

Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries

Alikhan Baimenov · Panos Liverakos
Editors

Public Service Evolution in the 15 Post-Soviet Countries

Diversity in Transformation

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Dedicated to the pioneers of public service reform in the post-Soviet countries.

FOREWORD

During the thirty years of independence the post-Soviet republics, albeit at varying levels of commitment and speed of change, aimed to create democratic governance and market-based economic systems. This book focuses on the public administration and civil service transformation trajectories of these countries.

The book comprises sixteen chapters, with the first providing a comprehensive overview of the reforms these states pursued in nurturing a professional public administration and a competent public service capable of accomplishing the countries' sustainable development objectives. The other fifteen chapters present the trajectory, each of the post-Soviet republics pursued in transforming their public administration and civil service systems over the course of a generation.

The overall conclusion of the book is that these countries' common historical experience while they were part of the Soviet Union, and their subjugation to the Soviet ideological and institutional regime, left them with many problems that eventually haunted them in their pursuit to establish and consolidate good governance and market-based economic systems. As a result, their reform efforts have been remarkably diverse. This, of course, is not surprising, as it has been demonstrated repeatedly that institutional transformation is highly dependent on specific "conjunctures", in particular historical and cultural, but also geopolitical contexts that may lead to divergent outcomes.

Generally, it would appear that these fifteen countries started with their reforms in the early years of independence—with the exception of a few that remained still for another decade and started introducing changes in the mid-2000 or later. At first, the majority of the post-Soviet republics looked to the West in exploring ways of transforming their respective political, economic, and social systems. Later, as we now know, they became aware that in order to develop and implement their envisioned transformation strategies—in a truly meaningful way—they had to take into account their historical and cultural traditions, as well as learn from one another.

Today, the public administration and civil service reform efforts of most post-Soviet republics are congruent with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal 16. This Goal aims at building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, with equal access to justice under the rule of law, along with the existence of sound governance and transparent, effective, and accountable institutions. Goal 16 also aims at alleviating the corrosive effects of corruption, which damages social capital and undermines public trust. However, tackling corruption remains a challenge for most post-soviet republics. They yet need to confront this issue assertively, because persistent and pervasive corruption dampens their progress towards establishing the rule of law and equal access to justice and thus lowers their democratic governance standards. Although most countries have introduced integrity-based ethics systems, they need to supplement them with professional socialisation measures that are reinforced by incentives for good behaviour, and policies enhancing meritocracy and transparency, as well as the adoption of international standards in combatting bribery and the flow of illegal funds.

What distinguishes a duly performing civil service are ethical and professional values that are truly internalised and institutionalised. A civil service marred by corruption will not for long be able to maintain its competence, efficiency, and responsiveness. Furthermore, experience has demonstrated that persistent and pervasive corruption diminishes the beneficial outcomes of reforms and undermines the sustainability of development gains.

If one looks at these countries' human development, one will note that all but two of these fifteen countries have attained scores that are above world average, classifying them as countries with a relatively high human

development (HDI 2019).¹ However, who also looks at their governance norms in place will note that wide differences exist. For instance, the three Baltic States and Georgia display high scores that place them in the top twenty-five per cent of countries in the world for adopting good governance practices. Another five countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation—are placed in the top fifty per cent, and yet another four—Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan—in the top seventy-five per cent, while two countries—Tajikistan and Turkmenistan—are placed in the lower twenty-five per cent in the world (WGI 2018).² In sum, the countries that display higher scores have established solid institutions of democratic governance by pursuing relatively consistent reform policies, which resulted in institutional transformation that is more advanced than in other post-Soviet republics.

How can one explain such differences? The critical factors that have probably influenced the pace, scope, and overall direction of reforms over the past thirty years are historical, political, economic, and cultural in nature. They have played a role in driving (or inhibiting) public administration and civil service reform. Hence, in order to gain an adequate understanding of these differences and identify the causes of the varying national outcomes, one must take into account many aspects of each country's political, economic, and social norms and values, constitutional arrangements, the interplay of politics and economics, the propensity of political elites for change, the vision and objectives of the political leaders, public attitudes towards politics, and the effects of international influences, to name a few.

As no significant evidence-based research exists to date on the experience of these countries—shifting from totalitarian to a democratic political regime and from a command-based to a market-based economic system—this book is a worthwhile attempt to shed light on the subject matter.

¹ Human Development Index; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>.

² World Governance Indicators; <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#home>.

It offers a critical examination of public administration and civil service reform in the post-Soviet republics since their independence.

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