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'Support to professionalisation and quality of state civil service and state administration'

(PROAK project)

Case study of Czech ESF project under the study 'Progress Assessment of the ESF Support to Public Administration' (PAPA)

Written by Dr David Spacek
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PPMI

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Operational Programme	Operational Programme Employment
Beneficiary organisation	Ministry of the Interior
Target groups	Authorities subjected to the State Civil Service Act and its employees
Project duration	01/09/2016 – 30/06/2023 (the duration was extended on 13/06/2019, originally the project was supposed to finish at the end of 2021)
Budget	CZK 178,051,416.97 (approximately EUR 6,85 million); ESF contribution: CZK 143,977,717.29 (approximately EUR 5,5 million)
Project manager (email address)	Ing. Štěpánka Cvejnová, Head of the office of the Minister Deputy for the State Civil Service, Ministry of the Interior (stepanka.cvejnova@mvcr.cz)
Partners	Authorities subjected to the Act on the state civil service
Project/ organisation website	https://www.mvcr.cz/sluzba/clanek/podpora-profesionalizace-a-kvality-statni-sluzby-a-statni-spravy.aspx?q=Y2hudW09MQ%3d%3d
	https://esf2014.esfcr.cz/PublicPortal/Views/Projekty/Public/ProjektDetailPublicPage.aspx?action=get&datovySkladId=52C4A3EA-99A6-4455-863C-6358CB85D573

This case study was produced during the project 'Progress Assessment of the ESF Support to Public Administration - PAPA', that was contracted by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission. The purpose of this project is to present specific cases of ESF-funded PAR and capacity building initiatives, as well as to show the role of ESF financial support to public administration for accountability purposes. This report provides a story on the project **'Support to professionalisation and quality of state civil service and state administration'**, which discusses its context and purpose; characteristics of the team implementing it; main challenges faced and difficulties encountered during implementation; key developments during the implementation process; results and impacts achieved; as well as lessons learnt and the contribution of ESF.

SUPPORT TO PROFESSIONALISATION AND QUALITY OF STATE CIVIL SERVICE AND STATE ADMINISTRATION (PROAK)

Introduction: the context of the project

Štěpánka Cvejnová, the project director and head of the Office of the Deputy Minister of the Interior for the State Civil Service, summarised her intensive experiences with the project as follows: 'I became a half IT person … and had to reconfigure how our family works in order to be able to manage the project.' Later, she added: 'And what is my goal and why I still have not resigned, although the project is so complex? I think that our task should be to simplify the work of state civil servants. I think that we can bring them some relief. For instance, consider e-learning. Because digitalisation is a fashionable and timely topic, every public authority wants to build its own system. Think of the amount of work they have to invest, the money. There are various open-source solutions available, all have some drawbacks, have to be procured… I think we are saving their money. Also, the [quality] improvement criteria can save them resources and simplify their work… And we would like that civil servants feel that somebody cares for them too. Because this is not usual in state administration.' Her team is responsible for the implementation of the project 'Support to professionalisation and quality of the state civil service and state administration'[1], known in shorthand as PROAK, which has been running in Czechia since September 2016 and, after recent extension, is scheduled for completion in June 2023.

In the Czech Republic, besides the general Labour Code, there are two important acts regulating the civil service. The first, Act 312/2002, focuses on civil servants of self-governments (municipalities and regions), was adopted in 2002 and has been in force since the beginning of 2003. The second, Act 234/2014, centres on the state civil service (not on civil servants of self-governments), was adopted in October 2014 and came into full effect from July 2015. The vast majority of employees of ministries, other central authorities and their organisations are now subject to Act 234/2014, except for 14 ministries. Information on systemisation of State civil servants refers to about 211 other authorities and agencies and 70 195 positions in the state administration that are subject to the act (out of 77 826 positions in central authorities and their organisations)[2]. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the implementation of both laws; the Section for the State Civil Service was established in the beginning of 2015, its Office is headed by Štěpánka Cvejnová who is subordinated to Josef Postránecký, the Deputy Minister of the Interior for the State Civil Service.

Improvement of the civil service in Czechia was one of the key goals of pre-accession assistance, but was not supplemented by more relevant, systemic changes in legislation for a rather long time. Czechia was an example of a country without general civil service legislation and had rather fragmented legislation on public administration employees until 2015[3]. Besides the aforementioned Act 312/2002, Act 218/2002 approved in 2002 – known in shorthand as the Act on State Civil Service ('Služební zákon'). However, its enforcement was postponed several times and the Act has not came into force and was replaced by the Act 234/2014.

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[1] CZ.03.4.74/0.0/0.0/15_019/0006173.
[2] Ministerstvo vnitra, 2018; Špaček, 2019.
[3] Špaček and Nemec, 2017.

