

Requirements and opportunities for EU bureaucrats

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ABSTRACT

2004 year brought new phase in EU bureaucracy, ten new Member States, including Hungary joined the European Union. In 2007, two more countries, Romania and Bulgaria followed them in accession. This meant not only that the territory and the population of the EU had risen by more than one fourth, but it also generated significant challenges to the administration of EU institutions. European administration provides higher wages, furthermore it gives the opportunity of a secured career and constant improvement of skills. European civil servants may learn any of the official EU languages they choose and gain experience how to succeed in a multilingual workplace.

(Keywords: requirements, opportunities, administration)

Követelmények és lehetőségek az EU hivatalnokokkal kapcsolatban

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ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS

A 2004-es esztendő új fejezetet nyitott az Európai Unió bürokráciájában, 10 új tag, köztük Magyarország csatlakozott az Unióhoz. 2007-től további két országgal, Romániával és Bulgáriával bővült az Unió. Mindez azt jelenti, hogy nemcsak az EU területe és lakossága nőtt több mint egynegyeddel, hanem lényeges kihívásokkal került szembe a hivatali adminisztráció is. Az EU bővítése új karrierlehetőségeket nyújt az új tagországok szakemberei számára. Az európai adminisztráció magasabb fizetéseket, biztonságosabb, kiszámítható karrierlehetőségeket biztosít a folyamatos szakmai ismeretek mellett.

(Kulcsszavak: követelmények, lehetőségek, adminisztráció)

Introduction

2004 year brought new phase in EU bureaucracy, ten new Member States, including Hungary joined the European Union. In 2007, two more countries, Romania and Bulgaria followed them in accession. This meant not only that the territory and the population of the EU had risen by more than one fourth, but it also generated significant challenges to the administration of EU institutions. (*EUROPA Rapid Press Releases*, 2007). They had to increase the number of their employees, mainly from newly acceded countries at least for two reasons: firstly the accession of twelve new Member States brought new and extended tasks and secondly the institutions were lack of knowledge and competences regarding local conditions in the new EU countries.

A 'special' labour market has opened in front of those who wanted to become civil servants. EU institutions provide a wide variety of career opportunities, from traineeships to senior manager jobs. Only the European Commission – which has 27

Directorates-Generals (DG) – employs 25.000 civil servants from which nearly 4.000 are from the EU-12. *Georgakakis and de Lassalle* (2006) speak about Europeanization of political and administrative careers. In their opinion it is a continuous and standardised process regarding to all positions, nationalities and the European political sectors.

Posts in European Civil Service

A lot of young and older educated specialists ask “What kinds of posts are available for a European civil servant?” Let us see it from up to the bottom (*Georgakakis and de Lassalle, 2006; European Commission Civil Service, 2004a*).

Apart from the present 27 Commissioners, the highest career that one may fulfil is to become middle- or even senior *manager*. As a senior manager, Director-General is the top-level civil servant reporting directly to the Commissioner. They are responsible for their whole policy area (for example: agriculture, competition). Deputy Director-Generals, Directors and Principal Advisers have also important role as senior managers. They often have to lead from three up to seven units.

Middle managers are ‘Heads of Units’ who conduct a group of staff. Within the strategy and the work plan of a Directorate-General they have to set out targets for the whole unit, therefore they need to have special educational knowledge and skills such as good ability to communicate, negotiate and unique leadership qualities.

Permanent official tasks can be divided up into two categories: administrators (AD) and assistants (AST). Certainly it depends on which DG one starts to work in, but an *administrator* must fulfil wide range of duties. They work on fields like the European Union’s legislative and budgetary processes, the co-ordination of Member States’ broad economic policies. They are responsible for the Common Agricultural Policy and ensure that Community law is uniformly interpreted and effectively applied in every Member State. *Assistants* guarantee important background. They deal with budgetary and financial affairs, personnel work, organisation and computing. They also play a significant role in implementing policies.

Temporary agents can be employed because of several reasons: to make up staff shortages, to work for the Commissioners’ special offices (cabinets) or to work in special scientific programs. European Union encourages research and development activities therefore plenty of research centres have been built up to manage European research programmes.

