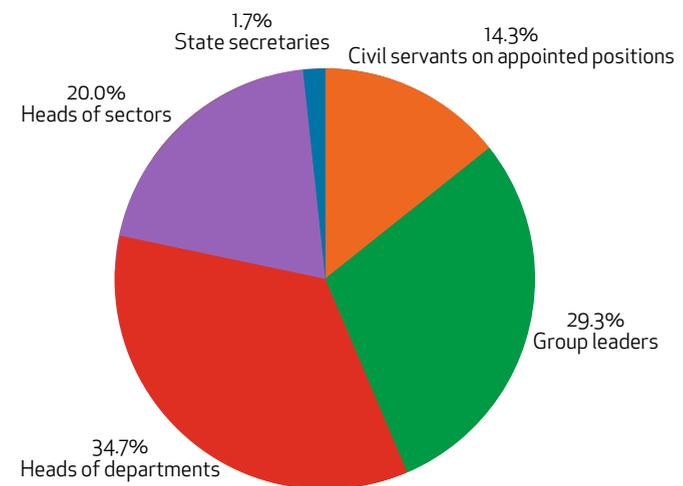
4. THE SERBIAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE

Under the Civil Servants Act (2005), a civil servant is a person whose job description includes tasks conducted within civil service organs, with the proviso that he/she has passed the state civil service exam. There are two types of positions at the senior level of the civil service: appointed civil servants and executorial civil servants.

For this study, we targeted the senior level of Serbia's central government administration. This includes state secretaries, appointed civil servants and top level executorial civil servants (heads of sectors and agencies and group leaders). Roughly one third of our sample are senior civil servants holding appointed positions, while the rest are civil servants holding executorial positions (figure 2). As mentioned in the previous section (3.3), the response rates are similar for both categories of civil servants. 52.4% of respondents are women, indicating an ostensibly fair gender representation in senior public management positions. The gender balance among senior civil servants is dealt with in more detail in the following section.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 4.1 discusses the position of women in the Serbian public administration executive. Section 4.2 looks at the educational background of Serbia's senior civil servants. Section 4.3 maps the tenure and work experience of respondents, and section 4.4 concludes with an evaluation of reported job satisfaction, organizational commitment and staff engagement.

Figure 2. Share of respondents by position (Serbia)



References

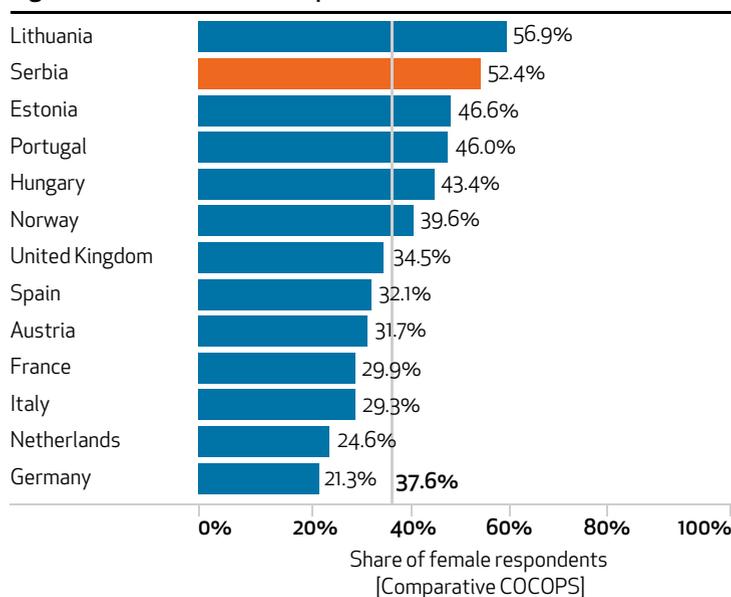
Zakon o državnim službenicima, Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije. 79 2005; Amend 81 2005, Amend 83 2005, Amend and Suppl 64 2007, Amend 67 2007, Amend and Suppl 116 2008, Amend and Suppl 104 2009.

4.1 Women in top public management positions

While women are equally represented in management positions in Serbia's public administration overall, there are fewer at the highest echelons of the civil service hierarchy. In section 5.2 we will show that decision-making power is concentrated at the top of the Serbian public administration, which means that women have lower participation in planning and budget execution and in the selection and implementation of policies. However, in comparison, Serbia fares better in this respect than Norway, the Netherlands or Germany.

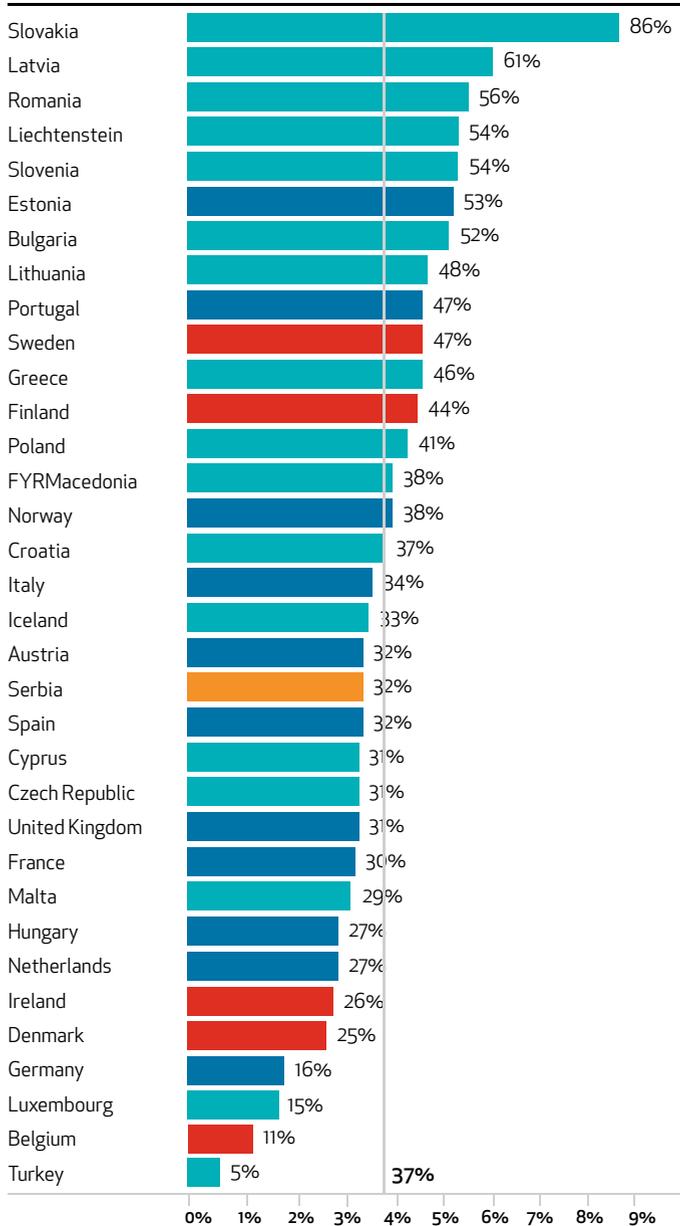
The survey indicates that Serbia has among the largest number of women in management positions in public administration, ranking immediately behind Lithuania. This data corroborates findings by other studies, which have found that a higher percentage of women hold senior management positions in the Serbian public administration than in European Union member countries (SIGMA, 2008). Specifically, according to the COCOPS survey in Serbia, 52.4% of senior managers are women, compared to 39.6% in Norway, 24.6% in the Netherlands, and 21.3% in Germany (Figure 3a). While the sample was representative, we should note that the survey did not encompass the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior (see Blagojević-Hewson, 2013, for data on the gender make-up of the 'ministries of force').

Figure 3a. Share of female respondents



The high level of representation of women in management positions in the Serbian public administration may be explained as a legacy of the Socialist system. Women in Yugoslavia during World War II were fellow fighters – soldiers, nurses and politicians, which in turn introduced the prospect of equality for women in public and political life after the war. In the post-war period, women were active in reconstruction efforts. An important innovation of Socialism was equal pay for equal work, which was applied in the public administration, where the participation of women had increased significantly (Zaharijević, 2012).

Figure 3c. Share of women on Level 2 administrative positions



Another possible explanation of equal representation of women in management positions lies in the feminization of professions. It has been argued that the result of feminization has been that jobs in the public administration have lost social status and economic power as the participation of women has increased (Popović & Duhaček, 2009). However, our sample of senior civil servants indicates that the hypothesis, in this case, does not hold true. Respondents to the survey reported—in answer to a question about motivation to work in public administration—that status ranks high on the motivation scale. Serbia, in fact, ranks at the top of the list of countries participating in the COCOPS survey⁷ in this regard, which leads us to the conclusion that working in public administration, at least in management positions, has not lost its lustre.

It is important to emphasise that, regardless of the small discrepancy between the numbers of women and men, respectively, in management positions in Serbia, the possibility of discrimination vis-à-vis promotion at work is not excluded. In regard to better paid and more prestigious jobs, the gender structure is pyramid-like, according to the COCOPS survey: 62.8% of all lower-ranking managers are women, with the percentage declining at each higher level of the civil service, falling to 39.2% among appointed civil servants (Figure 4). Our results correspond with those of a European Commission’s survey on participation of women in decision-making in Serbia⁸. According to the EU survey, conducted in 2012, only 15% of state secretary positions are held by women (Figure 3b), whereas

⁷ The question asked was “How important do you personally think it is in a job to have..?” On the 1 (‘not at all important’) to 7 (‘it’s very important’) scale regarding status, women gave an average mark of 5.46, whereas the result for male respondents was 5.67.

⁸ See European Commission survey at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/public-administration/national-administrations/index_en.htm

32% of assistant ministers (which are appointed civil servant positions) are women (Figure 3c). Both surveys clearly point to a 'glass ceiling' (Phillips, Little & Goodin, 1995) for many women.

Although it is clear that women are increasingly pushing through the 'glass ceiling' in Serbia, the low percentage of highest-ranking positions that women hold indicates that a more active gender equality policy should be implemented. Indeed, in 2008 the Government made improving the gender balance among senior civil servants an objective and indicator of success of the modernization of the public administration. Echoing other studies, our research shows the importance of implementing measures to increase the number of women in management positions where planning and budget decisions are made and policy design and implementation is undertaken, so as to render the work of the entire public administration gender sensitive.

