

From cradle to grave with seniority promotion?

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¹ http://news.kathimerini.gr/4d0gij_w_articles_columns_2_15/12/2013_543173

The "first star" (Wolf badge in the US ²) is the first distinction a Cub Scout (7-11 years old) receives. To gain it in the U.S., a Cub must meet 90 requirements, in Austria 29³ and in Cyprus 70⁴. These requirements cover areas such as knowledge, skills, care of the soul and body, and contribution to society, family and nature. In Greece, the Scouts of Greece^{5*} define only one requirement: to have been participating in the weekly gatherings of the team for three months!

² <http://www.usscouts.org/advance/Cubscout/wolf.asp>

³ https://www.ppo.e.at/leiter/wiwo/wiki/index.php?title=Erprobungskarte_1_Stern

⁴ http://www.40thscouts.org/sections/ageli/apaitiseis/gr_apetiseis-asterii.php

We see unfortunately a respective lack of essential evaluation and (at least moral) reward to those who distinguish with their work in most aspects of our society. In the public sector almost all employees receive the highest evaluation grades, while salaries do not depend upon performance but, mainly, on seniority (years in service). The "exams" I have been undergone to become a member as an Engineer of the Technical Chamber of Greece, was just a relaxed conversation with the examiner. I am told that lawyers are promoted to the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court levels in five and ten years respectively, without actually having to show some work. And of course, I cannot omit mentioning the indescribable practice of the "Democratic 5"⁶ which seems to be applied in some university departments.

⁵ Long URL, provided as an endnote

This pitiful situation does not mean that in all areas I mentioned do not exist many worthy people who honor their position with their work. But the downward leveling does not let them stand out as they should. Instead, the few that are not worthy are hiding behind the lack of substantial evaluation.

⁶ During university written exams, a student could simply write "I opt for the Democratic 5" and he would receive it in order to "pass" the exams of a semester's lecture.

Fortunately, some things have begun to improve. Exams have been introduced again for admission in experimental schools. Laws that were passed under the framework of Greece's Economic Adjustment Programme stipulate that the public sector distribute proportionally the grades and allow for additional payments based on the fulfillment of certain targets. Hopefully these changes will be actually implemented. Also, based on provisions preserved from the new law

for higher education, university departments are evaluated today by professors working abroad.

Much more is needed however. For example, in education, which determines the future of our country, the Ministry of Education must finally abandon the failed model of the stranglehold definition of every detail. This has brought secondary education (including the one provided in private schools) to be evaluated as among the last in European Union's PISA⁷ ranking and good universities struggle to compete internationally. Instead it should: a) leave it up to schools to innovate in the curriculum and teaching methods, b) give to all levels of education the option to select the distribution of teachers and manage their budget and c) provide to parents and students information on the performance of each school and university departments (universities and technological educational institutions).

⁷ Programme for International Student Assessment

Similar actions of the evaluation of individuals, organizational units and stakeholders, transparency in the results of the evaluation and the promotion of meritocracy and excellence should be followed in all areas where our state lags: health, justice, public order and culture.

More importantly we should keep in mind that the harsher critic of all is the market when it operates in a properly regulated framework. The conscious customer will judge the existing offers and choose the best. For this reason it is the duty of the government to allow the market to work efficiently. The Development Ministry should immediately abolish hundreds of silly anachronistic provisions that protect pampered cartels and spoiled guilds. At the same time, the Competition Commission must be activated to enforce transparency as a means of evaluating prices. It is for example scandalous that readers of a particular newspaper are enjoying a 20% discount at the supermarket or to pass onto all consumers the cost of "free installments" or reimbursements that many credit cards offer. Finally, the state should stop subsidizing inefficient enterprises whether it does so indirectly, i.e. by turning a blind eye to tax evasion and undeclared work, or directly with programs like the ones of "social tourism" that simply provide customers in infrastructures that fail to attract foreign tourists. Only this way may healthy businesses be able to find the resources to pull our economy forward.

To conclude, the meaningful evaluation in all areas as well as the recognition and reward of excellence are the required means for all of us to provide our country the energy needed to stand up again.

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Translated into English by Nikos Alexandris. Some corrections and links provided by the author.

Endnote

*http://www.sep.org.gr/sites/default/files/4.%20ANAGNORISEIS%20PROSPATHEIAS%20SE%20OMADIKES%20DRASEIS_o.pdf