Contract agents are also divided into two groups. One group must handle manual or administrative support-service tasks, meet infrastructural and logistical needs or work for Agencies, Commission Representations and Delegations in Member States. This opportunity gives them a long-term prospective for a maximum of five-years. After this, their contract can be renewed for a maximum of another five years or can be converted into a contract of indefinite duration. The other group of contract agents replaces temporarily absent officials due to illness or maternity leave or they are hired to respond acute staff shortages at times of intense work pressure. Usually they have a short term contract with a minimum of three months length.

Seconded National Expert (SNE) is a specific post. Seconded National Experts are Member States’ civil servants. They bring their experiences of the issues they deal with to the Commission and than return to their home administration with the knowledge of EU issues which they acquire during the period of the secondment. These experts work on national, regional or local level in the public, private or voluntary sector.

Finally, different kinds of *traineeships* exist at the European institutions for the length of one to six month periods. Traineeships give good perspective to get to know

how the institutions and common policies work in the EU. Applicants have to obtain their university diploma and speak quite well in English, German or French besides their mother tongue (*EurActiv*, 2008).

As it can be seen above, there is a wide range of posts in EU bureaucracy, but not for everybody. The specialist has to pass a concurs, they have to fulfil serious requirements.

Recruitment

Members of the permanent staff have to pass the so-called concurs (exam) after which they are able to apply for jobs in the institutions. Once they are selected, they have the chance to work for lifelong in the 'system' (*Walter and Kalmár*, 2008). The selection method to become a European civil servant is co-ordinated by the European Personal Selection Office (EPSO). First of all applicants have to meet the eligibility criteria and must be a citizen of one of the Member States. Concurs usually have two parts, a written and an oral one. The written test contains multiple choice questions relating to the European integration, language skills, verbal and numerical reasoning. Those who pass the written tests are called to an interview with a selection panel. If the candidates go through this final step, they are placed on a reserve list from which they can be selected. But, being on this reserve list does not guarantee that they are going to get a permanent official's position. These lists often have a time limit of one or two years.

Institutions offering comprehensive career opportunities to the Union's citizens are:

- *Council of the European Union* which is the Union's main decision-making body. Member States are represented by their ministers corresponding to their professional fields.
- *Members of the European Parliament* are directly elected for five years by the EU's citizens. Members form political groups. The Parliament has substantial legislative and budgetary power.
- *European Commission* proposes European legislation, it is responsible for implementing common policies and manages the Union's programmes and budget.
- *Court of Justice* ensures that Community law is uniformly interpreted and applied.
- *Court of Auditors* controls the European Union's revenues and expenditures.
- *European Ombudsman* stands for the rights and interests of Union's citizens.
- *European Data Protection Supervisor* (EDPS) is the guard of the protection of personal data.
- Other advisory bodies are *Committee of the Regions* representing regional and local authorities and *European Economic and Social Committee* ensuring communication between civil society and European institutions.

Benefits

After the successful recruitment the next question is "What social and financial perspectives are being offered by working at any of the European institutions?" (*European Commission Civil Service*, 2004a). European Commission is an example as the largest multicultural employer among the institutions. Its career system consists of a single pay scale based on sixteen grades. Each grade has five seniority levels. Civil servants usually move up one level every two years until they reach the last level of the grade or until they are promoted to a higher grade. They start as probationary officials

during a nine-month period. After passing this stage they start to work as officials. They get personal training, which is tailored to the official's own needs.

Monthly salaries alter between 2.300 and 16.000 euros without social security contributions, taxes and allowances. As an expatriate they may gain 16 percent of their basic salary as added payment. Other allowances are: household allowance, dependent child allowance, educational and pre-school allowances.

Officials usually retire at the age of 63, but early retirement is also possible at the age of 55 or they can work until the age of 67. Whilst working officials have to pay 10.25 percent as contribution to the pension fund their pension can be a maximum of 70 percent of their final basic salary. EU officials and their families are entitled to benefit from a Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme which covers 80 percent of the costs of medical expenses. They have to pay 2 percent contribution for the Scheme from their monthly salary.

