



Romanian National
Agency of Civil Servants



How neutral is the public service?

What do citizens think,
what do public servants say

IRSOP Market Research & Consulting Survey

January 2007

Bucharest

Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION	3
I. WHAT DO CITIZENS THINK?	4
1. Are people aware of the concept of public servants?	5
2. Public servants and/or party members?	8
3. How vulnerable are public servants to political pressure?	11
4. What criteria matter in the recruitment of public servants?	16
5. How can the neutrality of the public service be strengthened?	20
6. What is the public image of county prefects?	22
II. WHAT DO PUBLIC SERVANTS SAY?	26
1. How widespread are decisions based on political criteria?	27
2. How can public servants be protected from political pressure?	29
3. How can the public servants' preparation be improved?	31
III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	34

INTRODUCTION

The survey was conducted by IRSOP Market Research & Consulting as part of the ***Phare*** 2004 /016-772.01.02/03 project “***Observatory of the Prefect’s Institution***”. Study was conducted for the ***Association for Sustainable Development Assistance and Programmes – Agenda 21*** in partnership with the ***National Agency of Civil Servants***.

IRSOP interviewed a sample of 500 citizens and 32 public servants in the city of Bucharest and the counties of Constanța, Iași, Harghita and Arad. The sample is representative for each of the 5 regions and for the adult population in the counties included in the survey. The sample for each region included about 100 respondents. The error margin for the total sample is of maximum +/- 4,4%.

Public servants were interviewed in all the 5 counties.

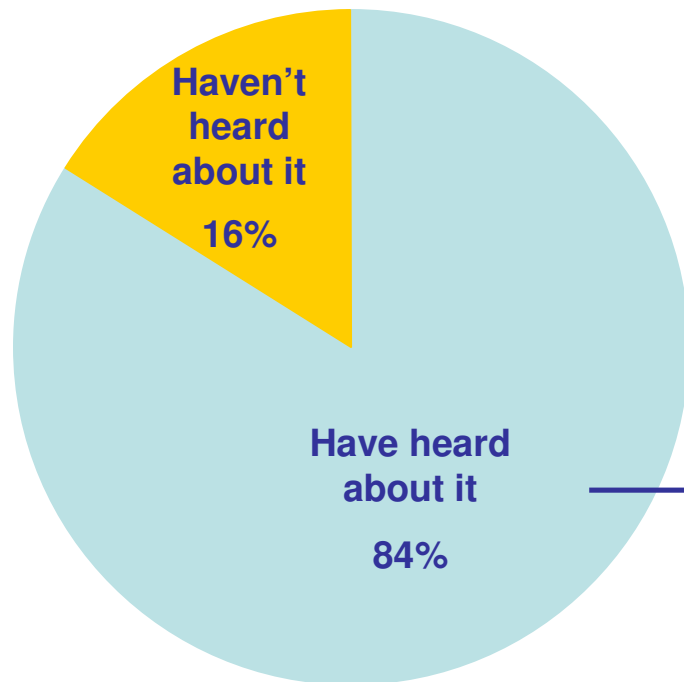
The survey was conducted between 4-8 January 2007.

IRSOP is a private independent market and opinion research company (www.irsop.ro).

I. WHAT DO CITIZENS THINK?

1. Are people aware of the concept of public servants?

How many people have heard about “public servants”?



Base 500

Why do they think they are called “public servants”?

	%
They work with the public	49
They serve public interest	35
They work in public state institutions	20
They are paid from public money	11
Other interpretation	1
Don't know	11

Base 422

Interpretation

High awareness, but people interpret the concept based on the most common meaning of the words.

What groups are less familiar with the concept of “public servants”?

	Haven't heard about the concept	Base
	%	N
Total	16	500
Sex		
Male	17	240
Female	15	260
Age		
18-34	14	171
35-54	23	148
55+	12	182
Education		
Comprehensive school	31	162
High school	10	244
College/university	4	93
Residence		
Rural	20	177
Urban	13	323
Region		
Bucharest	10	97
Constanța	3	104
Iași	22	95
Harghita	24	104
Arad	19	100

Interpretation

Lack of awareness is more widespread among people with a low education and in the 35-54 age group, where contacts with civil servants are likely to be more limited.

2. Public servants and/or party members?

What do people think about the relation between public servants and parties?

Public servants ...		
	Are party members?	Should be party members?
	%	%
Yes	50	21
Some are, some are not	29	-
No	12	68
Don't know	9	11
Total	100	100

Base 500

Interpretation

Strong mental cleavage between people's impression that public servants are enrolled in parties and their wish that public servants should not be party members.

Based on the questions "Currently, do you think that public servants are members of political parties or not?" and "Do you think that, for things to go well, public servants should be members of political parties or they should not?"

Who thinks that public servants ...?

	Are party members	Should be	Base
		%	N
Total	50	21	500
Sex			
Male	55	19	240
Female	45	23	260
Age			
18-34	45	21	171
35-54	58	23	148
55+	48	19	182
Education			
Comprehensive school	58	34	162
High school	47	17	244
College/university	42	8	93
Residence			
Urban	51	19	323
Rural	47	24	177
Region			
Bucharest	45	17	97
Constanța	56	19	104
Iași	56	25	95
Harghita	45	25	104
Arad	47	18	100

3. How vulnerable are public servants to political pressure?

Can politicians influence the decisions of public servants?