Various proposals and initiatives emerged up to 2014. For example, the Government initiated resolution no. 237 ('reform and modernisation of central state administration') in 2004, which anticipated rationalisation of processes in central authorities, improvement of their management and quality, implementation and improvement of state civil service and rationalisation of funding. However, the reform was not perceived as successful, because of problems like departmentalism[4], and in particular:

- Bad horizontal communication of information about projects;
- Low level of cooperation of some ministries with the coordinating institution;
- Different expectations of project teams; and
- Low awareness and interest of the public and political changes[5].

Štěpánka Cvejnová was involved in the team that coordinated the reform at that time and commented 'The reform was not successful, because things were imposed on all authorities and communicated from the Office of the Government [that became responsible for implementation of the reform in that time]. And they did not like it. We [employees of the Office of the Government responsible for the reform] struggled. And we did not expect any implementation of the former Act on the State Civil Service, because there was no interest in it after all the years of its postponement. From time to time, the topic was opened again, but was dropped quickly.'

Finally, a new Act on State Civil Service (no. 234/2014) was approved rather rapidly, without sufficient preparation and deliberation, and was published in October 2014. The push came from the commitment of the Czech government to undertake a reform, enshrined in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Partnership Agreement for 2014-2020. Although it was not an ex-ante conditionality, full application needed to be verified before the Operational Programmes were approved[6].

The main aim of the PROAK project is to support implementation of this Act 234/2014 through various instruments, tools and processes that are not elaborated (further) by the Act itself. In the last two programming periods (2007–2013 and 2014-2020), professionalisation of the civil service and human resources management (HRM) practices of municipalities and regions have been supported by their own projects that have been focusing on HRM, quality management and strategic management implementation[7]. *Ad hoc* projects have also been implemented by individual central authorities, and thus, practices and processes implemented on the central administrative level can vary significantly. But mainly larger cities and regions implemented quality management systems and tools compared with central authorities and their experiences were used in the PROAK activities.

Design and execution of the ESF-funded project

The activities anticipated within the PROAK project are based on an assumption that central authorities have often not been working with standard management tools and techniques, which were already recognised as effective in territorial self-government or elsewhere. Hence, their application in authorities subjected to the Act on the State Civil Service can contribute to

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[4] Špaček and Neshybová, 2010.
[5] Úřad vlády, 2005.
[6] Špaček, 2018.
[7] Špaček, 2018.

implementation of the Act itself. Also, existing practices were not evaluated and coordinated sufficiently by responsible central authorities. The project tries to accomplish aims stipulated in the current public administration reform (PAR) programme – the Strategic Framework for the 2014-2019 period[8] (the called 'SRRVS')– and the subsequent implementation plans (see Annex), under its specific objective 1.3 (its part on dissemination of quality methods in authorities subjected to the Act on the State Civil Service) and strategic objective 4 (development of professional human resources in public administration). This project also aims at developing and improving coordination of the state civil service, as well as the accomplishment of TO11 requirements and is also relevant for some other strategies (like Digital Czechia - see next section).

Josef Postránecký, the Deputy Minister of the Interior for the State Civil Service, initiated the PROAK project not long after he was appointed in January 2015. The execution of the project started in September 2016.

'There were two main drivers of the project' according to Štěpánka Cvejnová. 'Our Section for the State Civil Service was established in 2015 and since its beginning, it has been responsible for implementation of the Act on the State Civil Service. Also, some goals anticipated by the SRRVS became its responsibilities, especially the whole strategic goal 4 and the specific goal 1.3. So, we discussed internally, how to deal with it.' The second impetus resulted from the fact that the Act on the State Civil Service was not preceded by any explanatory memorandum and any ex-ante regulatory impact assessment (RIA). 'So we decided that it would be beneficial to evaluate the Act after some time and also consider experiences with similar legislation from abroad.' And, she elaborated 'because some of us have experiences with projects funded from Operational Programmes, we decided to use the project-based approach and the ESIF support.' Then a snow-ball effect occurred: 'As soon as it was decided that we will prepare a project, it started to grow. We had internal meetings, everybody brought some experiences from previous jobs … and that´s how the project was developed.' Later on, the project was shaped based on numerous negotiations with authorities about what they would prefer to implement in quality management etc.

The project is co-financed from call 19 of the Operational Programme Employment (OPZ) and its investment priority 4.1 (efficient public administration), which focuses on implementation of the SRRVS and optimisation of processes and procedures in public administration (especially through improvement of strategic management, quality and reduction of administration burden) and professionalisation of public administration (especially through improvement of knowledge and competences of civil servants and developments of HRM policies and strategies and implementation of the Act on the State Civil Service)[9].

