

THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN GEORGIA

Irakli Kotetishvili¹

The Civil Service Bureau of Georgia (CSB) is a legal entity of public law, under the President of Georgia, responsible for reforms and innovations in the Georgian civil service. Based on up to date research and international expertise, we draft civil service legislation, develop and promote human resource management systems, carry out electronic governance projects and other anti-corruption activities. Our mission is to promote effective and transparent public governance in Georgia.

Georgia has committed to reform the civil service before various international organisations such as: the European Union (EU); North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); and the Open Governments Partnership (OGP). The aim of the reform is to create effective and transparent state institutions in Georgia, while ensuring fair and equal treatment of its citizens.

Before 2003 Georgia was considered one of the most corrupt countries among the former Soviet Union countries, with nepotism acting as the driving force within the public sector. Following the fundamental changes that arose from the Rose Revolution, Georgia started to gradually reform its civil service. Various legislative amendments were passed to enhance the existing legislation and to bring greater transparency and efficiency; salaries were significantly increased in the civil service to prevent corruption; e-governance projects were developed to raise the efficiency of public service delivery; the government publicly prosecuted many corruption cases; civil servants underwent comprehensive training in good governance and logistical advancements such as new public buildings and modern equipment played a vital role in the modernisation of the Georgian public service.

As a result of the Georgian civil service reform, Transparency International and the World Bank named Georgia as the biggest combatant against corruption in 2010. Moreover, Georgia was considered as one of the least corrupt countries in Europe under the Eurobarometer in 2012. The United Nations has also recognised the work done by Georgia and in 2012 awarded the Public Service Hall with a United Nations Public Service Award. This recognition

¹ Director, Civil Service Bureau of Georgia

was further extended in 2013 when the Civil Service Bureau was presented the same award in recognition of its high efficiency in the category of 'Preventing and Combating Corruption in the Public Service'. The practical results of the reform are now apparent: police and other public services are now totally corruption-free; the process of starting a company and registering real estate takes only minutes; and all state procurements are done online; all of which promotes transparency and accountability for its citizens.

The **Georgian police reform** was one of the most successful examples in the reform process. The Government dismissed the entire police force, announced tens of thousands of new vacancies and required all new police officers to undergo intense scrutiny and training. In order to ensure the new decrees regarding corruption were upheld, salaries were raised significantly and all police officers were assigned new cars equipped with the most modern IT tools as well as new transparent glass offices to replace the out-dated police buildings.

The introduction and development of e-governance systems within the Georgian civil service was one of the main priorities of the country. We have been actively working in this direction since 2009 and have since been implementing a number of successful e-governance projects. For example, the *civil service online recruitment portal www.hr.gov.ge* which is a successful project of the Civil Service Bureau, was launched in June 2011. Since the establishment of the portal about 2,700 vacancies have been published. Currently, there are already 336 public agencies registered on the website and 90,000 job seekers registered in the applicant database. We have also been actively working on the development of mobile-friendly tools for the portal to ensure the possibility of receiving this electronic service via smart phones.

Another successful project initiated by the Civil Service Bureau is the *Online Asset Declaration System www.declaration.gov.ge*. Since the beginning of 2010, a unified electronic asset declaration system was implemented in Georgia. Transition to the Online Asset Declaration System has significantly improved the process and simplified procedures for submitting declarations by senior officials. Nowadays, any interested party can download the declaration of a

senior official for free without going to the office, filing a request and paying a fee. As previously mentioned, the system was awarded a Public Service Award in 2013 by the United Nations.

The Minimum Technical Standards for **software for Human Resources Management and Document Flow** were developed and approved by the Government of Georgia and further allow for the civil service to improve its operational processes. By the end of 2013, the software shall be introduced to all agencies funded through the state budget and will considerably save on materials, time and human resources. In order to further improve electronic systems, we continue to work towards improving existing online tools and facilitate the transfer of all other possible government services to online space.

Among our priorities the activities aimed at **raising the qualifications of civil servants** deserves a particular emphasis. We strive to organise on-going training sessions for civil servants in the following directions: integrity and ethics; human resources management; leadership; project management; e-governance and other topics which have been flagged as a priority. We truly hope that this kind of qualification raising initiatives will further strengthen the civil service in Georgia and contribute to the implementation of changes envisaged by the civil service reform.

Executing effective civil service reform is not easy as each country has its own cultural, historical and political background, which in part affects its implementation. However, we have learnt that successful reforms need to be orientated around the citizen; civil service reform is cross-sectorial and triggers interests in all branches of government; donor support and guidance is crucial as it brings insight from established democracies; shifting public services into online space and bringing in IT solutions is possibly the best option to achieve immediate and tangible results. During the reform process there should be corruption-preventing mechanisms in place and the constant fight against corruption is crucial.

Despite numerous successful initiatives implemented within the reform process, the civil service in Georgia still faces many challenges. Civil service still needs to be depoliticised; there is a lack of common nationwide HR practices; there is no system

of continuous capacity building of civil servants; citizens are less engaged in government decision-making process and civil service legislation is still out-dated.

In order to further achieve the aims of the civil service reform process, we must continue to work towards the full depolarisation of the civil service by separating executive and political positions; reforming HR departments by applying modern techniques and methodologies; consistently applying merit-based recruitment and appointment; reforming pay and bonus systems and finally setting up continuous training curricula for Georgian civil servants.