Figure 4. Share of female respondents by position in organization

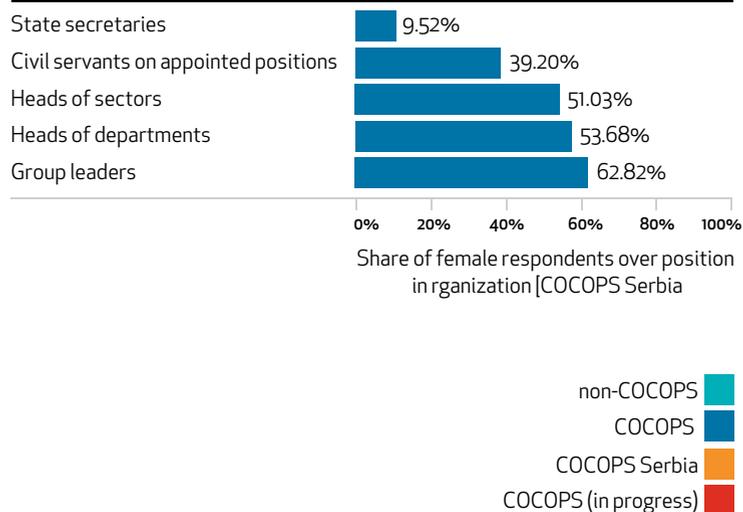
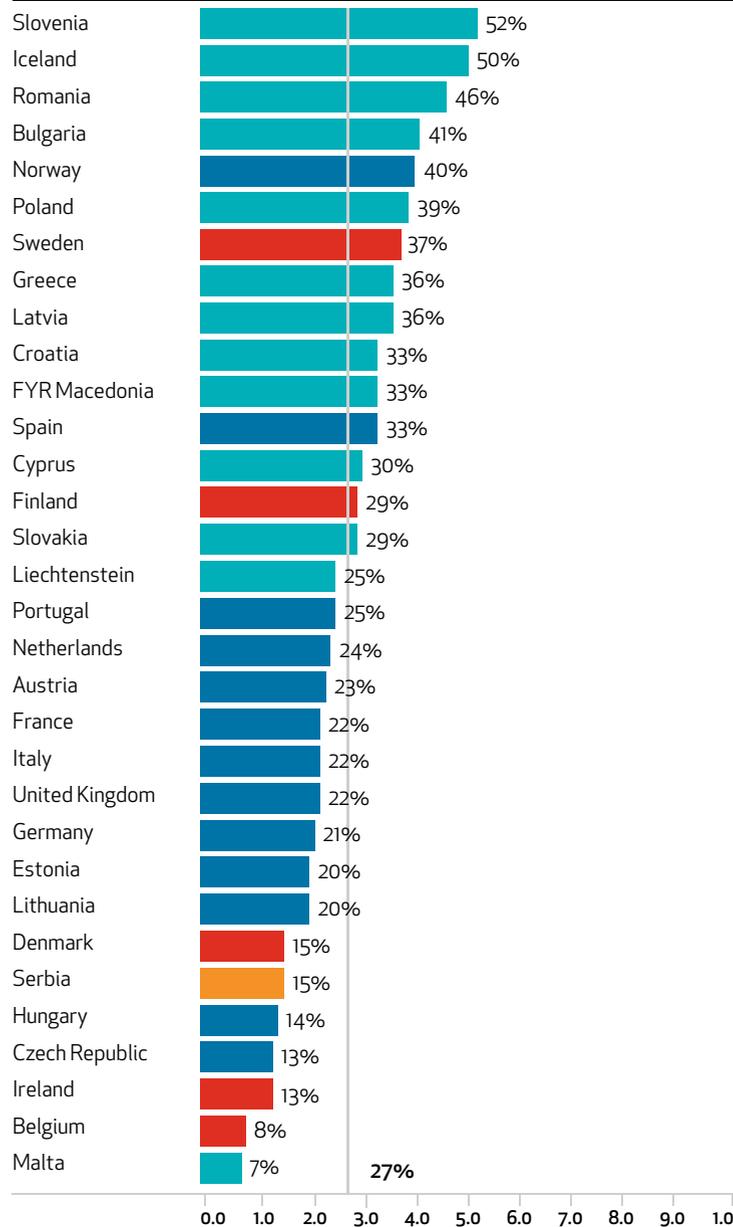


Figure 3b. Share of women on Level 1 administrative position



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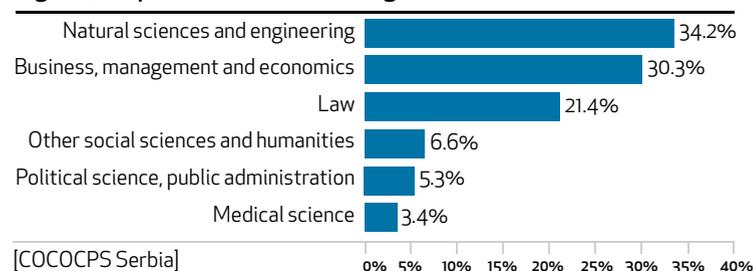
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4.2 Training, Education and their Implications for Reform

There is no dedicated educational institution in Serbia for future public administration managers; however, to qualify for positions in public administration it is necessary to pass the state civil service exam. Executorial civil servants are required to hold a university diploma, but not in a specific discipline; an exception to this rule are civil servants who are obliged to pass the bar examination (Milenković, 2013). Advisor positions also require a diploma but lower-ranking positions require only a diploma from a further education institution (a 'higher school') or a high school diploma.

The majority of Serbia's senior civil servants are university educated, with 91.2% holding a graduate or post-graduate degree and 4% having completed doctoral studies. Most common among respondents is a degree in the natural sciences or engineering (33.3%), with economics (30.3%) and law (21.4%) being the second and third most common (figure 5).

Figure 5. Reported educational background



Looking at these figures from a comparative perspective, we find that the top echelons of Serbia's public administration are less dominated by lawyers than those of countries such as Germany, Hungary, Spain and Austria (figure 6). The proportion of economics and business studies graduates corresponds more closely to that in countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and the U.K. (figure 7). These countries are considered to be 'de-juridified' (European) pioneers of public sector management (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2011). It is exactly these countries (e.g. U.K., Netherlands) where, following the implementation of reforms, the proportion of economics, business and management graduates in senior positions has steadily increased (Bourgault & Van Dorpe 2013).

Figure 6. Share of respondents with educational background in law

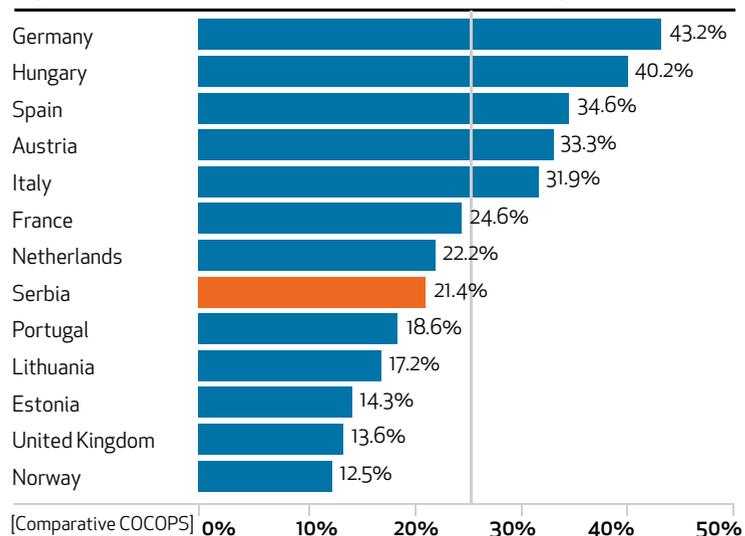
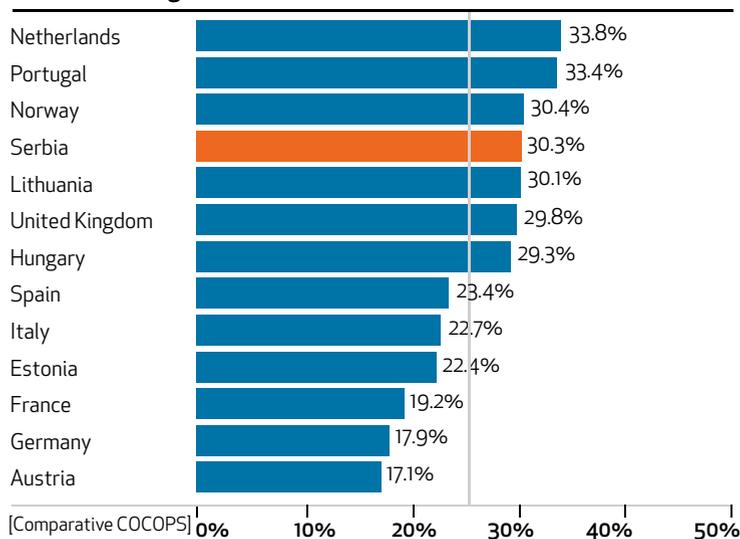


Figure 7. Share of respondents with educational background in business, management and economics



This finding is interesting given the legalistic and rule bound nature of public service provision in Serbia (Eriksen 2005), traditionally modelled on Franco-German systems of public administration (Šević 2003). While we indeed find a corresponding overrepresentation of lawyers in the area of policy design (33%) and to a lesser extent in policy implementation (25%), their number pale in comparison to the presence of lawyers at the top of, for example, Germany's public administration (43.2% overall).

We therefore have reason to believe that the nature of the administrative system in Serbia, which is highly centralized and resistant to change, may not match the attitudes of the managers themselves. Acceptance of managerial logic and managerial identity is crucial for the successful implementation

of management reforms (Thomas & Davies 2005), therefore the attitudes of top civil servants in Serbia towards core principles underpinning NPM, such as belief in market mechanisms (Hood 1991), could be considered a barometer to gauge the potential resistance to reforms. Asked to place their public service provision preferences on a 7-point scale⁹—where 1 represents “State provision” and 7 represents “Market provision”—respondents to the COCOPS survey in Serbia answered with an average of 3.77. This average does not differ (statistically) significantly from the mean preferences of top public managers in the U.K. (3.87) and the Netherlands (3.89). It is however statistically significantly higher than the answers of both French (2.73) and Austrian (3.39) respondents.

While there is no doubt that more in-depth research is necessary to draw solid conclusions, these results do imply that in spite of the legalistic tradition in the provision of public services in Serbia, senior civil servants may potentially be more prone to accepting management reforms than is generally assumed. This finding is consistent with Meyer-Sahling (2012), who found significant support for civil-service deregulation among senior civil servants and younger civil servants in general across the Western Balkans. It is thus more likely that, rather than the attitudes of the public managers themselves, factors such as goal ambiguity (section 5.1 of this report), prohibitively high levels of centralization (section 5.2) and a high degree of politicization at the very top of the public executive (section 5.3) constitute the major obstacles to increasing the performance of Serbia’s central administration.

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⁹ The question asked was: “Public services often need to balance different priorities. Where would you place your own position?”

4.3 Age, Tenure and Work Experience

It is informative to compare the general age distribution in the Serbian sample (figure 8) with the rest of the COCOPS countries. The sample population in Serbia indicates that civil servants are slightly younger than their Western European counterparts, but notably older than their Eastern European colleagues (i.e. Hungarian, Lithuanian and Estonian)¹⁰. The differences between East and West can, in part, be explained by the relatively recent modernization of recruitment policies for senior civil servants in Eastern Europe, where open competition recruitment is now common (see Matei & Popa 2010), as opposed to the seniority-based promotion systems still prevalent in many parts of Western Europe. A possible explanation for Serbia's position is the specific legacy of public administration. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was unique among ex-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, because it preserved key features of the country's pre-Second World War public administration system, which was modelled on the German and Austrian models (Eriksen 2005). This resulted in an administrative continuity in Serbia that the collapse of the Socialist regime could not dismantle.

¹⁰ Because of anonymity concerns respondents' were not asked to fill in their exact age, therefore these comparisons are based on a comparison of obtained age-categories.