The following eight key activities of the project were defined:

- Management, administration and publicity of the project;
- Evaluation of effectiveness of the Act on the State Civil Service;
- Support of systemisation and organisation of the state civil service;
- Support of education and examination in authorities;
- Support of quality management implementation in state civil service authorities;
- Support to implementation of the Act on the State Civil Service;

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[8] SRRVS; Ministerstvo vnitra, 2016.
[9] ESFCR, 2015.

- Realisation of training related to the state civil service and to the Act on the State Civil Service; and
- Project self-evaluation.

Implementation of the ESF project: main developments and challenges

The project is rather large, which presents challenges to its implementation and coordination. Štěpánka Cvejnová summarised the project as a complex one that, in fact, consists of almost 10 individual sub-projects. She has differentiated four main project directions: analyses; education; IT support; and quality management in public authorities subject to the Act on the State Civil Service.

The project is focused on supporting the implementation of the Act, including the evaluation of its effectiveness, not on the Act per se. Its implementation has not finished yet. In fact, the project was extended in June 2019 until the end of June 2023 especially due to delays in public procurement of IT components of the project. The following key actions have been realised within the PROAK project so far:

- Various analyses, including the international experiences with similar legislation, that should help improve the legislation in future; in the project outputs the ex-post RIA of the Act on the State Civil Service was anticipated, but it was being finalised for a rather long time in cooperation with the contractor (KPMG) and was still not published on the project webpages in December 2019 when this study was concluded (as of 10.12.2019) (Štěpánka Cvejnová informed on 12.12.2019 that the RIA was available);
- Various training and support to implementation of the Act and also framework on the education of state civil servants (as approved by the Deputy Minister for the State Civil Service by the service regulation no. 9/2015 on rules of education and by the Government resolution 865/2015);
- Preparing and pilot testing the Methodological Order for quality management in state civil service authorities, and supporting its implementation after its approval;
- Launching eExam (electronic support of the state civil service exam);
- Starting to discuss more the information system on internal management of regulations (eSIAR; elektronická sbírka interních předpisů služebních úřadů), mainly based on the former experiences of the General Financial Directorate with it; and
- Starting to develop more the shared eLearning (sLearning) initiative with the aim to replace an obsolete system with a shared and modern one, to consolidate eLearning in state administration, and also to link it more to records of past training which is important for potential rotations in the state civil service and to save money on training.

The project activities were also supported by the conference 'State civil service' that was organised by the Section for the State Service in May 2018[10]. The next conference is anticipated early in 2020.

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[10] Information on the konference and downloadable presentations are available at:
https://www.mvcr.cz/sluzba/clanek/konference-statni-sluzba.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3d%3d (accessed: 19/06/2019).

It is expected that the IT components, such as eExam, sLearning and eSIAR, will contribute to delivering the strategy 'Digital Czechia' approved by the government in October 2018[11]. Preparation of the ex post RIA of the Act on the State Civil Service, and improvements of processes in the state civil service, will contribute to delivering of the Policy Statement of the Government.

Interviews as well as available information indicate that, as of June 2019, support to quality management in the state civil service authorities seems to be the most visible and promoted area of the project. The PROAK project team was developing activities in this area, including the preparation of an analysis of the diffusion of quality management tools in public administration, during the period 2016-2018. The findings were used to prepare methodological guidelines for the training of state civil servants and implementation of quality management in state civil service authorities, and the Methodological Order for quality management in state civil service authorities, which was approved by Government resolution no. 214 during April 2018. Central authorities and their organisations are now required to follow them and implement the Order till the end of June 2021. Štěpánka Cvejnová admitted that she was cautious about comments from other central authorities before the team finished the Methodological Order and the Government approved it: 'Because the things from the Methodological Order are not disseminated further at ministries, we anticipated a lot of obstacles. But except for those from the Ministry of Finance, which asked about the funding of the project, we received comments from just about five ministries.' Before the Methodological Order was proposed for all central authorities, it was piloted at two – the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Agriculture – and also discussed with central authorities.

According to the Methodological Order, central authorities have two options:

- They can decide to implement the <u>minimum</u> quality measures by applying the 'criteria for improvement' (see overleaf).

- Alternatively, they can reach the <u>optimal</u> extent of quality management, within the scope of a chosen quality management method/system. The Methodological Order distinguishes the following instruments as 'guaranteeing the optimal quality management level', namely, quality management according to ISO 9001, the European Institute of Public Administration´s Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model, and benchmarking (a methodology is to be prepared within the PROAK project).

If an authority chooses to take the more demanding direction and implement the second option, the 'optimal extent of quality management', it should prove that the minimum level is already implemented. Central authorities are free to choose any tool that will guarantee implementation of requirements specified in the Methodological Order. Implementation of more advanced quality management can be supported from the Operational Programme Employment (within either its call 25 for projects of organisational units of the state focused on support of efficient public administration[12] or its call 19).