Politicians can influence public servants ...	
	%
To a large extent	72
To a limited extent	17
Not at all	11
Total	100
<i>Base 500</i>	



	Think they can to a large extent	Base
	%	N
Total	72	500
Sex		
Male	77	240
Female	67	260
Age		
18-34	73	171
35-54	76	148
55+	67	182
Education		
Comprehensive school	61	162
Secondary school	76	244
College/university	79	93
Residence		
Urban	78	323
Rural	61	177
Region		
Bucharest	80	97
Constanța	78	104
Iași	79	95
Harghita	65	104
Arad	57	100

Interpretation

The dominant opinion is clearly that public servants are influenced by politicians. Respondents espousing that conviction are mainly male, educated, residing in the urban area, inhabitants of Bucharest, Constanța and Iași.

Based on the question "If the politicians in power want to influence the decisions of some public servants, do you think they can do so to a large extent, to a limited extent or not at all?"

How do people think public servants react to political pressure?

They think public servants ...			
	Can oppose political pressure	Raise their voice to object to pressure	Can defend themselves from pressure
	%	%	%
Yes	48	24	61
No	46	70	34
Don't know	6	6	5
Total	100	100	100

Base 500

How can they do that?

	%
By going to court / invoking the law /by suing the relevant parties	34
By approaching their superiors	11
By refusing to do what they are asked to do / By being correct/ Honest/ Professional/ Sincere	10
By talking to the media/ papers/ TV/ the public	6
By resigning	5
By approaching the Civil Servants' Union/ their colleagues	2
By resorting to acquaintances, connections "who can defend them"	6
Don't know/ Refuses to answer	35

Base 306

Interpretation

The prevailing feeling is that public servants can oppose political pressure, they could do so, but they actually do not.

Who has sceptical opinions concerning the public servants' attitude towards political pressure?

	They think public servants ...			Base
	Cannot oppose political pressure	Do not raise their voice against pressure	Have no means of defence	
	%	%	%	N
Total	46	70	34	500
Sex				
Male	48	73	35	240
Female	44	67	34	260
Age				
18-34	44	73	32	171
35-54	44	67	31	148
55+	49	69	39	182
Education				
Comprehensive school	46	62	31	162
High school	45	71	37	244
College/university	46	80	34	93
Residence				
Urban	49	76	36	323
Rural	41	59	31	177
Region				
Bucharest	44	77	34	97
Constanța	55	78	37	104
Iași	48	70	41	95
Harghita	37	49	29	104
Arad	45	74	32	100

Interpretation

There is a slightly prevalent share of elderly people who think that public servants do not have the means to defend themselves. Respondents who are the least confident in the public servants' courage are university educated, reside in the urban area, in Bucharest and Constanța.

Is the public servants' union strong enough to protect its members from political pressure?

The Union ...	%
Is strong enough	35
Has no power	33
Doesn't get involved	23
Don't know	9
Total	100

56

Interpretation

Two thirds (65%) think implicitly that the Union is perfectly useless since it is powerless (35%), opportunist (23%) or unknown (9%).

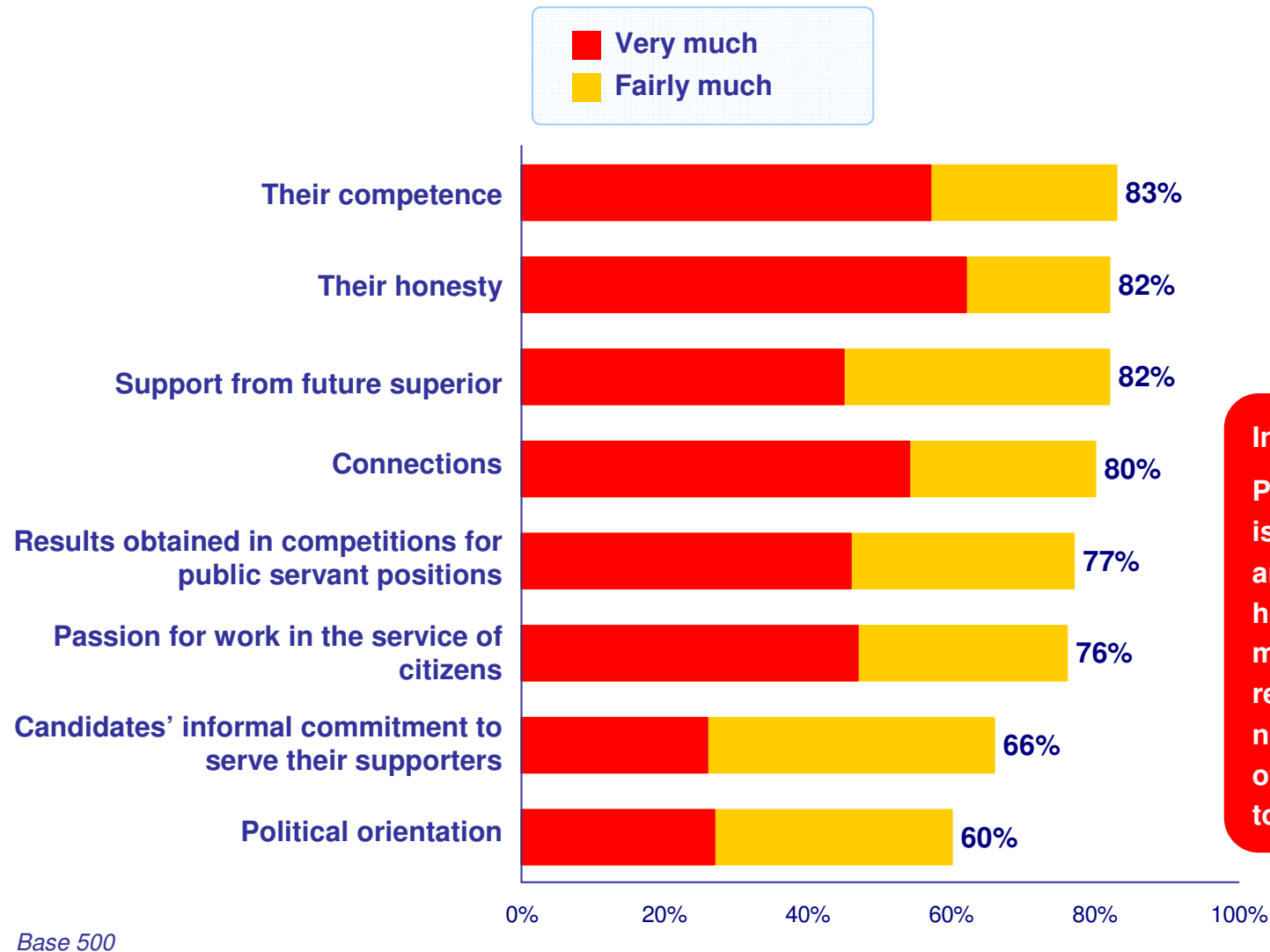
Who is more sceptical?

