

PRINCIPLES OF SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE IN KAZAKHSTAN: INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS

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The beginning of the twenty-first century heralds a fundamentally different governance climate. The recent global economic and financial crisis has revealed systemic problems in the global financial architecture. We acknowledge that the world has become much more vulnerable and volatile. As the result, the world community has been witnessing different social and political challenges.

These issues need high-quality and effective governance decisions that are predominantly defined by the professionalism of state apparatus, namely policy-makers and civil servants. Therefore, with an invisible hand of market structures, there is a growing global recognition of the need for the visible hand of government to promote economic progress. Nowadays, the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and perhaps beyond face common challenges due to various factors. Our civil service legislation is still actively evolving by adopting international best practices. Initial specific laws have been adopted only in the mid-1990s. Only a few countries have established special bodies for civil service affairs, and the consistency and continuity of reforms are not always ensured. Moreover, there is a lack of evidence-based research in the field of public administration, civil service and HR management.

The early years of Independence of Kazakhstan witnessed an unprecedented socio-economic turmoil and an uneasy transition into a market economy. The President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan put forward before the Government a task of studying international best practices on public sector reform but avoiding any form of duplicating.

Ever since then the experience of leading countries in the field of civil service has been rigorously investigated. In his Annual

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Address to the People of Kazakhstan in 2012, President Nazarbayev announced a new Strategy “Kazakhstan – 2050: new political course of the established state”. The strategy’s fifth direction is “*Further enhancement of statehood and development of Kazakhstani democracy*”. The purpose is to form a new type of public administration that is capable of achieving new objectives of serving the society and enhancing the statehood. In other words, there is a need to develop a professional state apparatus free from the administrative – command style of management traditions of the past. These cannot be done without in-depth research on what constitutes an effective citizen-centred civil service.

Taking the abovementioned into consideration, the Academy of public administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereinafter – Academy) has been conducting specific research projects on civil service modernization. The research topics among others include:

- Selection methods into civil service and admission testing
- Developing and managing a personnel reserve for civil service
- Performance appraisal of civil servants
- Legal, methodical and organizational measures to improve working conditions for civil servants and public sector management

The preliminary research findings indicate that the principles of New Public Management with a particular emphasis on genuine orientation of the state apparatus to citizens’ needs, delivery of quality public services and public accountability have been introduced in numerous countries to effectively address the raising demands of their societies.

Furthermore, as the experiences of Singapore, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States demonstrate effective and responsive civil service systems often have a senior civil service level. It is named differently in different countries, for instance, in the Netherlands – *de Algemene Bestuursdienst* (or in short – *ADB*), in the UK – *Senior Civil Service*, in Singapore – *Administrative service*. In Kazakhstan it has been named “*corps A*”.

Corps A is an executive level of civil service envisioned to ensure the link between the strategic decision-making and implementation, as well as provide continuity of human resources policy and long-term performance of a state agency.

The current civil service reform in Kazakhstan, particularly introduction of the executive level – corps A, promotes the ideals of serving the people and society at large. Such profound changes that require civil service transparency, public accountability and efficient delivery of quality public services aim at increasing the number of civil servants for whom integrity, professionalism and ethics are paramount principles.

A – for avant-garde, B – for base

The reasoning behind the naming corps A and corps B has been raising curiosity of the international expert community. As Alikhan Baimenov, the Chairman of the Agency of civil service affairs of Kazakhstan, put it precisely “A” can be attributed to avant-garde, whereas “B” – for base. Thus, corps A comprises of senior civil servants who are in the frontline of execution, who report to and work closely with political appointees by providing them during decision-making with expert opinion and advice taking into account the availability and quality of financial and human resources in the public sector. The corps B (which is 99,4 per cent of all civil servants in Kazakhstan), on the other hand, includes civil servants who serve as a strong base that ensures adequate implementation of decisions taken and deliver public services to the population. In addition to that corps A servants are called to provide stability and continuity when political appointees change.

Open selection inculcates public trust and renews civil service

Between the 3rd April and the 3rd May 2013 the number of applications for corps A reached 2 024. Among them 511 were civil servants already occupying the positions qualified as corps A positions under the new amendments to the Law on civil service introduced in March 2013. Notably, 30 per cent of those 511 failed to obtain the threshold value during testing.

As a result the personnel structure of the newly created corps A has now been renewed by 30 per cent giving opportunities to those high potential civil servants who might not have had opportunities to be noticed before the reforms. About a half of that renewal included entrants from the private and quasi-governmental sectors demonstrating professionalism and character of integrity. This dispelled the myth that senior civil service positions are not reachable and form a closed circle which is not unattainable by outsiders (non-civil servants, or lower position civil servants). Taking into account the feedback received from the public and mass media it can be argued that such open selection inculcated greater trust in civil service and the government at large.

Kazakhstani society has gone through the transition and reached a mature, established statehood. In order for the state to develop in a sustainable manner there needs to be rule of law which is to be ensured first and foremost by the law abiding and law promoting civil servants.

The role of the Academy in increasing the professionalism of corps A

The Academy has designed special training seminars and programmes taking into account the changing nature of competences required of senior civil servants of corps A in today's globalised world.

Between 30 September and 2 October 2013 there was organized a training seminar for corps A, namely for the permanent secretary level. The objective was to improve the participants' skills on leadership, project management and audit in state agencies.

On 3–6 October 2013 there was held in the Academy another seminar for corps A, namely chief of staff of governors of provinces, the capital city Astana and Almaty. The aim was to strengthen the skills and knowledge of the participants on project management, internal audit of state agencies, leadership, conflict theories and prevention and resolution of social conflicts.

Both seminars were organized in with support of *Ecole nationale d'administration* (ENA) and the Policy Advisory Group of leading

experts. The seminar will be held for the governors of provinces and large cities.

While putting together short-term training seminars for corps A, the Academy has also been focusing on longer time horizon training programmes. For instance, the Academy's National School of Public Policy via partnering with *Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy* and the *Federal Executive Institute of the Office of Personnel Management* of the United States has developed a specialized rigorous one year academic programme for high potential civil servants aspiring to enter corps A in the near future. Such a programme has so far no analogs among the CIS countries.

In addition, the Academy has recently established a Centre for competences. The primary mission of the centre is to study the competences profile for civil servants and employees of non-governmental sector, assess and measure their competence level and disseminate best practices in this field. One of the most important modern competences required of civil servants is the ability to effectively manage projects. Therefore, together with the Policy Advisory Group of leading experts currently the creation at the Academy of a Project Management Centre is being contemplated.

Conclusion

It is worth noting that certain concrete measures have been taken in an attempt to foster further professionalization of civil service in Kazakhstan. However, one needs to recognize that there is still a lot more to be done. Incremental steps forward will likely lead to finding those missing puzzles in the picture of an effective civil service that we all in the region aspire to achieve.

One can argue that priorities of civil service reform depend on global, regional and country-specific factors. The pace of reform as well as the level of civil service development is defined by the role of state, the chosen social-economic model, specific challenges and the degree of society's democratization. The above mentioned determines the relevance of enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with countries that have accumulated wide experience and developed efficient civil service systems, as well as the relevance of boosting the regional cooperation. In this regard, it is important

for the countries of the region to build their research capacity and create a strong basis for regional studies.

In spite of the fact that states of the region have common challenges, each country has its own contextual experience that could be shared. The compound of regional experiences creates synergy of immense value, allows avoiding common mistakes and hereby significantly improves the decision-making process. That is the very aim of the Regional hub of Civil Service in Astana. It is now increasingly recognised that the initiative is a timely endeavour the fruitfulness of which is likely to increase in the years to come.