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[11] Rada vlády pro informační společnost, 2018.
[12] More information can be found here (in Czech): https://www.esfcr.cz/vyzva-025-opz (accessed: 20/06/2019).

The Methodological Order works with the following five areas that are important for quality management and are supported also by various guides and model documents prepared by or for the project team:

- Management of the authority;
- Strategic planning and management;
- Human resources management;
- Management of partnerships; and
- Improvement of performance.

Within these areas, the minimum extent of practice is by measures required in the following 10 areas (called 'criteria for improvement'):

- Strategy of development of the authority;
- System for definition of measurable goals;
- System of accountability and responsibilities;
- System of internal regulations;
- System of communication;
- System of change management;
- Policy on human resources;
- Adaptation processes;
- Survey of employees´ satisfaction; and
- System of partnerships within the state civil service.

Their description also contains possible enhancement of their implementation.

Some activities were already supplemented by model documents prepared within the project– e.g. a model document on employee satisfaction measurement, model structure of strategy for development of a State service authority, or a model internal regulation on adaptation process.

The Order also contains 12 steps recommended for implementation of the criteria for improvement or quality management methods. According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, these steps reflect the experiences obtained through the pilot testing at the two central authorities. The steps are as follows:

1. Informing the management of State services authorities
2. Defining responsibilities for implementation of a quality management system (QMS)
3. Deciding on the scope of QMS implementation
4. Deciding on use of financial support from the Operational Programme Employment
5. Appointing a quality team
6. Passing a training
7. Preparation of an analysis of a current state
8. Preparation of an internal project and/or a project proposal and an application for support
9. Implementation of the QMS
10. Internal evaluation of the QMS implementation
11. External evaluation of the QMS implementation
12. Implementation of measures and adjustment of processes for continual improvement.

As of June 2019, implementation of the Methodological Order is only beginning. Available information indicates that most authorities opted for the minimum extent of practices required by the end of 2021, in accordance with the Methodological Order. Just some will implement enhanced criteria, while just two will implement a quality management system - the Ministry for Regional Development and the Railway Inspectorate. For instance, the Ministry for Regional Development experienced ISO 9001 implementation in two departments and started to implement BSC together with CAF in 2007 and 2008, but the project ceased after the change of a minister.

Nevertheless, some central authorities are more advanced and have implemented some of the requirements from the Methodological Order already before it was approved, or also during the project period, but regardless the goals of the project – for instance, just because they wanted to improve processes related to adaptation of new civil servants. This all helps them to meet the requirements of the Methodological Order more smoothly. Most probably this was also above their motives to implement only the minimum extent of practices. Some requirements of the Order may also be difficult to implement in some central authorities. Interviews indicated that this might be the case of authorities that have a high number of subordinated organisations and employees (like the Ministry of Finance or Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs). According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, this was also among the reasons why implementation of more complex quality management was not imposed strictly on all public bodies subjected to the Act on the state civil service, and why public bodies may choose their direction as to how to comply with the Methodological Order. Implementation of quality management was also sometimes perceived in the interviews as difficult due to the recent initiative of the Ministry of Finance to reduce the number of civil servants.

Interviews also revealed that as of June 2019 not all central authorities appointed quality teams that should coordinate the implementation as required by the Methodological Order. Nevertheless, central authorities that appointed the teams were waiting for training of their members. For instance, Jan Křivacec from the General Financial Directorate, the authority that belongs to more advanced central authorities, noted: 'We implemented the first five steps of the Methodological Order within a month in 2018. And since that time, we have been waiting for the training... When I consider that, during autumn 2017, we agreed on the basic parameters and now we are half-way through 2019 and the training may be realised until the end of the year... Well, it´s been a while and nothing more than the Methodological Order was provided'. In general, the training is considered as crucial for further development, because some of their activities that are required by the project rely on it and the training may also help clarify relationships between central authorities and organisations subordinated to them in quality management implementation. Interviews clearly indicated that central authorities would welcome clearer information about the training, the dates, content, length etc. Štěpánka Cvejnová noted that this was caused by a delay in the public tender on locations for the training.

Although Štěpánka Cvejnová emphasised the role of the Open Day events that were organised three times in April and May 2019 for presentation and especially discussion about hot project topics with civil servants of authorities impacted by the PROAK project, some civil servants were not so pleased with these events. Interviews revealed that according to them, it actually did not last the whole day, but only an hour or two, focused on presentation[13] rather than on discussions, and only showed that in some areas the project is still lacking a clear focus. According to

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[13] Presentation 'Aktuálně z projektu' was prepared by Štěpánka Cvejnová and the project team and is available at: https://www.mvcr.cz/sluzba/soubor/proak-dod-aktualne-z-projektu-pdf.aspx (accessed: 21/06/2019).

Štěpánka Cvejnová, the length of the events was determined by the number of questions raised by participants. She added: 'What else can we offer? Why they do not ask more often? Often they just wait for what we will provide them with.'