	%	Base N
Total	56	500
Sex		
Male	60	240
Female	52	260
Age		
18-34	58	171
35-54	46	148
55+	62	182
Education		
Comprehensive school	52	162
High school	56	244
College/university	62	93
Residence		
Urban	58	323
Rural	52	177
Region		
Bucharest	61	97
Constanța	56	104
Iași	53	95
Harghita	50	104
Arad	60	100

Based on the question "Public servants have a union of their own. In your opinion, is the union strong enough to protect public servants from political pressure, or do you think the union isn't strong enough to protect anyone, or won't get involved in such matters?"

4. What criteria matter in the recruitment of public servants?

To what extent do these factors matter in the recruitment of public servants?



Interpretation

People think that recruitment is based on a mixture of value and partisan criteria. But the high number of respondents mentioning corrupt recruitment practices does not favour the development of confidence and respect towards public servants.

Based on the question "In your opinion, to what extent do these factors matter when running for a public servant position?"

What interests are at the forefront of the public servants' activities?

	%
Own interests	54
The citizens' interests	42
Don't know	4
Total	100

Interpretation

The widespread impression that public servants mainly pursue their own interests creates a gap between the public service and citizens.

Which are the more critical voices?

	%	Base N
Total	54	500
Sex		
Male	56	240
Female	53	260
Age		
18-34	56	171
35-54	50	148
55+	57	182
Education		
Comprehensive school	57	162
High school	51	244
College/university	57	93
Residence		
Urban	54	323
Rural	55	177
Region		
Bucharest	65	97
Constanța	66	104
Iași	56	95
Harghita	31	104
Arad	53	100

Based on the question "Overall, do you have the impression the public servants are more concerned about attending to the citizens' problems or about pursuing their own interests?"

Why do citizens think that personal interests govern the activities of public servants?

They think that in the recruitment of civil servants ...	They think public servants pursue...		
	The citizens' interest	Their own interests	Base
	%	%	N
Competence			
Matters	44	52	414
Doesn't matter	30	69	70
Connections			
Matters	39	57	398
Doesn't matter	58	39	90
Political orientation			
Matters	37	60	300
Doesn't matter	52	43	172
Honesty			
Matters	45	51	412
Doesn't matter	25	73	78
Passion for work in the service of citizens			
Matters	46	50	380
Doesn't matter	29	68	110
Results obtained in competitions for public servant positions			
Matters	47	50	387
Doesn't matter	25	68	92
Support from future superior			
Matters	41	55	409
Doesn't matter	44	54	70
Candidates' informal commitment to serve their supporters			
Matters	42	55	332
Doesn't matter	43	52	121

The difference up to 100 is represented by "don't know" answers.