Figure 8. Age distribution of respondents

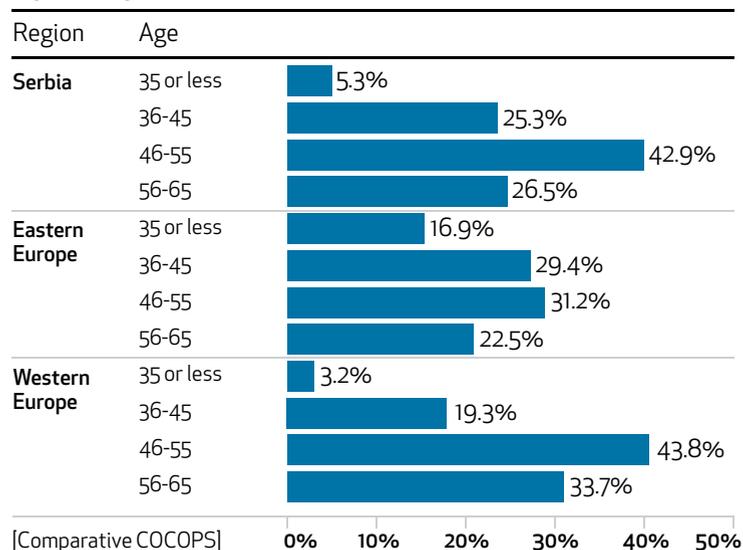
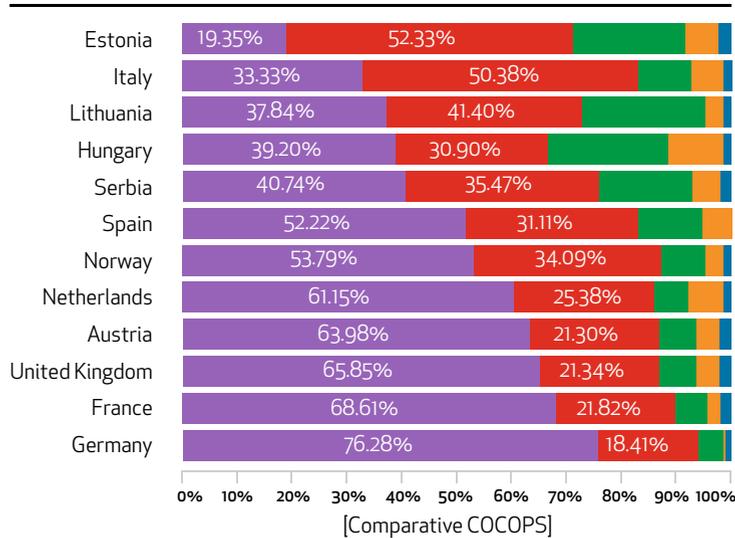


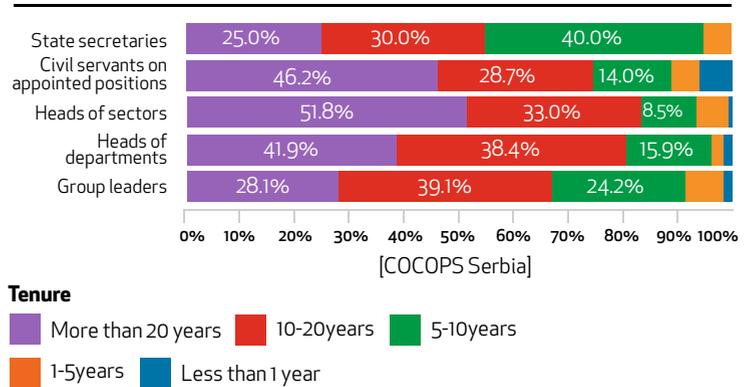
Figure 9 shows that in terms of public sector tenure, Serbia is grouped together with Eastern European countries, where public sector tenure tends to be lower than in the West. Looking across different hierarchical levels (figure 10), we find that appointed civil servants tend to have slightly less public sector experience than those in senior executive positions (i.e. heads of sectors and agencies). In part this is explained by age differences, as appointed civil servants tend to be younger; 27.3% of appointees fall in the 36-45 age category, compared to 19.6% of sector heads, while 34% of appointed civil servants are aged 46-55 compared to 49% of sector heads.

Figure 9. Reported public sector tenure



The big differences between appointed civil servants and permanent staff in senior positions (executorial civil servants) can be seen when comparing their tenure in the organization they currently operate in (figure 11), which in the case of appointees tends to be much shorter. This low horizontal (organizational) mobility of executorial civil servants, coupled with their low vertical mobility—due to the political nature of senior management positions within the administration—implies that after reaching a certain level within their organization, executorial managers’ opportunities for further promotion diminishes significantly; they are likely to hit a so called *career plateau*. ‘Plateaued’ managers tend to exhibit significantly higher stress levels (Elsass & Ralston 1989), which has a detrimental effect on both individual wellbeing (e.g. Near 1983; Elsass & Ralston 1989) and, consequently, organizational wellbeing (e.g. Bardwick, 1983). Therefore, increasing the horizontal and vertical career mobility of executorial civil servants is not only likely to lead to a more efficient allocation of talent within the Serbian administration, but also to higher satisfaction and productivity among civil servants as a whole.

Figure 10. Reported public sector tenure by position in organization



Finally, looking at the levels of private sector experience among senior civil servants in our comparative COCOPS sample, we find that Serbia has the highest percentage (47.3%) of managers with no private sector experience (figure 12). The number of civil servants reporting no private sector experience is fairly stable over the different hierarchical levels (figure 13), but seems to be lower for younger civil servants (figure 14). As public managers with private sector experience tend to exhibit higher levels of work involvement (Boardman, Bozeman & Ponomariov 2010), and make more use of performance information (Hammerschmid, Van de Walle & Štimac 2013), one avenue for modernizing Serbia’s public administration could be to further open up senior management positions to outsiders.

Figure 11. Reported tenure in current organization by position in organization

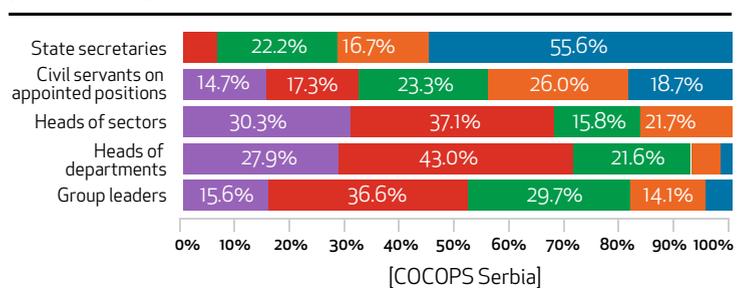
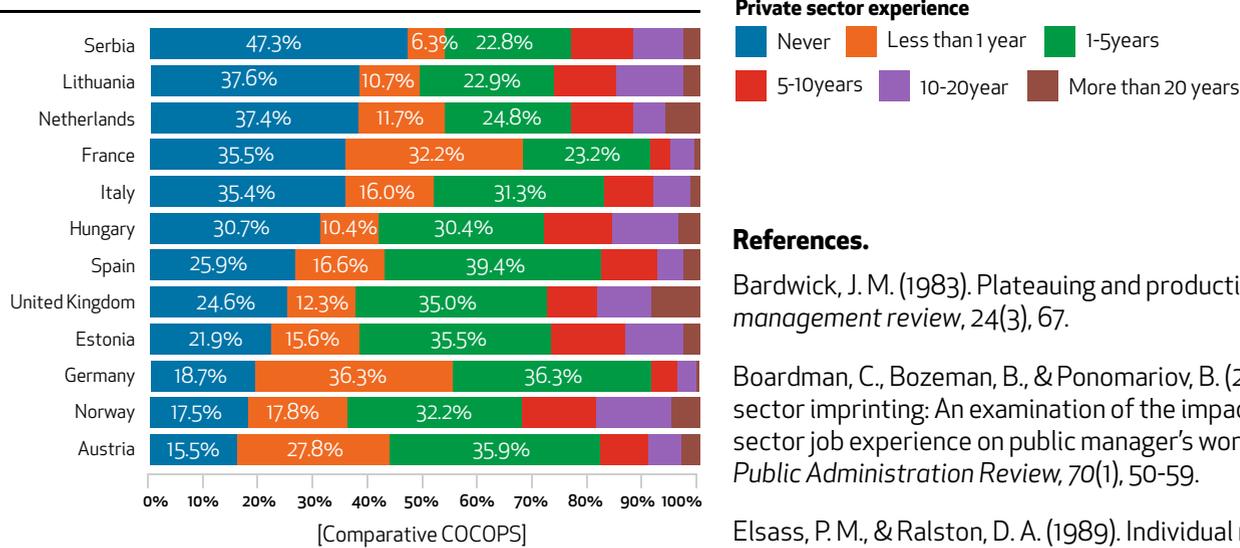


Figure 12. Reported private sector experience



Private sector experience

Never Less than 1 year 1-5 years
5-10 years 10-20 year More than 20 years

Figure 13. Reported private sector experience by position in organization

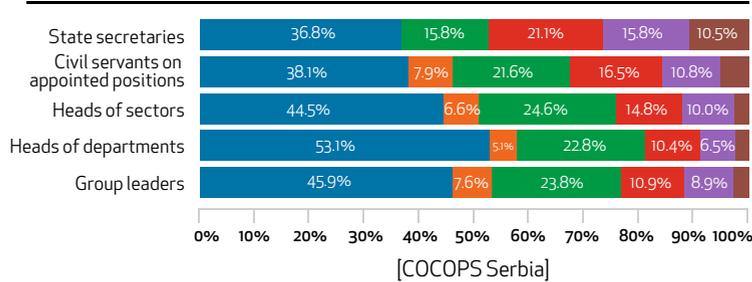
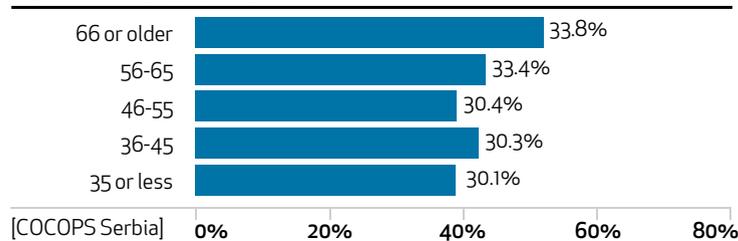


Figure 14. Share of respondents reporting no private sector experience by age group



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4.4 Job satisfaction, organizational commitment and staff engagement

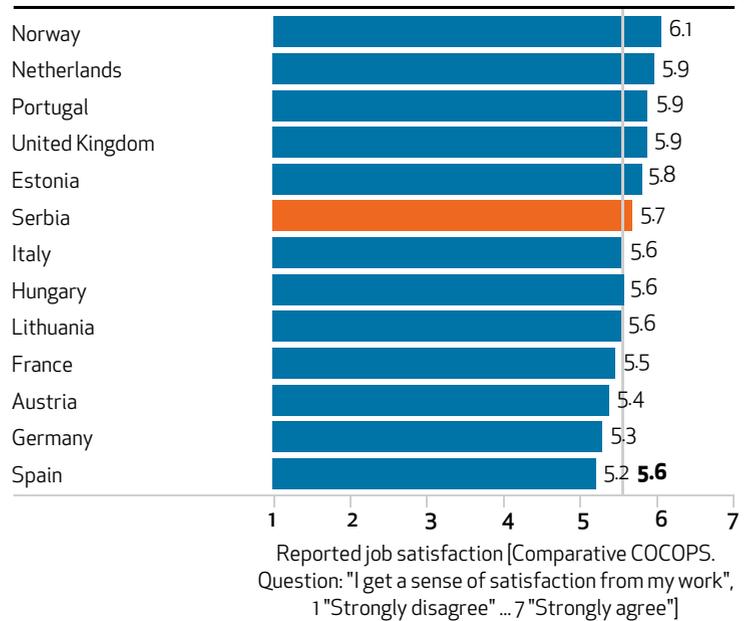
The survey indicates that senior civil servants in Serbia enjoy average levels of job satisfaction (figure 15) -though differences across the studied countries are not particularly large¹¹. In terms of perceived staff engagement (figures 16 and 17) we find that Serbia ranks low among the sampled countries.