For the project's future, for instance, the Czech Social Security Administration (CSSA) emphasised that it would welcome a clear plan that would introduce future steps on a timely basis. This clearly calls for better change management and understanding of its importance during the project preparation as well as in the implementation phase. In the interviews, some suggested that during the project implementation the potential for sharing experiences with implementation of the Methodological Order across the state administration was somewhat underestimated, and that communication was based mainly on interactions between the Section for the State Civil Service and individual authorities. Although it is logical that the greatest effort is devoted to that, better communication and more sharing of knowledge may overcome feelings that were expressed by a civil servant of an affected central authority: 'It is true that sometimes I and my colleague sit and wonder what will result from the project.'

Štěpánka Cvejnová pointed out two main critical success factors of the PROAK project – people and the quality of outputs. Other critical success factors suggested by the interviewees include:

- Clarification of the plan and related activities and deadlines;
- Political support of the project, which was strengthened thanks to its prior incorporation into the public administration reform programme (the SRRVS), but can be undermined by austerity measures or legislation that is not consistent with the strategic objectives and the aims of the PROAK project;
- Commitment of the project leader and completeness of the project team, and also, a certain level of substitutability of key members of the project team (e.g. employees responsible for key project areas);
- Close and service-based communication with key stakeholders;
- Smooth public procurement, if not solved in-house;
- Usable IT components, and users who can use them and understand their impact and contribution;
- Not seeing the project as finished when it meets its deadline, but rather having a long-term reach, establishing the basis on which it is possible to build and cooperate in future;
- The project not producing a needless administrative burden;
- Project activities emphasising knowledge- and experience-sharing; and
- Willingness of public authorities to change existing practices and management

According to officials, implementation of the PROAK project faced two major obstacles:

- The first occurred especially at the beginning of the project when it was hard to find people for the project team. Štěpánka Cvejnová admitted that it took almost one year to occupy most of the positions of the project team. According to her, the project team started to work mainly in 2017 and the main project activities were commenced (and this is also a reason why the project activities focused mainly on preparation of analyses until then). Still, according to her, the team was not complete as at June 2019. But although requested, no information on the composition of the project team was provided and it is therefore hard to assess if the project team is sufficient.

- The second relates to IT, and specifically the lack of IT experts willing to participate and the delays caused by public tendering (due to low number of bids and also the length of their ex-ante control as required by conditions applied for the Operational Programme Employment).

Štěpánka Cvejnová was a bit concerned about the IT components of the PROAK project, because, as she said, 'almost every IT person has a different opinion on how to solve things', and also 'civil servants will feel the impact of the project on themselves especially thanks to the IT things'. According to her, this year (2019) and the following year are the key period for the project, and especially for preparing and implementing its IT components. They were also among the reasons why the project was extended recently. 'You cannot build them in one year', Štěpánka Cvejnová noted with regards to time needed for their preparation. Their public procurement will also take some time. According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, the extension of the project will also help prepare guides for implementation of CAF and ISO 9001 in central authorities and to propose a system for continuous improvement, benchmarking and bench-learning, as anticipated by the project.

Problems related to IT components of the PROAK project can be illustrated by eExam (eZkouška). eExam was developed in order to digitalise and automate some processes of the examination that is specified in the Act on the State Civil Service. Its aim is to replace a paper form of the general part of the exam[14] and manual generation of questions and matrixes with correct answers. The eExam will also serve as an e-tool for administration of the general part of the exam and for automatic generation of related information and documents, including those that are sent to the information system on the state civil service (IsoSS, https://portal.isoss.cz).

FIGURE 1. LOGO OF EEXAM

Source: Web pages of this component of the PROAK project.

According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, eExam was slowed down, because some public authorities had not adjusted the rights of their employees in the register of rights and duties (RPP; http://www.szrcr.cz/registr-prav-a-povinnosti). This was followed by assistance from the Section for the State Civil Service. A civil servant from an authority subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (anonymised upon request), who is directly involved in the use of eExam, pointed out that, although they were informed about the initiative and this was also presented during the Open days event, 'still in the half of May 2019, we did not know more about the eExam. And we were required to use it since the beginning of June for administration of

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[14] The State civil service exam ('úřednická zkouška') is specified especially in paragraphs 35 – 37 of the Act. The General part should have a written form. The special part of the exam is organised after a State civil servant successfully passes the general part. This part should have a form of an oral exam in front of the examination commission.

exams'. He added, 'we could not trial it before anywhere else, but in the building of the Section for the State Civil Service. And before we could use it in action, it was stopped. On June 4th, we received an information that the system is not fully functional and we should not use it until it we are informed otherwise.' According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, this can be determined also by insufficient communication inside public authorities.