How to read this table

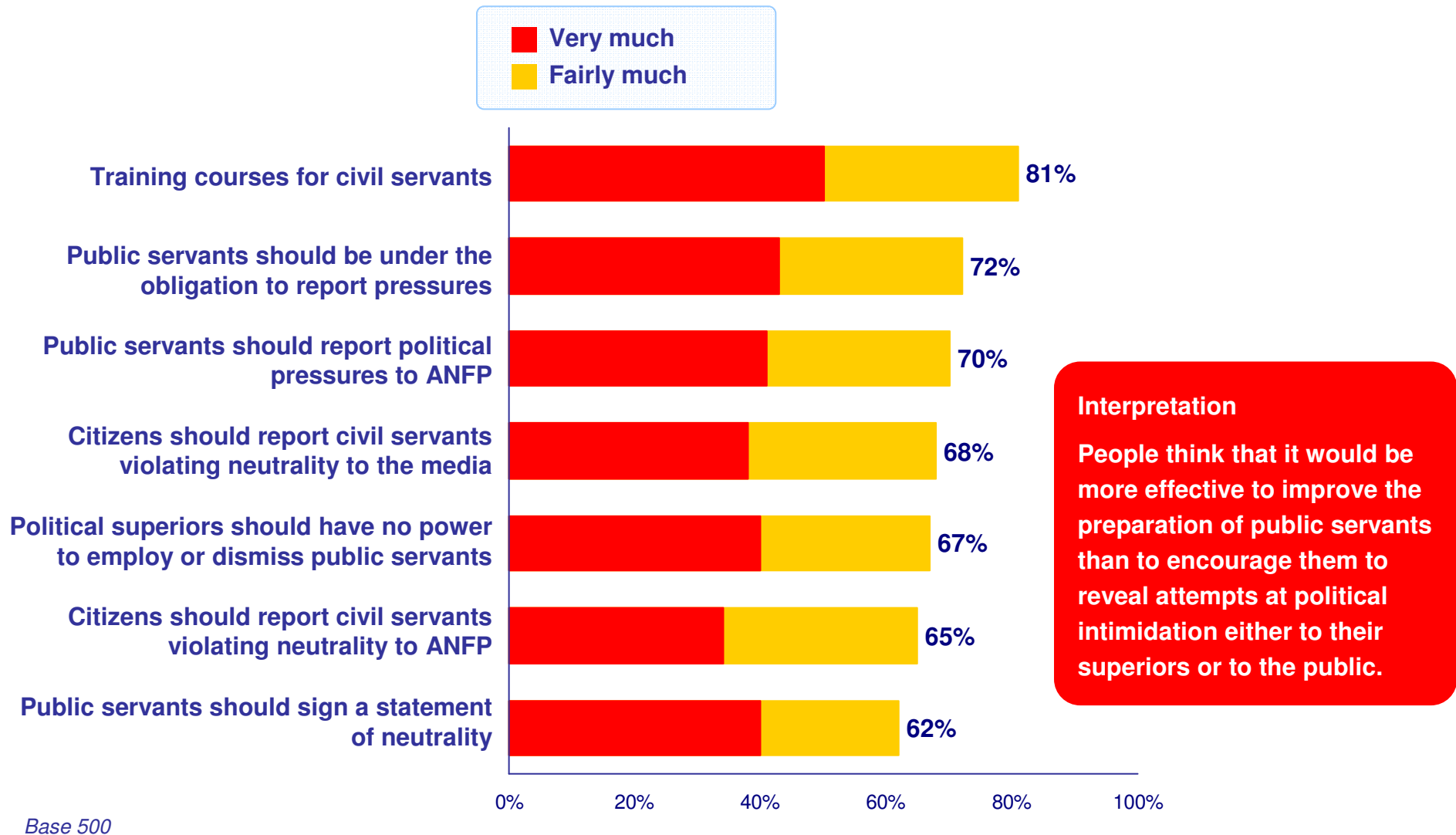
Out of 100 people who say that competence does not matter at recruitment, 69 think that public servants pursue their own interests, while 30 think that they serve the citizens' interests.

Interpretation

The perception of corrupt practices in the recruitment of public servants fuels the conviction that, while on the job, public servants only pursue their own interests .