Looking at Serbian civil servants, we find significant differences in various measures of job satisfaction and organizational commitment when comparing appointed and executorial civil servants. Figure 18 shows that executorial staff report lower degrees of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They also feel less valued and are less likely to recommend their organization as a good place to work. All of these noted differences are statistically significant.

These differences could be attributed to differences in job characteristics and work context—and especially goal clarity and task related autonomy—which studies have shown to be major determinants of job satisfaction among public sector workers (Wright & Davis 2003). As sections 5.1 and 5.2 of this report will show, in Serbia the work context of appointed civil servants differs markedly from that of executorial staff, with the latter reporting significantly lower levels of autonomy and higher levels of mission ambiguity.

¹¹ Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they agree with the statement "I get a sense of satisfaction from my work"

Figure 15. Reported degree of job satisfaction



Setting clear goals and delegating their completion to lower levels of management is therefore likely to result in increased job satisfaction among executorial level civil servants¹². In addition, the implementation of such management practices has been shown to lead to an increase in staff engagement and satisfaction (Bozeman & Kingsley 1998; Rainey & Steinbauer 1999). As job satisfaction can be directly related to provision of effective public services (Boardman & Sundquist 2009), employee turnover (George & Jones 1996), job performance (Judge et al. 2001), and organizational commitment (Shore & Martin 1989), the improvement of the work context in which the lower level management operates ought to be seen as a priority on the public administration reform agenda.

¹² For executorial civil servants in our Serbian sample we indeed find a very strong relationship between self-reported organizational goal clarity and job satisfaction (the Spearman rank equals to 0.46 and is statistically significant at 1%, based on 1080 observations).

Figure 16. Reported staff engagement: extent of goal internalization

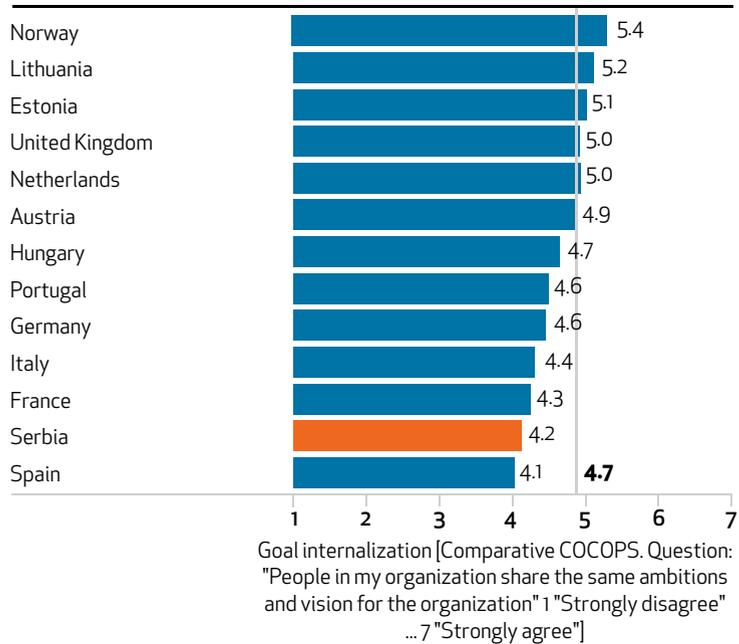


Figure 17. Reported staff engagement: collective pursuit of goals

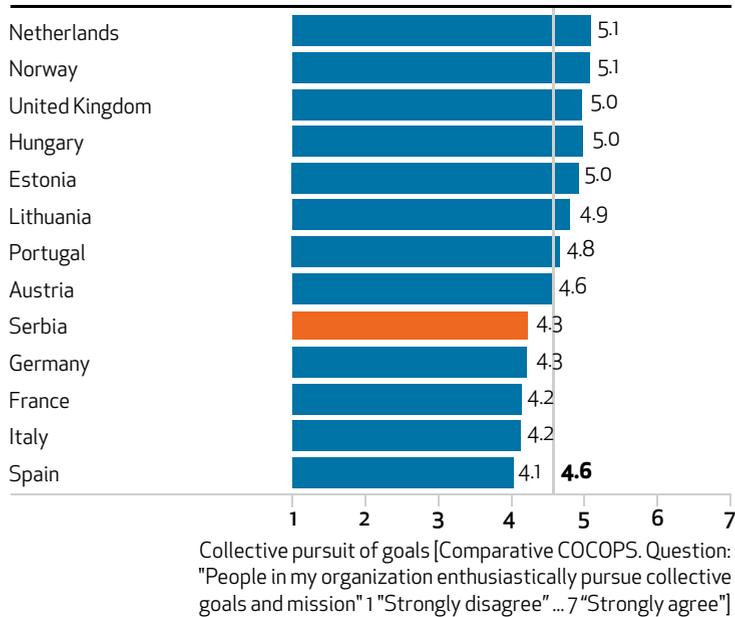
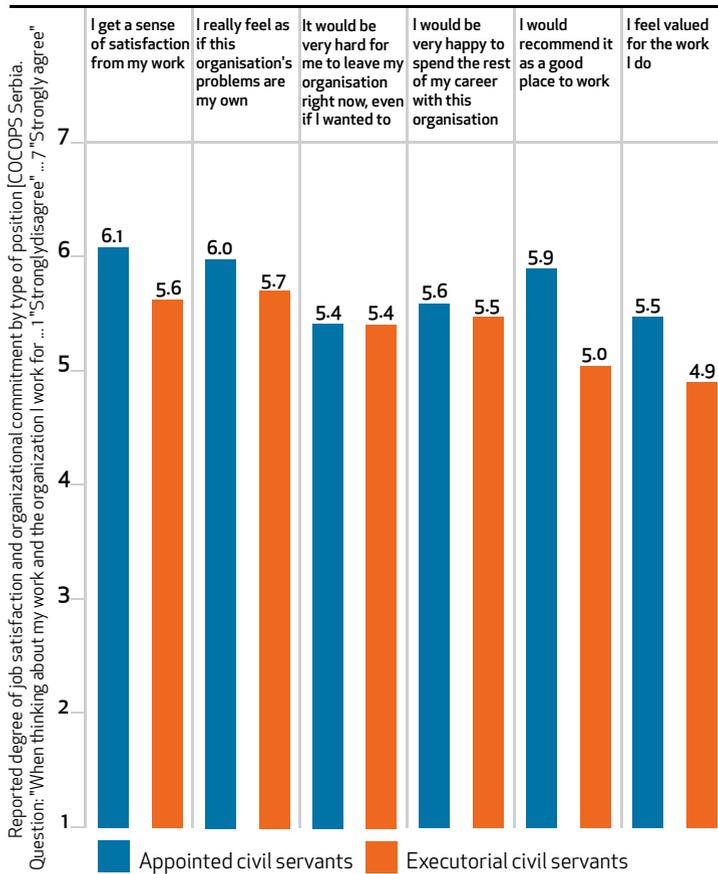


Figure 18. Reported degree of job satisfaction and organizational commitment by type of position



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5. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION WORK CONTEXT

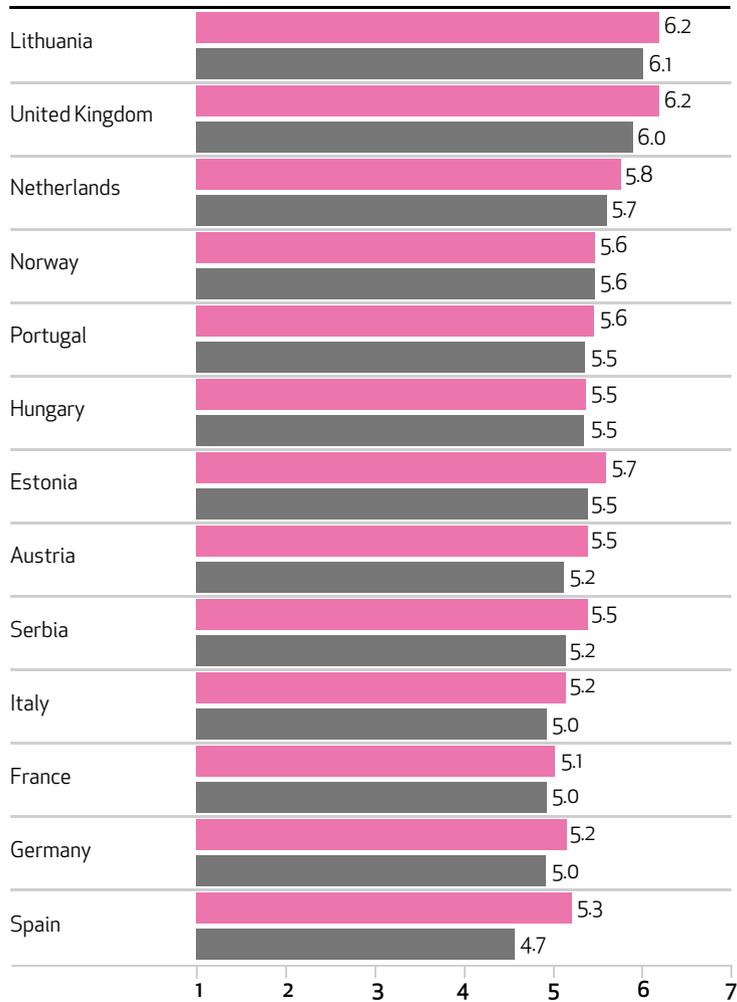
As the previous chapter has shown, senior civil servants may be more receptive to management reforms than is generally assumed (section 4.2). At the same time the reported levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment among lower levels of management, as well as the overall degree of staff engagement, leave room for improvement (section 4.4). International experience suggests that such improvements can be brought about by changes in the work context, which is the topic of this chapter. The next section discusses management goal clarity. Management autonomy is covered in section 5.2, while section 5.3 looks into the questions of senior civil service politicization.

