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Central Inspection: Between a rock and a hard place

The present system of public service accountability in Lebanon relies primarily on a number of central control agencies that were set up in the 1950s and 1960s to improve the performance of public administrations and ensure proper spending of public funds.

Some central and independent agencies, such as the Civil Service Council and Central Inspection Board, were entrusted with important powers relating to personnel and disciplinary matters, which they are supposed to exercise independently of any political considerations.

However, the problem of ensuring the necessary independence and immunity of those agencies against political infringement has been a very difficult and complex issue. Their effectiveness has often been inhibited by the undue influence that the Council of Ministers can exercise over their work.

Legislative framework

The period between 16 December 1958 and 12 June 1959 saw the endorsement of 80 legislative decrees (by the exceptional privileges given the government) for different administrative cases, out of which 62 were published in a single issue of the Official Gazette on 12 June 1959.

The Court of Audit was set up (Article 223 of the Public Accounting Law issued 16 January 1951), along with the Civil Service Board (Legislative Decree 114 issued 12 June 1959), the General Disciplinary Council for Public Employees (Decree 7236 dated 8 May 1967), which determines the council's framework, and the Central Inspection Board, which includes the Bids Department and the Research and Guidance Department (Legislative Decree No. 115 dated 12 June 1959).

The four bodies, which are affiliated with the Council of Ministers, present an annual report to the Council describing the year's accomplishments, adopted procedures and administrative suggestions. The report is distributed to ministers and MPs and published in the Official Gazette.

This issue examines the rules and procedures laid down for the Central Inspection Board and some of the challenges it faces, as illustrated by its reports.

Duties and Structure of the Central Inspection Board

As determined by law, the supervisory role of the Central Inspection Board is a financial one. It keeps tabs on the spending of public funds by the different administrations, institutions and municipalities, as well as by all their temporary or permanent employees (with the exception of the Central Bank, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) and the National Social Security Fund (NSSF).

Its financial supervisory duties extend to judicial bodies, the Army, the General and Internal Security Forces, the Lebanese University and Lebanese missions abroad. Other duties include improving administrative work methods, providing advisory services to help administrative managers and conducting studies and investigations when commissioned to do so.

The Central Inspection Board is made up of three departments:

- Bids Department
- Research and Guidance Department
- Central Inspection (composed of administrative, financial, engineering, education, health, social and agricultural inspection divisions.)

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