5. How can the neutrality of the public service be strengthened?

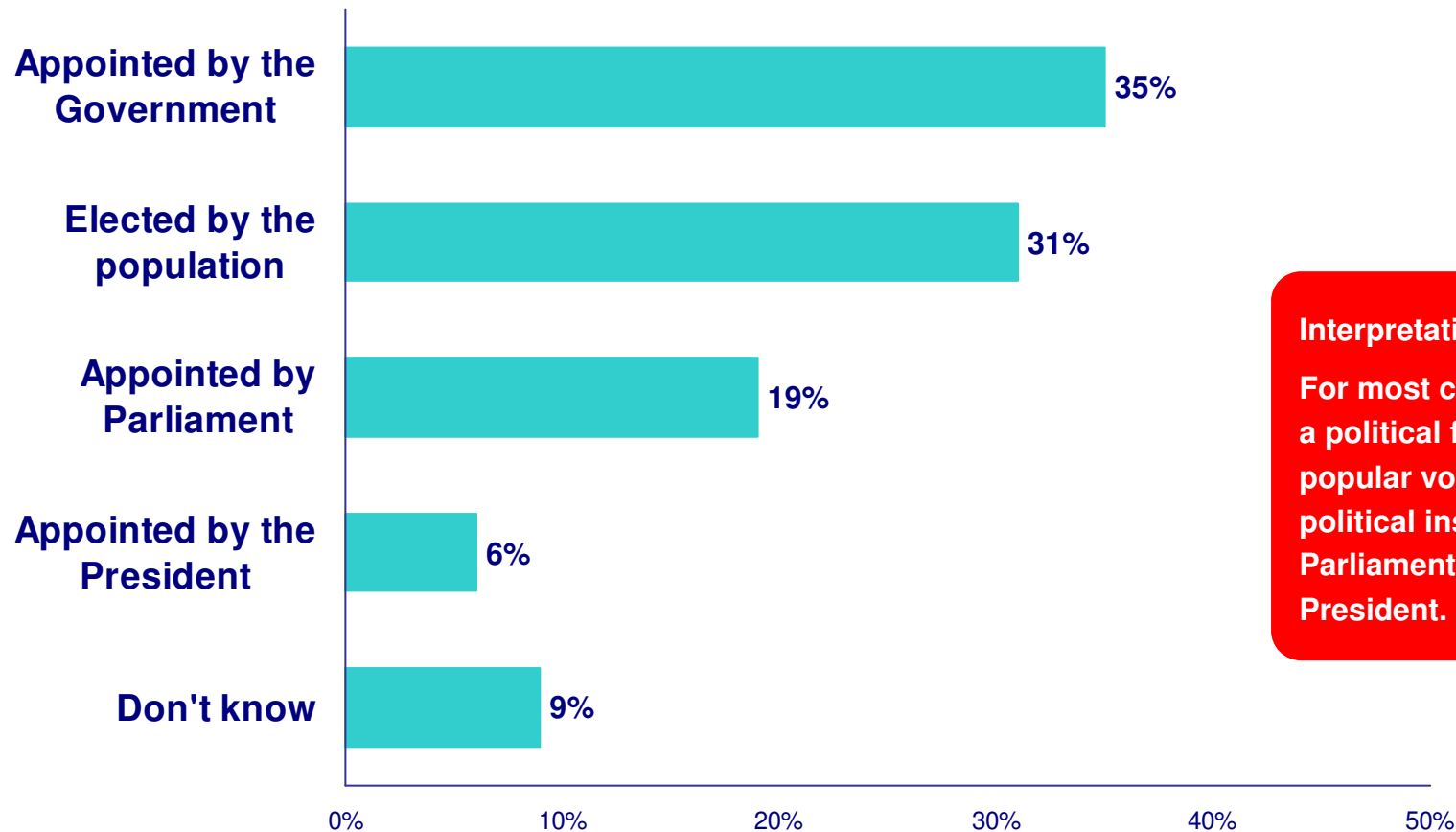
To what extent do these measures contribute to eliminating political pressure?



Based on the question "To what extent do you think these elements help public servants stay neutral, i.e. not be influenced by politics?"

6. What is the public image of County Prefects?

How does somebody get to be a Prefect?



Interpretation

For most citizens, the Prefect is a political figure elected by popular vote or appointed by a political institution, such as the Parliament or the country's President.

Base 500

Based on the question "In your opinion, is a County Prefect elected by the population, appointed by the President of the country, appointed by the Government or by Parliament?"

To what extent is the Prefect seen as a defender of the neutrality of public service?

	They think the Prefect ...		
	Could take measures against politically influenced public servants	Is enrolled in a political party	Takes practical measures against politically influenced public servants
	%	%	%
Yes	88	78	58
No	7	19	31
Don't know	6	3	11
Total	100	100	100
<i>Base 500</i>			

Interpretation

People think that the Prefect could take measures against attempts to exercise political influence on public servants. But prefects themselves are seen as members of a political camp. This is why fewer respondents consider that prefects actually take effective measures against public servants who yield to political influence.

Who has a less favourable opinion about the Prefect?

	Think that the Prefect is politically engaged	Base
	%	N
Total	78	500
Sex		
Male	80	240
Female	76	260
Age		
18-34	85	171
35-54	75	148
55+	74	182
Education		
Comprehensive school	73	162
High school	80	244
College/university	82	93
Residence		
Urban	82	323
Rural	70	177
Region		
Bucharest	88	97
Constanța	89	104
Iași	79	95
Harghita	56	104
Arad	77	100