5.1 Goal and mission clarity

Goal congruence and clear communication of goals and targets to staff has been shown to be directly related to the performance of public organizations (e.g. Moynihan & Pandey 2005; Chun & Rainey 2005). Setting unambiguous goals and targets improves employee motivation and performance by clearly linking their efforts to mission-related tasks (Rainey & Steinbauer 1999), reducing exposure to organizational politics (Witt 1998), and encouraging innovation and risk-taking (Behn 1999; Golden 1990). For the same reasons, unclear or conflicting goals tend to create an environment where employees are prone to minimize their individual risk exposure and pursue individual rather than collective interests (Thompson, Scott & Zald 2009; Bozeman & Kingsley 1998).

Previous studies and anecdotal evidence suggests that in the case of Serbia's public administration, organizational goals

Figure 19. Goal clarity and communication

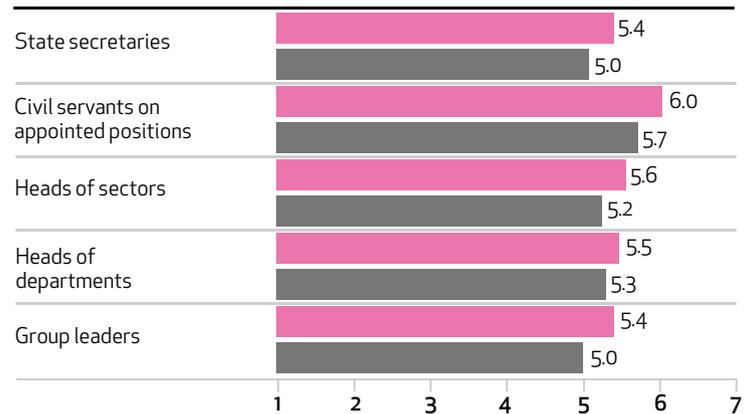


Goal clarity and communication [Comparative COCOPS. Question: "To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization? ... 1 "Strongly disagree" ... 7 "Strongly agree"]

■ Our goals are clearly stated
■ Our goals are communicated to all staff

often tend to be ambiguous and not clearly communicated to staff, which results in the kind of negative effects that we might anticipate in regard to staff behaviour (e.g. Eriksen 2005; Uvalić 2010). Figure 19 shows that, from a comparative perspective, Serbia indeed ranks relatively low among COCOPS countries in terms of both goal clarity and the degree to which goals are clearly communicated to staff. Moreover, when we compare appointed and executorial staff's ratings of goal clarity and goal communication to staff (figure 20) we find that the appointed civil servants' perceptions are not corroborated by lower management layers¹³. It is interesting to note that state secretaries' perceptions correspond most closely to those of group leaders (at the lowest level of the hierarchy sampled), indicating that those at the very top of the administrative executive are well aware of issues regarding goal ambiguity within their organizations.

Figure 20. Goal clarity and communication over position in organization



Goal clarity and communication [COCOPS Serbia. Question: "To what extent do the following statements apply to your organization?" 1 "Strongly disagree" ... 7 "Strongly agree"]

¹³ When asked to rate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they agree with the statements "Our goals are clearly stated" and "Our goals are clearly communicated to all the staff", appointed civil servants on average reported a 6.0 and 5.7, while executorial staff on average reported 5.5 and 5.2.

The lack of goal congruence within the Serbian administration is further reflected in the limited implementation of strategic planning and management by objectives and results (MBOR) reported by our respondents (figure 21). Moreover, figure 22 depicts the share of respondents that reported that they “cannot assess” the extent to which strategic management tools are used in their organizations: in Serbia, this share is 14.9% for strategic planning and 16.8% for management by objectives and results. These proportions are only comparable to Hungary, and are six times higher than the average among the remaining COCOPS countries (2.6% and 2.5% respectively). Given that the purpose of such management tools is to formalize and disseminate organizational goals, lack of awareness of their implementation indicates that the scale of the problem is much larger than the findings presented in figure 21 ostensibly suggest.

In order to improve organizational performance and staff motivation and engagement (discussed in section 4.4), Serbia’s political and senior civil service leadership should formalize their strategic plans through MBOR frameworks, and communicate the resulting objectives to all levels of management. This will not only increase the accountability of senior civil servants to political leaders and citizens, but—importantly in this context—also protect civil servants from politicians’ whims.

Figure 21. Implementation of Strategic planning and Management by objectives and results

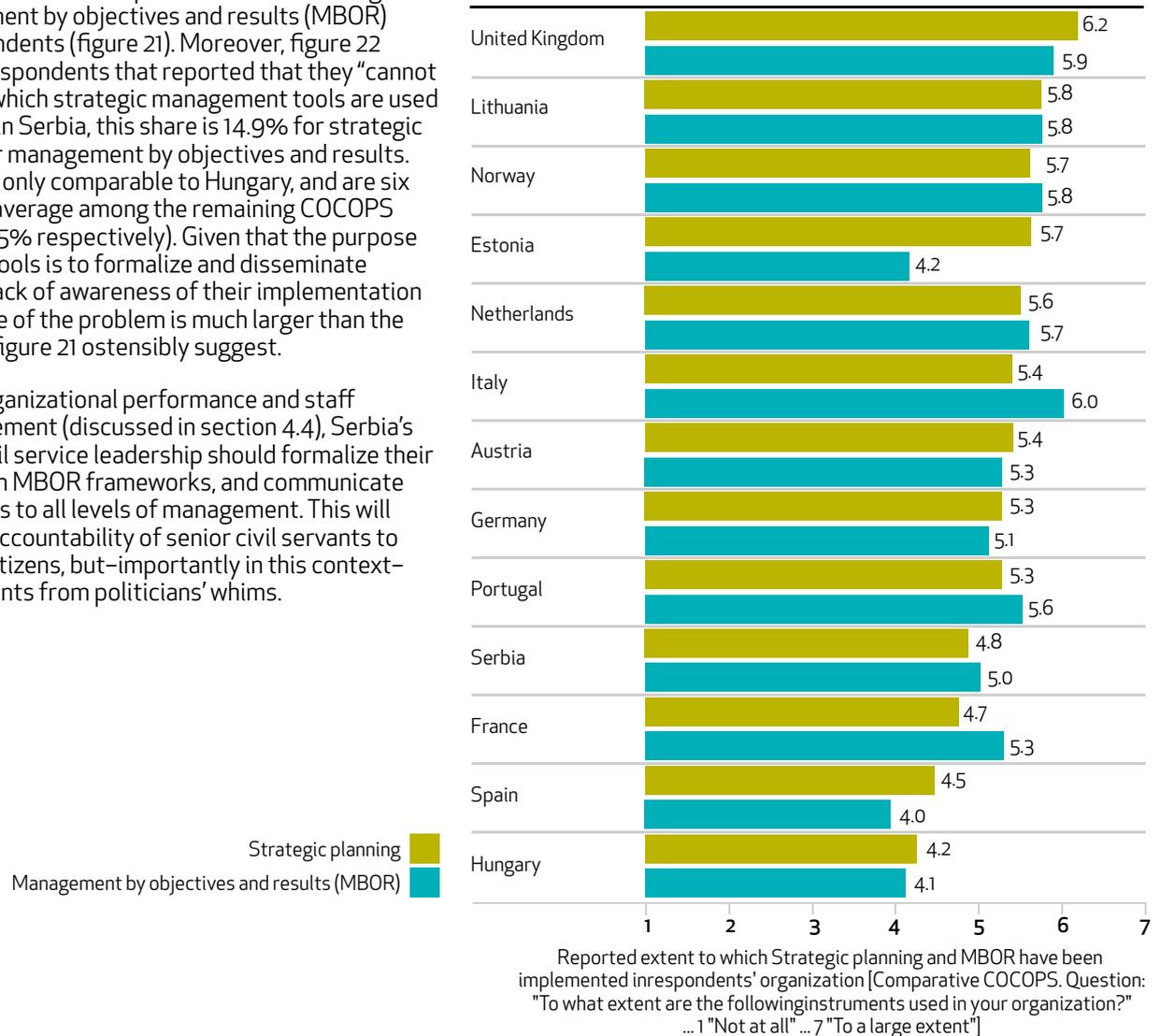
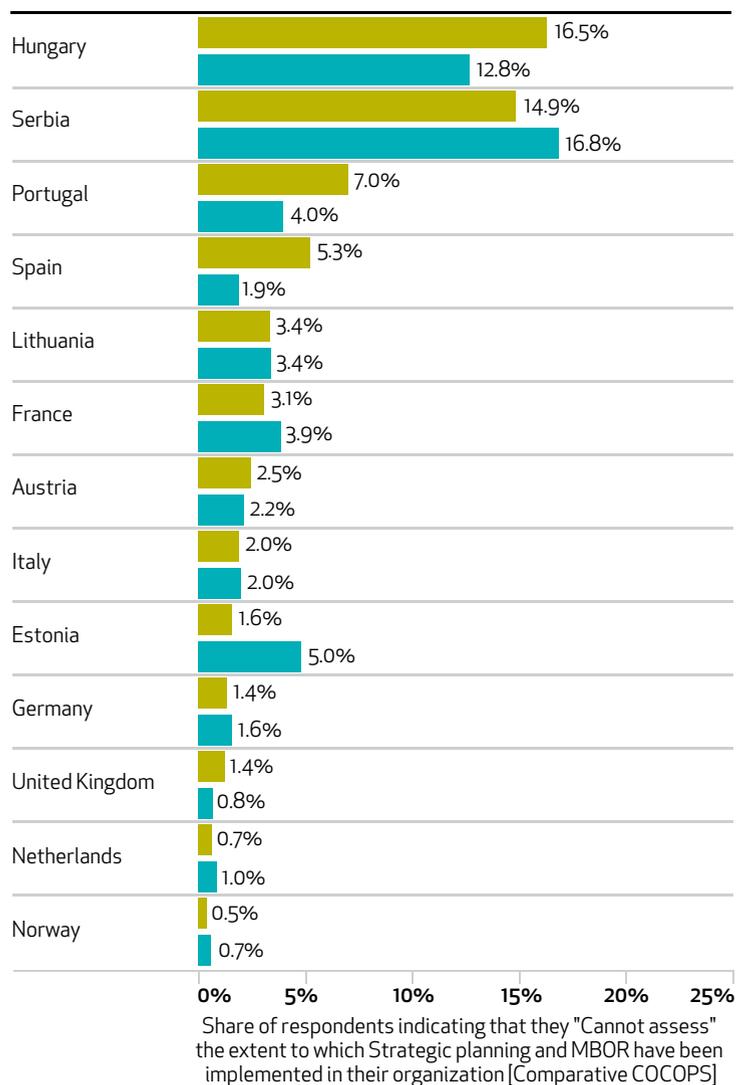


Figure 22. Share of respondents unable to assess extent of Strategic planning and MBOR implementation



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5.2 Centralization and managerial autonomy

In order to reap the benefits of implementing performance management tools such as MBOR, it is crucial that managers who are held accountable for goals and targets receive enough managerial autonomy to deliver them (Nielsen 2013). From a comparative perspective we find that Serbian public managers enjoy relatively low degrees of autonomy with regard to budget allocation (figure 23), policy design (figure 24) and policy implementation (figure 25), which supports the perception of Serbia's public administration as highly centralized (e.g. Eriksen 2005).