European civil servants' salary is not subject of national taxation. They pay a so-called Community tax which varies progressively between 8 and 45 percent of their wages and which is paid directly into the Union's budget. Officials may claim annually 24 days off. In addition to their annual holiday they are entitled to have special days off for time spent travelling between their home country and their workplace, for marriage, death of relatives or serious illnesses and births. Mothers may claim only 20 weeks as maternity leave, but there also exists 10 days of paternity leave. On a basic monthly allowance, parents are entitled to 6 months of parental leave per child (*European Commission Civil Service, 2004a*).

Recruitment targets

As *Figure 1* shows, women are more represented during the early stage of their career, but the proportion of genders is quite balanced during the whole working period. The most remarkable age among civil servants can be pointed between 40-50 years. Over 10.000 person works at this age as officials and temporary agents (*Rana, 2007*)

It can be seen on *Figure 2* that while EU-15 provides 85 percent of employees working at the EU institutions, only 15 percent is coming from EU-12. After Poland (4,1%) Hungary (2,2%) is the second biggest new Member State represented among civil servants.

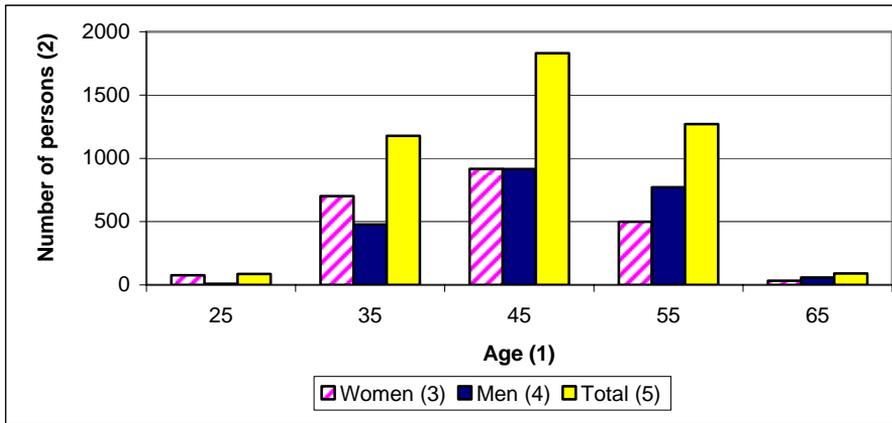
Figure 3 shows that except Malta and Cyprus, more women than men coming from the new Member States started to work at the EU institutions. Regarding to the average of EU-27 proportion of women and men is almost equal (49,7% women, 50,3% men). Tough EU-15 is more represented by men, in average the Commission has fulfilled its recruitment of women working in the different departments. In 2006 the target for the recruitment was only 30 percent (*Rana, 2007*).

Other recruitment targets have also been set by the Commission regarding to the management staff coming from the new Member States. For example at Director-General and Deputy Director-General levels the aim to recruit was at least one official from each new Member States. Except middle management level Hungary has overrepresented itself with one person at DGs' and one at Directors' level. At the middle management level Hungary still have 3 posts to fulfil.

Directorate-General for Translation is the biggest employer among DGs. European Union's administration must communicate by using 23 official languages. This has always been a question of argument, because the cost of it represents a large amount of EU's expenditure and is said to decrease economic competitiveness. (*EurActiv, 2008*)