II. WHAT DO PUBLIC SERVANTS SAY?

1. How widespread are decisions based on political criteria?

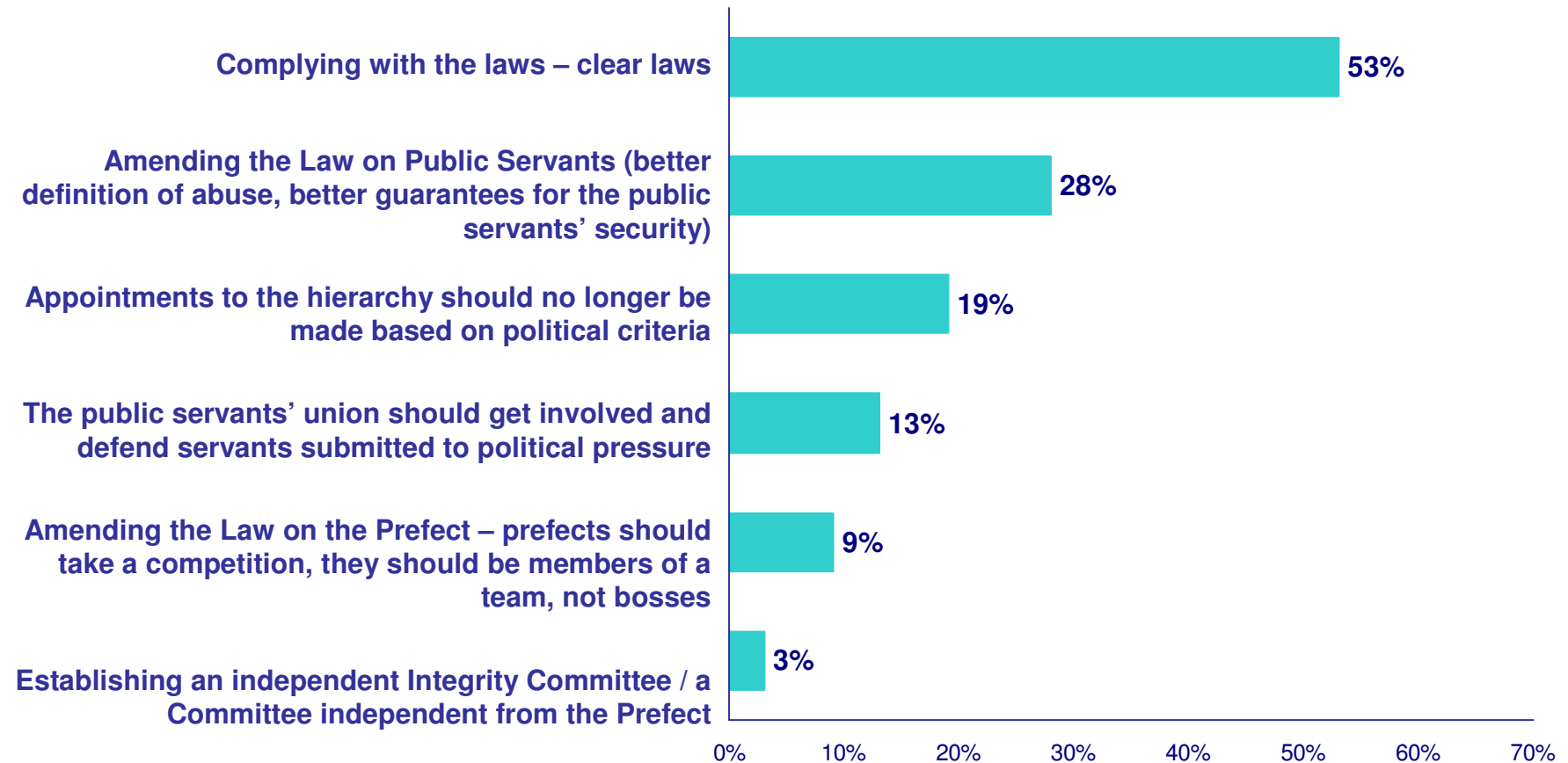
What are the public servants' experiences?

They think that in the institution where they work ...			
	Decisions are made based on political criteria	They have been submitted to political pressure	They can oppose political pressure, without negative consequences
	%	%	%
Yes	35	16	63
No	56	84	25
Don't know	9	0	12
Total	100	100	100

Base 32

2. How can public servants be protected from political pressure?

What are the public servants suggestions for eliminating political pressure?