This view is further strengthened when differences between the various hierarchical levels within the administration itself are compared. We find that most of the decision making power seems to be concentrated at the level of politically appointed management, both in terms of budget allocation and execution (figure 26) and policy design and implementation (figure 27). Comparing the degree of self-reported autonomy in these four areas compared to appointed and executorial civil servants, we indeed find that the averages are statistically significant in all cases¹⁴.

¹⁴ Asked to rate their degree of autonomy regarding budget allocation, appointed civil servants on average answered with 4.1 on a 7-point scale, while for executorial staff the average answer was 2.5. For budget execution the means of these two groups are 4.3 and 2.6, for policy design 4.3 and 2.4 and for policy implementation 5.0 and 3.7. All of the means are significantly different at 1% significance level.

Figure 23. Budget allocation autonomy

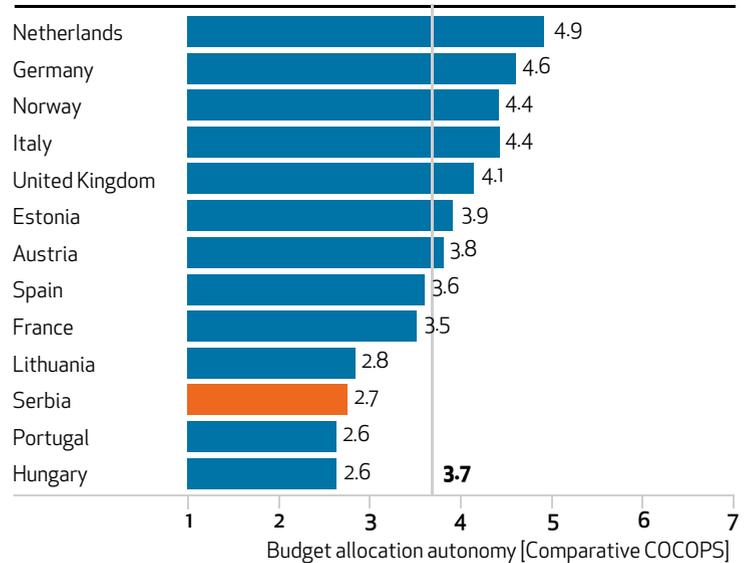


Figure 24. Policy design autonomy

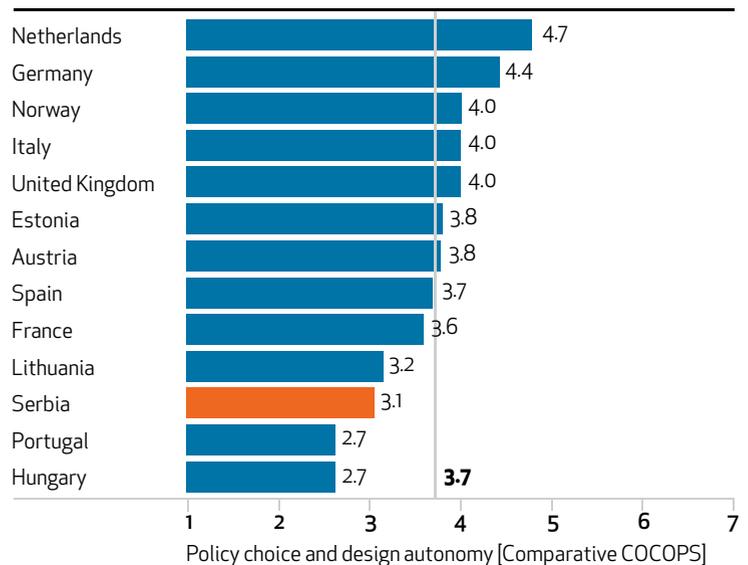
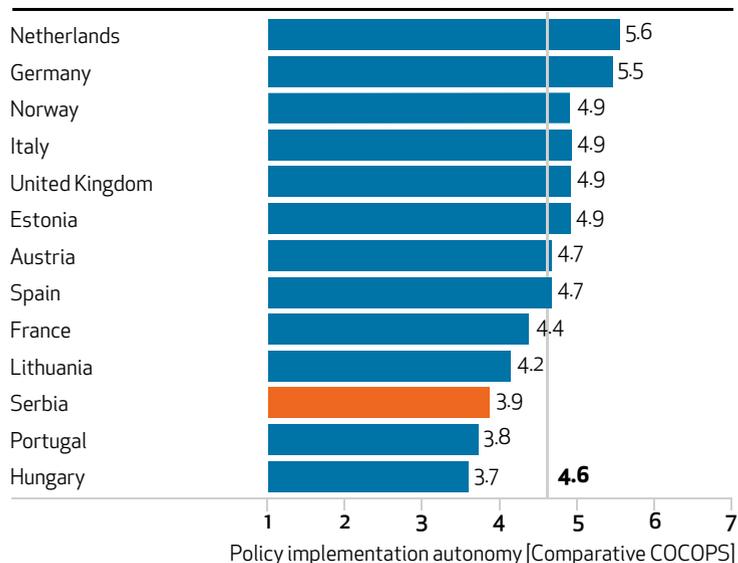


Figure 25. Policy implementation autonomy



While highly centralized bureaucratic organizational structures might work adequately in stable contexts, they are understood to be highly inappropriate for organizations faced with a need for change and operating in complex and dynamic environments (Crozier 1963; Minzberg 1979); with broad public administration reform yet to be undertaken, this is arguably the case in Serbia. In order to successfully affect large scale reform, all levels of management need to identify with and internalize organizational goals. This is unlikely to take place in an environment characterized by low degrees of job autonomy (Daft 1998; Hart 1998)

Figure 26. Budget allocation and execution autonomy by position

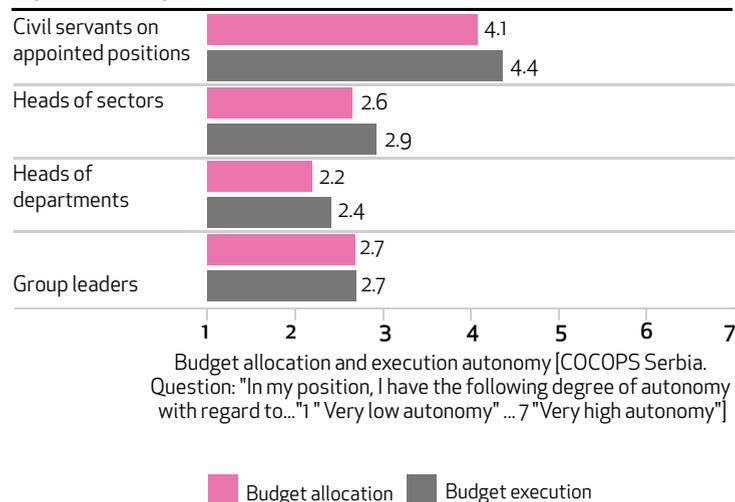
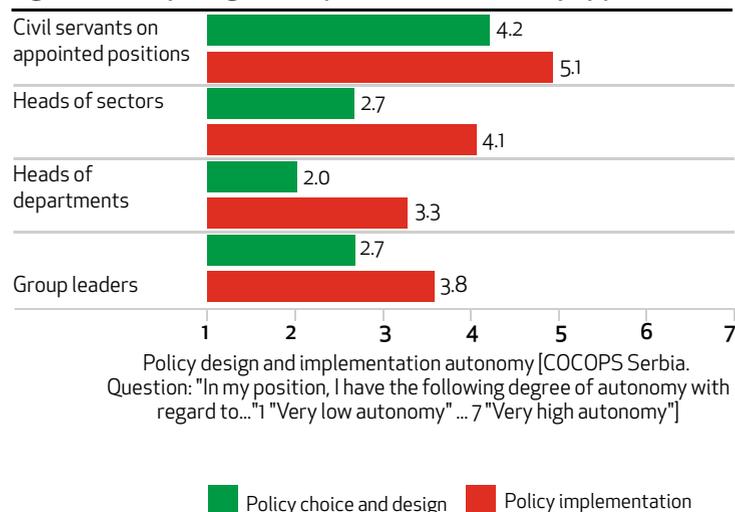


Figure 27. Policy design and implementation autonomy by position



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5.3 Politicization of the Senior Civil Service

As explained in section 4, the very top layer of the senior civil service in Serbia is politically appointed. The survey shows that the career dynamics (section 4.3) and job satisfaction (section 4.4) of appointed civil servants differ markedly from executorial civil servants. More importantly we find that most of the power within the central government administration is concentrated within this group, be that in terms of budget allocation and execution or policy design and implementation (section 5.2). As appointed positions within the Serbian civil service are administrative and supposed to be awarded on the basis of merit, the usually high turnover at this level following changes of government (Sević 2001; World Bank 2004; Žarković-Rakić 2007; section 5.2 of this report), as well as the highly politicized character of Serbia's senior civil service (e.g Eriksen 2005; Meyer-Sahling 2012), should be seen as a point of concern.

In this section, we look at the views of appointed and executorial civil servants regarding the degree of politicization within their organizations. We find that perceived influence by politicians is one of the highest among the sampled countries (figure 28). Perhaps more concerning is the degree to which respondents feel that politicians respect the expertise of senior civil servants, which is the lowest of all studied countries (figure 29).

Figure 28. Reported political influence over senior-level appointments

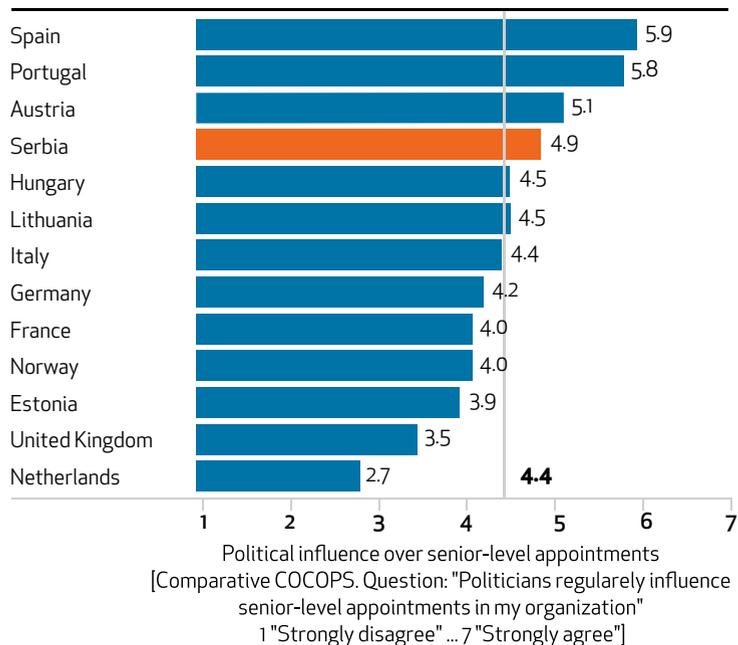
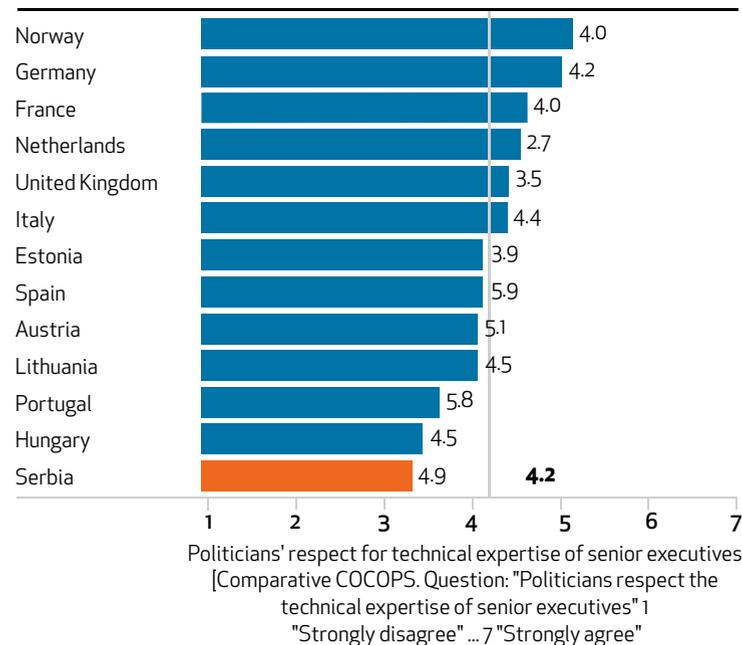