Figure 1

Distribution of civil servants by gender and age, April 2008



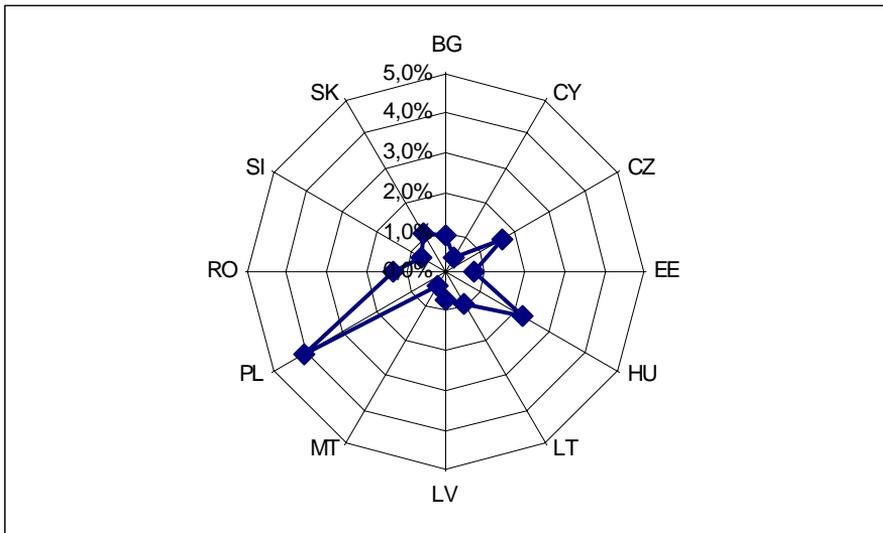
Source (Forrás): *European Commission Civil Service* (2004b)

1. ábra: A hivatalnokok megoszlása kor és nem szerint, 2008. április

Kor(1), Személyek száma(2) Nők(3), Férfiak(4), Összesen(5)

Figure 2

Proportion of civil servants coming from the new Member States, April 2008

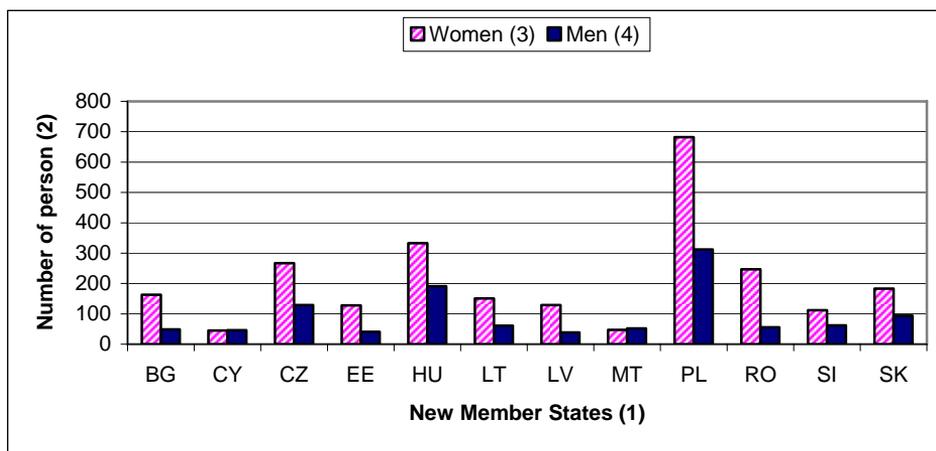


Source (Forrás): *European Commission Civil Service* (2004b)

2. ábra: Az új tagországokból származó hivatalnokok aránya, 2008. április

Figure 3

Ratio of civil servants coming from the new Member States by gender, April 2008



Source (Forrás): *European Commission Civil Service* (2004b)

3. ábra: Az új tagországok hivatalnokainak megoszlása életkor és nem szerint

Új tagországok(1), Személyek száma(2), Nő(3), Férfi(4)

European statistics indicates that R + D are also one of the most important aims of the Union. The second largest DG is Joint-Research Centre and the third one is Directorate-General for Research, because R + D is one of the most important aims of the Union.

Hungary is most represented in DG Translation, DG Agriculture and Rural Development and DG Competition.

Summarising the said above, the accession to the European Union gave new career perspectives to the citizens of twelve new Member States. What kind of advantages could be profited compared to the national labour market? European administration provides higher wages, furthermore it gives the opportunity of a secured career and constant improvement of skills. European civil servants may learn any of the official EU languages they choose and gain experience how to succeed in a multilingual workplace.

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