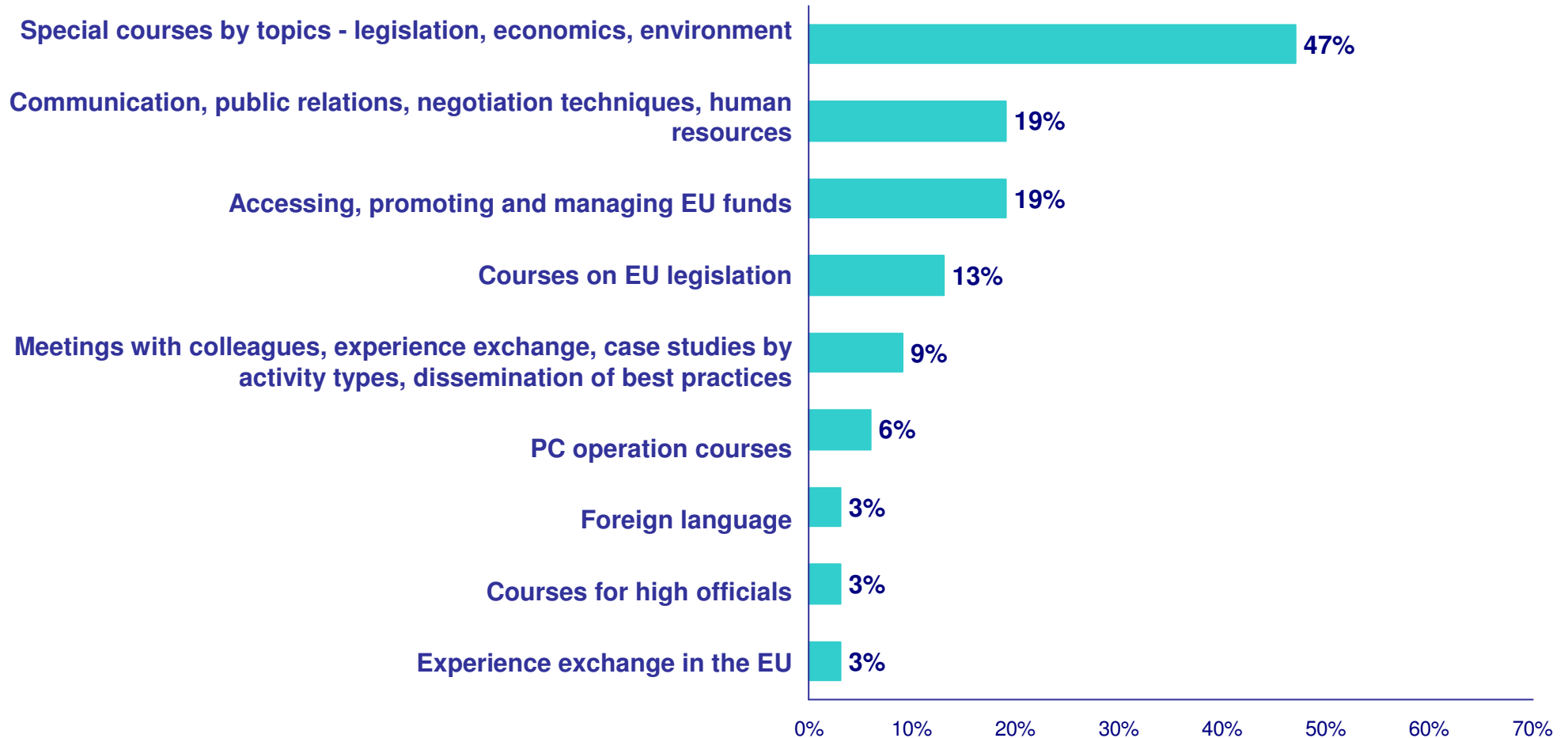


Base 32

Based on the question "What should be done in order for public servants to be protected from potential political pressure?"

3. How can the public servants' preparation be improved?

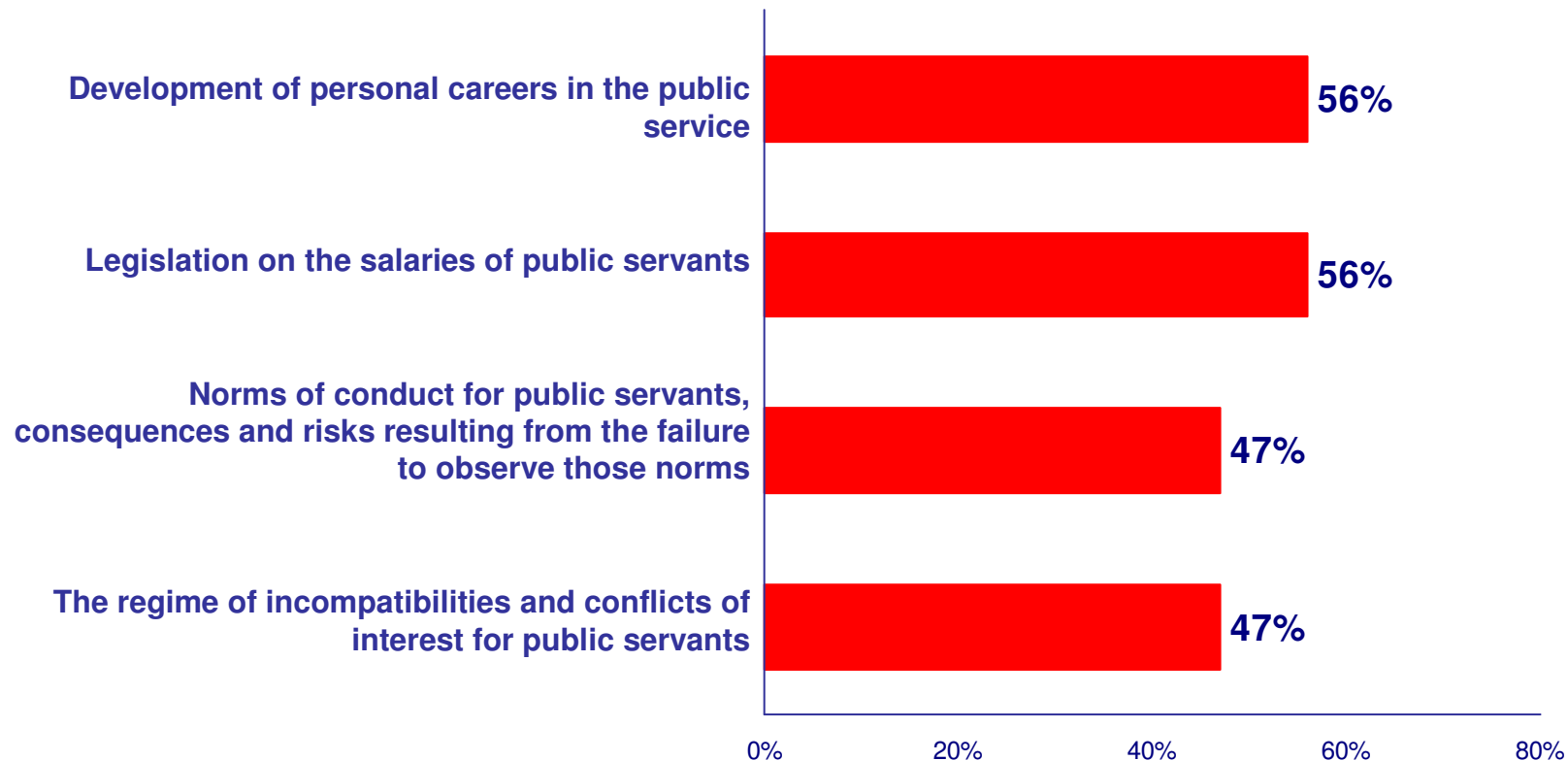
What information and knowledge do public servants want to have?



Base 32

Based on the question "What knowledge would be most useful to you in order to help you be better prepared for the job?"