Figure 29. Extent to which politicians respect the technical expertise of senior executives



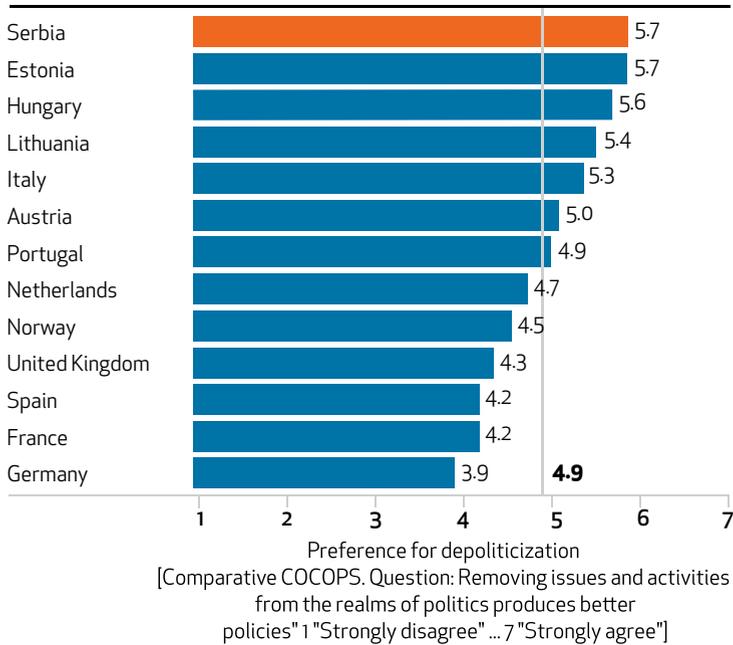
These findings are in line with those presented in the previous sections of this report. If senior management positions are to a large extent influenced on the basis of political affiliation (figure 30), it is indeed plausible that executorial civil servants are likely to encounter *career plateaus* that would in part explain their lower levels of job satisfaction and engagement (section 4.4). Moreover, if politicians fail to respect the expertise of senior executives (figure 29), and these executives have little decision-making authority (section 5.2), their work is effectively

reduced to compliance with rules. A work context of this kind is likely breed what, in the case of Serbia, has already been described as a "risk-averse, rule-based administrative culture" (Eriksen 2005). This characterization is supported by our findings. When asked to rate what they are primarily held accountable for their work, executorial level civil servants on average rated the category "Compliance with rules and regulations" highest (6.35 on a 7-point scale) of the five available categories¹⁵.

¹⁵ The other categories were "Impartiality and fairness," "Finances and use of money," "Performance and results" and "The political line of my Minister". Appointed civil servants ranked "Performance and results" highest (6.4), with "Compliance with rules and regulations" coming in second (6.27). We however note that the average rating for the "Compliance with rules and regulations" dimension doesn't differ (statistically) significantly over appointed and executorial managers, implying that this rule-compliance based administrative culture permeates all levels of the administrative executive.

As argued in the previous section, such an environment might be adequate for established, stable administrations but it is highly unfavourable for an administration faced with the need to undertake fundamental reforms involving all levels of management, as is the case in Serbia.

Figure 30. Reported preference for depoliticization of the civil service



We also find that there is a clear consensus among all of Serbia's senior civil servants—i.e. appointed and executorial ones—that political interference in their activities is detrimental to performance. When asked to rank the degree to which they agree with the statement "Removing issues and activities from the realms of politics produces better policies", our respondents answered 5.72 on average on a 7-point scale, with over 40% of the respondents responding with a 7. As figure 30 shows, this is the highest of all the COCOPS countries. This broad agreement

implies that all levels of the executive view the status quo as untenable. The lack of clearly formalized goals (discussed in section 5.1) and room to make decisions (discussed in section 5.2) drives executorial level managers to protect themselves by adopting rule and regulation obsessed attitudes. In turn, appointed civil servants are forced to draw more power to themselves in order to effectively manage their organizations, which further exacerbates the problem.

One way to break the current gridlock is to formalize organizational goals through strategic plans and accompanying MBOR frameworks (see 5.1). If appointed civil servants are able to hold lower management levels accountable for performance and results, they will be more likely to delegate decision-making authority. At the same time, the security and clarity provided by formalized targets will encourage lower management levels to pursue organizational goals, thereby facilitating the transition from an administrative culture centred on rule compliance to one focused on improving service delivery and outcomes (Keating 2001).

It should be clear however—from both the demonstrated politicization of the senior levels of the civil service and the highly centralized nature of the Serbian administration—that the successful implementation of the aforementioned reforms will require the full and unconditional support of the political leadership of the Republic of Serbia.

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6. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SERBIA'S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The previous chapter shows that there is a low degree of autonomy in the work of managers in the Serbian public administration, as well as that objectives are not clearly defined or well communicated to the employees (section 5.1). There is a need to increase the autonomy of managers and decentralize the decision-making process. The survey shows a high degree of perceived politicization of the public administration; therefore, in order to improve accountability, transparency and predictability of managers' decision-making, it would be desirable to reduce the influence of politicians (section 5.3). This chapter deals with respondent's assessment of the reform process (section 6.1) and the influence of international organisations (section 6.2) on reform the in public administration.

6.1 Evaluation of Serbia's Public Administration Reform

Over the past two decades many European countries have introduced various reforms to public administration—e-governance, transparency, flexible employment, reduction in staffing, programme-based budgeting, focus on outcomes and results. Senior civil servants throughout the countries sampled by the COCOPS survey hold the view that politicians have applied a 'top-to-bottom' approach, with poor participation of citizens, to introducing public administration reforms (Hammerschmid, Oprisor & Štimac, 2013).

In Serbia, since the political changes in the year 2000, there have been several attempts to reform the public administration. The first attempt was implemented between 2001 and 2004, but achieved little success due to the lack of a new administrative framework (Eriksen & Statskonsult, 2005). Following the adoption of the first strategic public administration framework in 2004, the old legislation was amended and new laws passed,

but the implementation of objectives and strategy principles remained weak (Janićijević & Bogičević-Milikić, 2011; Milenković, 2013). Since the adoption of the 2006 Constitution, a set of laws has been passed intended to modernise the functioning of public administration, among the most important of which are: the Public Administration Act (2005), Civil Servants Act (2005), Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) Act (2005), Free Access to Information of Public Importance Act (2004) and the laws regulating e-governance (SIGMA, 2011).

The underlying principles of the planned reform process are decentralisation, depoliticisation, professionalisation, optimisation and modernisation of public administration in Serbia (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2004; 2013). However, the Government has failed to adequately assess its own of reform activities, with the exception of drafting and formulation of legislation (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2012). It was therefore interesting to utilize this study as an opportunity to delve into senior civil servants' perceptions of the progress made in the implementation of reforms in the Serbian public administration.

Public administration performance evaluation

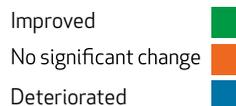
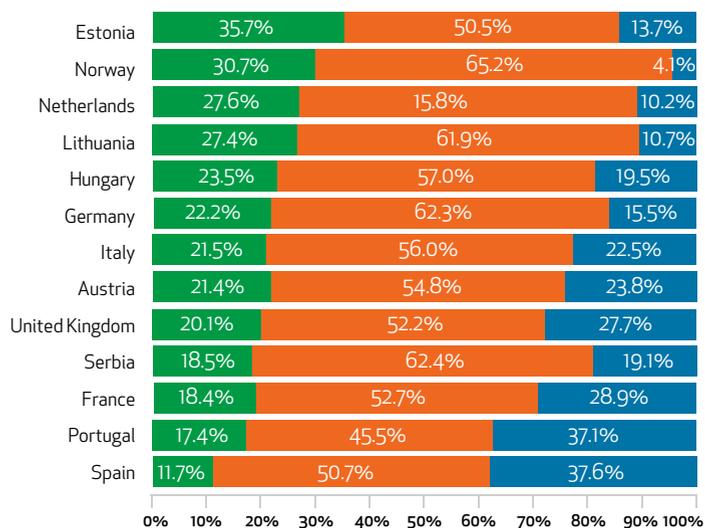


Figure 31. Respondents' evaluation of public administration performance

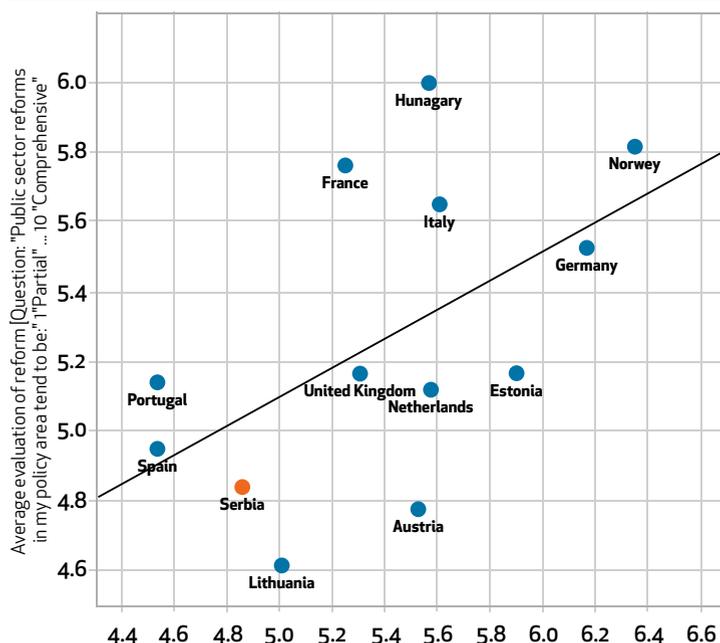


Evaluation of PA performance [Question: "Compared with five years ago, how would you say things have developed when it comes to the way public administration runs in your country?" 1 "Worse" ... 10 "Better" Recoding 1-3 "Deteriorated", 4-7 "No significant change", 8-10 "Improved"]

When asked to describe the general situation in the public administration, 17% of respondents said that it has deteriorated and 27.4% stated that the situation is better now than five years ago. However, the majority of respondents believe that the situation has not changed either for the better or for the worse—55% of all respondents (Figure 31). A possible explanation of this perception is the many failed attempts to reform the public administration in the past thirteen years. This is further corroborated in the findings presented in Figure 32. When compared to respondents from other COCOPS countries, Serbian public administration managers are inclined to describe reforms in their respective fields as partial and unsuccessful.