Conclusion: results, lessons learned and the role of ESF financial support

Main results

In overall terms, it is hard to obtain data on factual accomplishments of the project and therefore it is not easy to evaluate the project and its outcomes as a whole. One can access some of the project outputs on its web pages, but official evaluation of project activities that is published is rather scarce, focusing only on some activities (especially those related to quality management implementation). The ex post RIA of the State civil service act was not available for a rather long time and was published only recently. It is hard to assess if the analyses that are made available have been or will be actually used for changes of legislation and future improvements of the State civil service as intended.

As pointed out already, the project has not finished yet, its period was recently extended until the end of June 2023 and, in fact, its main components started to be implemented recently although the implementation of the project officially started in September 2016. This year and the following year are the key period for the project according to Štěpánka Cvejnová who summarized: 'The project is rather difficult, complex and I hope it will be successful'.

While the project is somewhat delayed, the signs so far from the large participating central authorities are encouraging.

A project manager from the managing authority, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, concluded: 'I think it is [going in] a good direction - how to solve things anticipated in the project in a unified and complex way across state administration.'

Jan Křivanec, Head of the Department for Personnel Support of the General Financial Directorate, responded similarly and added an important potential for sharing of knowledge: 'I see a potential for setting a unified level within the state administration. And also, I see the great advantage of the project in that that we will not work on something alone, but we will be able to use something prepared by others that will have proved to be successful.' According to Mr Křivanec, the project can also help human resources management in state administration: 'Its activities are often at the periphery in central authorities.'

David Stančík, Deputy Head of the Financial Authority for the Region Jihomoravský, anticipated: 'I do not think that the project will be only about passing deadlines and producing anticipated outputs. Rather, it will be about improvement of things and showing directions. The project should show minimum requirements that should be implemented in all authorities, and, at the same time, provide guidance on how to move in areas where we do not know what to do, what direction to take.' He also added: 'The reality will depend how the Ministry will approach it.' He liked the idea behind the project that it actually not about the Act on State Civil Service in its strict sense. Rather it is about things that go beyond and that are not regulated more by the

Act. As examples, he mentioned employee satisfaction measurement or adaptation of new employees.

The Czech Social Security Administration (CSSA), which together with the financial administration employs the vast majority of state civil servants, emphasised the potential of the project: 'It is a possible and an appropriate form of continuous improvement of internal processes in the state administration'.

David Sláma, Head of the Department for Strategic Development and Cooperation of Public Administration of the Ministry of the Interior, attributed a great potential to diffusion of quality management methods in state administration authorities and to a benchmarking framework for public authorities that is also anticipated in later project outputs.

Available information as well as the interviews suggest that the project appears to have made most progress in its area of quality management, but especially in terms of guiding documents prepared for central authorities, rather than in real practices. Central authorities perceive the great potential to unify practices across the state administration. This was clearly emphasised even by civil servants from central authorities that are more advanced in quality management and in implementation of requirements imposed on them by the Methodological Order. While the feeling is that the specification of some topics might stifle the creativity of authorities, it was mostly seen as helpful to harmonising the level of practice. According to Jan Křivanec, for instance, 'It is true that the Methodological Order is sometimes too detailed. But this can be helpful for those authorities that try to follow the minimalistic direction. I think it is a good guide for them how to proceed.'

Some reports have been published on the web pages of the PROAK project[15] and also on web pages dedicated to outputs of the current public administration reform programme[16]. For instance, the report on implementation of the minimum quality management standards in 2017[17] briefly outlines the findings of a questionnaire survey in which 49 superior authorities participated (out of 61 to which the survey was addressed), as follows:

- Start conditions are better at smaller and specialised authorities rather than ministries.
- Authorities are rather intensive in communication via electronic channels and work with a rather high number of internal documents available in intranets.
- There is a clear need to unify the most general documents (e.g. forms) for similar types of authorities.
- Evaluation and measurement is used particularly in agendas related to European projects.
- The authorities called for more flexibility in implementing the requirements and only a small administrative burden imposed on them by new requirements.
- The authorities raised questions about funding after the project finishes.

In June 2019, a report on situation in 2018 was published based on questionnaires completed by 53 superior authorities (out of 63 to which the survey was sent). The survey focused on

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[15] Web pages dedicated to the project outputs are available here: https://www.mvcr.cz/sluzba/clanek/podpora-profesionalizace-a-kvality-statni-sluzby-a-statni-spravy.aspx?q=Y2hudW09NA%3d%3d (accessed: 9/12/2019).

[16] Web pages dedicated to outputs of the SRRVS are available here: https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/vystupy-strategickeho-ramce-rozvoje-verejne-spravy.aspx (accessed: 9/12/2019).