How useful would these topics be for your professional development?



Base 32

Based on the question "I'm now going to read out several topics. For each topic, please tell me how useful it would be in making you better prepared professionally?"

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

I. What do citizens think?

- Respondents are unaware of the real meaning of the concept of public servant. Although 8 in 10 respondents say they have come across the concept (84%), most of them think that public servants are designated as such because “they work with the public” (49%), “they work in state institutions” (20%) or “they are paid from public money” (11%)
- Half of the respondents (50%) think that civil servants are enrolled in political parties, but two thirds (68%) would like them not to be party members.
- The dominant opinion is clearly that public servants are influenced by politicians. Seven out of 10 respondents think that politicians can influence the public servants’ decisions to a large extent (72%).
- Males, university educated respondents, residents in the urban area and inhabitants of Bucharest, Constanța and Iași tend to believe to a larger extent in the politicians’ power to dictate to public servants the decisions they should adopt.
- Opinions about how independent public servants are from politicians are divided. About half of the respondents (48%) think that public servants have the power to oppose political pressure, while almost another half (46%) think that they do not have that power.
- However, almost two thirds (61%) think that public servants do have means available whereby they can defend themselves from political meddling. Citizens are mainly thinking about legal means (34%) and the civil servants’ possibility to resist pressure due to their moral qualities (10%).
- When asked about the public servants’ courage, 70% of respondents think that actually public servants do not dare to raise their voice to object to political pressure.

- Respondents who are the least confident in the public servants' courage to oppose political pressure are, as a rule, university educated, reside in the urban area, are somewhat younger and come from Bucharest and Constanța.
- The public think that the unions representing public servants do not have the power to defend their members from political pressure. More than half of the respondents (56%) think that the unions are either powerless (33%) or they fail to get involved (23%) when public servants are politically influenced. One in 10 respondents (9%) does not know what to think.
- Respondents think that public servants are recruited based on their competence (83%), their honesty (82%), but also "with support" from their future superior (82%) or by means of clear favouritism (80%).
- The prevailing opinion is that public servants are more interested in pursuing their own interests (54%) than the citizens' interests. However, 42% think that public servants place the citizens' interest before their own.
- Respondents who think there is corruption involved in the recruitment of public servants are more inclined to believe that public servants only pursue their own interests while on the job.
- Respondents believe that improving the preparation of public servants could contribute to consolidating the neutrality of the public service (81%). Many believe, however, that encouraging public servants to report political pressure in general (72%), to ANFP (70%) or to the media (68%) can play an important role.
- As far as county prefects are concerned, most respondents think they are elected by the population (31%), appointed by Parliament (19%) or by the President (6%). Only one third (35%) know they are appointed by the Government.
- In the citizens' opinion, prefects could have the possibility to take measures against political intrusion (88%). But only about half of them (58%) think that they do actually take concrete measures, most probably because most of them (78%) are persuaded that prefects belong to political camps.

II. What do public servants say?

- One third (35%) admit that decisions are made based on political criteria in the institution where they work.
- One in four respondents thinks that if they opposed political influences they could be faced with negative consequences (25%).
- The dominant opinion is that the enforcement of existing legislation would be sufficient to relieve the public service from political pressure (53%). But about one quarter (28%) would like to have the Law on the Statute of Civil Servants amended, in order to include a clearer definition of abuse and a guarantee for the security/protection of civil servants.
- In order to improve professionally, public servants would like to take special courses in various domains (47%), they would like to become familiar with communication, PR, negotiation techniques and human resources (19%) and find out more about the EU, particularly concerning EU funding and general legislation (32%).
- When encouraged to opt for various topics for their professional development, public servants favour topic that can help them better understand the possibilities available to them to develop their careers (56%) and improve their personal welfare. (56%).

Recommendations

1. Evaluating the appropriateness of amending the Law on the Statute of Civil Servants in order to include a clearer definition of abuse and a guarantee for the security/protection of public servants.
2. Conducting a communication campaign aimed at promoting the image of public servants in the eyes of the citizens. The campaign should pursue the following objectives:
 - (a) Ensuring a correct understanding of the concept of public servant
 - (b) Communicating the values of the public service
 - (c) Altering negative perceptions about public servants
 - (d) Stimulating the citizens' participation and their interaction with the public service
3. Developing special training programs for public servants with an emphasis on developing their competence in the fields they are responsible for. The following topics are recommended:
 - (a) In-depth courses in various domains – legislation, economics, environment, social issues
 - (b) Communication, negotiation and PR techniques
 - (c) Human resources
 - (d) EU legislation
 - (e) Accessing and managing EU funds
 - (f) Opportunities and possibilities of personal fulfilment in the career of a public servant

4. Opening up communication channels between ANFP and the citizens
5. Posting banners on the walls of public institutions working with the public stating the political impartiality of the institution and its civil servants
6. Reporting the results of all controls conducted by ANFP in the counties to the media.
7. Reporting to the media all irregularities and violations of legal provisions concerning:
 - (a) Posting positions in the civil service and appointments to civil service
 - (b) The legal regime of incompatibilities and conflicts of interest
 - (c) Organizing and conducting competitions to fill positions in the civil service
8. Improving the transparency of competitions for executive and implementation positions in the civil service. Reporting the results of these competitions to the media.