The fact that more than half of senior civil servants in Serbia hold the view that there have been neither improvement nor deterioration of the public administration in the five years, and that they are inclined to describe the reforms as partial and unsuccessful, seems to corroborate the assumption that real public administration reform is yet to be implemented. These results confirm the findings of Section 2 of this report on the *status quo* in the public administration in Serbia.

Figure 32. Public managers' evaluation of reform implementation and success



Average evaluation of reforms [Comparative COCOPS. Question: "Please indicate your views on public sector reforms using the scales below. Public sector reforms in my area tend to be: "1 "Unsuccessful" ... 10 "Successful"]

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6.2 Influence of international organizations

International actors in Serbia exert a strong influence on the course of public administration reforms. Although the EU does not stipulate a specific structure of government and public administration, support to Serbia's administrative capacities is nonetheless a priority (SIGMA, 2012). With a budget of over €208 million for assistance to Serbia in 2013, the EU provides significant support to institutions in the field of public administration reforms, professional development of civil servants and e-governance development (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2013). In addition to providing expert and financial assistance to Serbia, the EU has certain requirements in relation to public administration reform, which are assessed in the European Commission's annual progress reports, criticizing negative aspects of the state's performance and giving recommendations for improvements.

In addition to the European Union, other international organisations, particularly the International Monetary Fund, have been very active in the field of public administration reform in Serbia. While EU primarily provides assistance in order to raise Serbia's administrative capacities to adopt and implement the *acquis communautaire*, the International Monetary Fund takes a different approach to the public administration reform, which often gives rise to tensions between politicians and the civil service managers implementing reforms (Meyer-Sahling, 2009). The requirements and recommendations of the IMF primarily pertain to public spending reduction, i.e. a freeze on

new employment, freezing salaries and streamlining public administration (Lilić, 2011; SIGMA, 2011).

As part of the COCOPS survey, respondents were asked about the frequency of contact they have with representatives of international organisations and, specifically, the European Commission. The responses shows that many state secretaries (42%) are in weekly contact with EU representatives (Figure 33). More broadly, contact with EU representatives reflects the pyramid-like power structure of the civil service, with appointed civil servants having more frequent contact with EU representatives than executorial civil servants. The frequency of contact with the representatives of other international organisations is similar (Figure 34).

Figure 33. Reported interaction frequency with European Union institutions by position

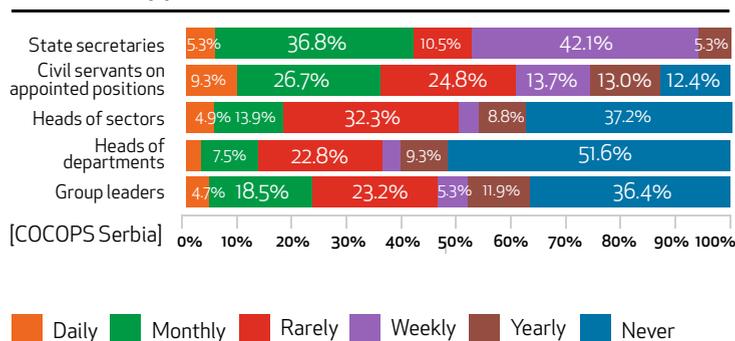
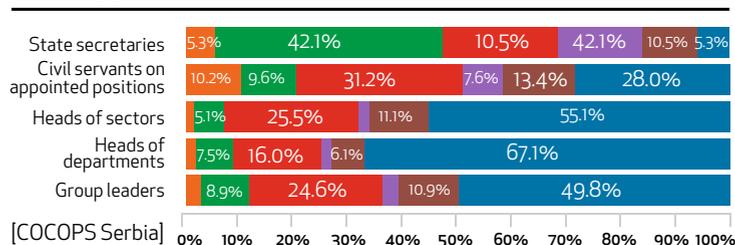


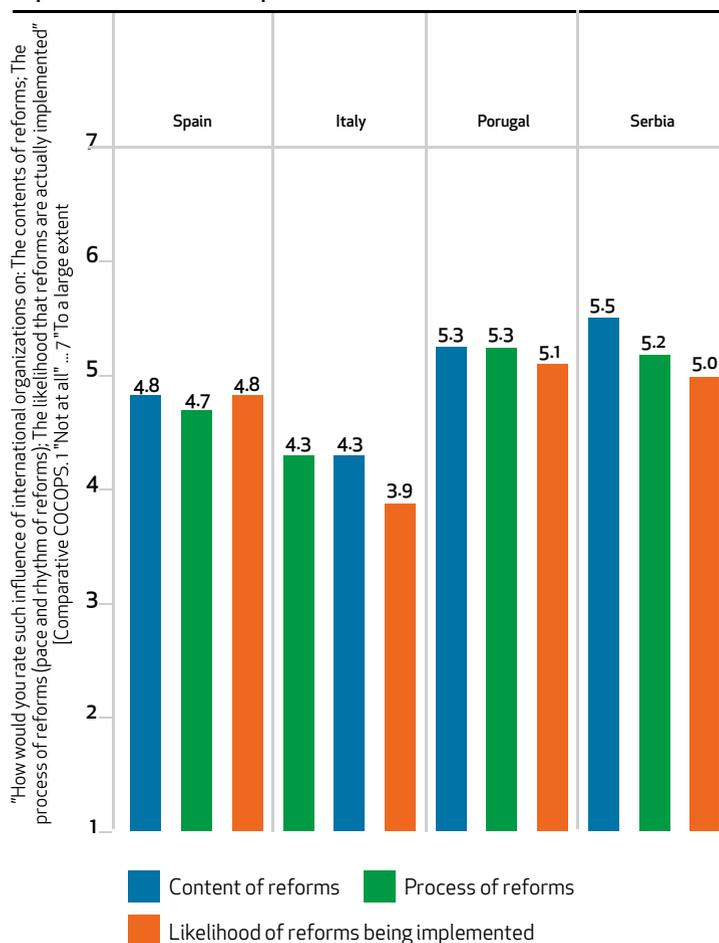
Figure 34. Reported interaction frequency with international bodies by position



These findings may be explained by the centralization of public administration, but the influence of the European Union itself, and other international organisations, on the process of designing reforms, which takes place at higher levels of the public administration, may also be significant (Figure 35). When asked about the influence of international organisations and the European Union on different phases of reform, the distribution of respondents' answers, on a 1 to 7 scale (1 indicating 'no influence' and 7 indicating 'great influence') were as follows: 'content of reform' – 5.46, 'pace and rhythm of reforms' – 5.21, and 'likelihood of reforms actually being implemented' – 4.96. We may see that the international organisations in Serbia have a greater influence in all the phases than is the case in Spain, Portugal or Italy (Figure 35).

Our survey confirms the importance of close contact and the significance of European and international expertise for the process of public administration reform in Serbia. The survey shows that there is a clear consensus among senior civil servants that international organisations and the European Union have a positive influence on the likelihood that reforms will be implemented. The survey results corroborate the assumption that if the prospect of EU accession is certain, the public administration has a strong incentive to reform itself (Koprić, 2011; Meyer-Sahling, 2009). We recommend stepping up interaction between civil servants at lower management levels and representatives of international organisations and the European Union in order to promote and facilitate the process of the public administration's adaptation to future tasks and assignments (Ziller, 1998).

Figure 35. Reported impact of international organizations or supranational bodies on public administration reform



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7.

CONCLUSION

This report presents the findings of the first large scale comparative study of senior civil servants in Serbia. The aim of this report is to (1) describe the population of senior civil servants (sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3) and assess their job satisfaction and organizational commitment (section 4.4), (2) investigate the work context these managers operate in (sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) and (3) report their evaluation of PAR (section 6.1) and the impact of international organizations on reforms (section 6.2). As already noted in the introduction, the current report presents data relating to a limited number of questions from the COCOPS questionnaire, and therefore covers only some of the topics relevant to public administration reform in Serbia. We also acknowledge that insights obtained from our survey could be enriched with other data (e.g. budgets, personnel numbers) and qualitative interviews with key players within the Serbian administration. Nevertheless, we believe that this report is a solid first step in the use the views and opinions of senior public executives obtained by the COCOPS study, which can support public administration reform in Serbia.

From a comparative perspective, we find that women are well represented in the senior civil service, although the number of women decreases significantly at higher levels (section 4.1). Senior civil servants in Serbia tend to be well educated and a higher than expected (given the legalistic heritage of the administrative system) number have economics/business backgrounds, which is accompanied with an above-average

receptiveness to management reforms (section 4.2). Mobility and turnover are high among appointed civil servants, but very low among executorial managers (section 4.3). In part, as a result of this, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are lower among executorial civil servants (section 4.4).

Our respondents report a very low degree of goal clarity within their organizations, with lower management levels reporting a higher goal ambiguity than among appointed civil servants (section 5.1). This is also evident from the low extent to which government-wide strategic plans have been implemented into organizational strategic plans and management by objectives and results frameworks (section 5.1). This goal ambiguity is accompanied by a high concentration of power within the appointed level of civil servants, with executorial civil servants reporting extremely low levels of policy and budgeting autonomy (section 5.2). Finally, our respondents report very high levels of political interference in the functioning of their organizations, and all respondents—at both executorial and appointed levels—indicate that decreasing the politicization of the senior civil service is likely to improve performance (section 5.3)

A clear majority of our respondents report that very little has changed in the performance of the public administration in Serbia over the past five years (6.1). Moreover, many characterize administrative reforms in their policy areas as both partial and unsuccessful (6.1). They report a relatively high frequency of

interaction with inter- and supranational institutions (especially the EU), although this interaction and cooperation tends take place primarily at the level of appointed civil servants (section 6.2), possibly because of the degree to which executive power is concentrated there (section 5.2). Finally, the vast majority of our respondents recognize the beneficial impact of international organizations on the content of reforms and on the pace and extent to which they are implemented (6.2).

Our study has shown that large scale civil service reform has yet to take place in Serbia (section 6.1), and that many of the plans that have been formulated have not been implemented. The current administrative culture—based on rule compliance rather than performance and characterized by a high degree of risk-aversion—is the direct result of the work context in which the senior executives operate. Moreover, we find that this work context explains both low levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment—especially among executorial managers—reported by our respondents.

This report argues that top decision makers should operationalize strategic plans by setting clear goals and targets and formalize these into management practices through utilizing objectives and results frameworks. This will not only allow political leaders to hold the senior public executive accountable for their performance, but also protect senior executives from the fickleness of national politics. In turn, senior public managers should use the clarity and stability of such frameworks to delegate more management autonomy to lower management levels, thereby stimulating internalization of collective goals throughout their organizations. Reforms should then be undertaken to increase the career mobility of executorial civil servants. Our findings suggest that such management reforms will lead to higher job satisfaction and engagement at all layers of public management.

The engagement of all layers of the administrative executive is a necessary condition to successfully implement public administration reform and execution of public policy in general. Changing the work context within the civil service should be a priority for both civil service executive and political leaders.

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