[17] Ministerstvo vnitra, 2018.

implementation of the 12 steps of the Methodological Order and based on the report, the situation can be outlined as follows: [18]

- The management of State service authorities was already informed in about 53 % of the authorities and in 28 % of the authorities this was expected during 2019.
- In about 49 % of authorities, responsibilities for implementation of a quality management system (QMS) were already defined and 32 % this was expected during 2019. In about 38 % of authorities their employees were already informed about this and in 41 % of the authorities this was expected in 2019.
- In 36 of the authorities it was decided to implement to implement the minimum extent of QM; 7 authorities intended to implement the optimal extent (3 x ISO 9001: 2016, 1 x CAF, 3 authorities did not stated what QMS they intend to implement). In case of 11 authorities a decision was expected in 2019.
- About 90 % of the authorities decided not to use financial support from the Operational Programme Employment.
- Quality teams were already appointed in 28 % of the authorities and in 51 % of the authorities this was expected during 2019.
- Related training could be passed by members of the quality teams, because it was not organized during 2018 and was expected in the second quarter of 2019.
- Analysis of a current state was prepared in 9 authorities (i.e. in 17 % of them) and in 23 authorities (43 %) this was expected during 2019.
- An internal project and/or a project proposal and an application for support was prepared in 5 % of authorities and in 22 of the authorities (i.e. in 41 % of them) this was expected in 2019.
- Some QMS was already implemented in 11 authorities, but this was most probably a result of their activities carried out before the approval of the Methodological Order.
- Internal evaluation of the QMS implementation was carried out regularly in 8 central authorities.
- External evaluation of the QMS implementation was done only in 3 central authorities.
- Implementation of measures and adjustment of processes for continual improvement is expected in 2021 and later.

The Section for the State Civil Service also publishes reports on the state civil service annually. [19] Their content relies mainly on input sent by central authorities that decide to participate in the surveys (not all of them participate), but also reflects discussions and consultations with State civil service authorities according to Štepánka Cvejnová.

Lessons learned

The PROAK project is rather complex which clearly impacted its implementation and poses challenges for its coordination, evaluation and future accomplishment. Although the interviews suggested that the Managing authority (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) is more or less satisfied with the project implementation, delays in some important core activities raise questions to what extent change and risk management were actually considered during preparation of the project and have been applied during its implementation. Although some steps

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[18] Ministerstvo vnitra, 2019.

[19] The reports are available here (in Czech only): https://www.mvcr.cz/sluzba/clanek/ostatni-dokumenty.aspx (accessed: 09/12/2019).

in the project required former approval of the Government or passing of long commenting procedure within the central administration, basic rules of change and risk management should be considered if such a new approach is expected to be introduced.

Implementation of such a complex project also requires sufficient and competent project team. Still in June 2019 it was noted by Štěpánka Cvejnová that the project team was not complete. Since no information on the composition of the project team was provided, it is hard to assess more if the project team is sufficient for its implementation.

Because the project is rather large, it may be difficult for some civil servants to imagine what it will encompass. Some officials welcomed the idea of the project going beyond the Act on the State Civil Service and dealing with matters that are not regulated fully by its provisions. At the same time, officials indicated that the project team will need to explain more PROAK's benefits for the authorities, of which Štěpánka Cvejnová is well aware: 'We have to communicate and coordinate a lot'.

On the other hand, Štěpánka Cvejnová noted: 'When I was working in a different department before, self-governments requested the methodological support actively. Here, I think that the state service authorities want to do things on their own and wait only for those things on which they do not need to spend their money. Also, the state secretaries are informed at every meeting and it is also about how they communicate it within their departments. We also sent them various information, update our web pages continuously, and inform them about relevant things by the newsletter. Also, we have been preparing and updating a database of contact points on key people from individual areas of the PROAK project and communicate with them… and we are also preparing a database of good practices, especially from the area of quality management.' Some officials perceived the meetings of state secretaries important for clarifications of the Act on the State Civil Service and a useful platform for collection of input for follow-up changes of the Act. In overall terms, interviews with senior officials indicated that communication is rather active and functional. But the words of Štěpánka Cvejnová as well as some interviews suggest that approaches of the project team should be more proactive in order to change a somewhat rigid approach of some central authorities. Not all of them have been participating in the surveys on situation in quality management etc.

Senior officials from central authorities hoped that the project would not result in formalities and a mere administrative exercise. One of the clear challenges is to make the project 'tangible' to civil servants, as it is harder to link 'soft' concepts like quality management to direct benefits, within the public administration culture in Czechia. According to Štěpánka Cvejnová, 'during one meeting I raised a kind of heretical thought that we should not have linked the criteria for improvement with quality, that this harmed them, because the authorities often understand quality of management as "ISO". And this is like a red rag for a bull. We try to persuade them that it is about the usual, standard things … I think they are scared when hearing the word "quality", that this has been profaned.' On the other hand, some central authorities are more advanced and had already implemented some of the Methodological Order's requirements even before its approval, which has helped them meet its requirements more smoothly. Also, as indicated in some interviews, some of the requirements can be difficult to implement in central authorities – especially those that employ more than a quarter of all state civil servants (like the financial administration or organisations subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) - even if these authorities are further down the road on quality management.

Although it is true that civil servants might more readily attribute great benefits to 'hard' elements, such as the IT components of PROAK, intense communication and explanations are still necessary in situations where, for example, the IT is not functioning or the civil servants were not sufficiently trained or were not active in attending the training to use them, etc. Usability of new IT systems and tools will also determine whether the users perceive them as making a contribution, understand their impact and therefore support - and promote - them. Štěpánka Cvejnová emphasised and beneficiary officials agreed that the performance of the IT components of PROAK was the main critical success factor, because civil servants can feel the impact of PROAK most directly.

Smoothness of public procurement of IT projects has been determined by the quality of preparation of tender specifications. Based on her experiences with IT public tenders, Štěpánka Cvejnová recommended 'in some cases you really need to get into the details. This may look like nit-picking, but thanks to it you may avoid great problems with what will be delivered.' Public tenders were also determined by the willingness of IT experts to participate in them.

Interviews suggested that the project somewhat underestimates the potential of sharing of experiences. The project can clearly benefit from it significantly. The potential of knowledge sharing should be considered more, especially in situation when some central authorities are more advanced in quality and human resources management and the project period is not long enough (considering rather ambitious goals of the project). Better knowledge sharing can also help to get more buy-in from civil servants. The project can also serve as a tool helping overcome the departmentalism – or silo mentality - that still exists in Czech central administration. As David Stančík noted: 'I think it would be ideal if public authorities could meet more often. You know, when you go somewhere, just listening to something new may be beneficial. You can network with people, or just think about it, wonder about how to make something better. Although there is still time to finish project tasks until the end of 2021, people should be meeting each other. Otherwise it will lead to a situation where authorities develop their own things separately and we meet in 2022 and find out that the projects of others are perfect... And if we knew this 2 years ago, it would have saved our time, money and the effort of our employees.'

When asked about the future, Štěpánka Cvejnová pointed to potential changes of leadership (the Deputy Minister of the Interior for the State civil service is appointed for 6 years). In its complexity, the project has not been incorporated into the strategy for the period after 2020 that is currently being discussed, only the parts dedicated to quality management and training. 'We are waiting for the finalisation of the RIA, and afterwards we will work on our own strategy on the state civil service.'

Role of ESF support

The role of ESF support was perceived as rather crucial for the PROAK project. It is clear from the project team and beneficiaries that the project would not have been initiated and implemented to the current extent without ESF's support. If they were not co-financed, the activities of the Section for the State Civil Service of the Ministry of the Interior would focus mainly on the Act on the State Civil Service, not on things that go beyond and support its implementation. Of the remaining PROAK activities in this context, Štěpánka Cvejnová would mainly support the quality management: 'We would do it with our team also because it is a kind of our personal thing, but we would not have a capacity for the ex-post RIA that had to be procured and definitely we could not afford the IT things. And if these activities are required by

the Government, it can only be done with support within a project [environment]', she concluded.

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ANNEX I. CURRENT PAR PROGRAMME (SRRVS) AND TASKS OF THE PROAK PROJECT

CURRENT PAR PROGRAMME (SRRVS) AND TASKS OF THE PROAK PROJECT

Strategic objectives and anticipated outputs	Schedule
1. Public administration modernisation	
QM at authorities subjected to the state service act - guide-lines, government resolution, implemented QM systems, employees trained	7/2016-12/2020
4. Development of professional human resources in PA	
4.1 Implementation of the State civil service act	
Presentation of solution and implementation process to the European Commission (supplementary documents)	being realised
organisation and systemisation (first and second systemisation)	until 10/2015
continuation of legal process – additional regulation	until 12/2017
management in the state civil service (preparation for decisions – model decisions, guides, lectures)	1/2015-6/2015
activities that are not considered as administrative procedure (methodical guides, service regulations)	until 12/2016
education and examination of state civil servants (framework)	6/2015-8/2015
information system on the state civil service	until 12/2016
4.2 Management and development of HR in central administration	
Analyses of current state of personal processes	1/2015-9/2015
Proposal for set-up of personal processes (methodical orders)	7/2015-12/2015
Proposal on implementation of measures (methodical orders)	1/2016-3/2016 (12/2016)
Implementation of proposed solution (presentations, training)	4/2016-6/2016 (1/2017-3/2017)
Creation of internal systems for training or preparation on educational strategies and realisation of educational activities (educational activities)	1/2017-12/2020

Source: Author based on the Strategic Framework and current versions of related implementation plans.

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