

REFORMING THE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN BELARUS:**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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In the paper, the authors outline perspectives for assessing the effectiveness of public administration in Belarus based on conceptual approaches and practices developed over the last two decades, including the concept of new public management.

The main goal of the work is to present some ideas for possible public administration reform in Belarus, and also inform the audience interested in public administration issues on some contemporary approaches to increasing effectiveness of government based on existing international experience.

Since the end of 2011 it becomes increasingly clear that the existence in Belarus of the social and economic system based on the command-administrative and politicized distribution of resources (which come from outside through external borrowing and subsidies) is drawing to an end. Regardless of wishes and attitudes of the ruling group, already in the short-term perspective a radical change in the economic and social management mechanisms will be required.

This inevitability is determined by the two main factors:

- Significant shrinking of available public (budgetary) resources;
- Significant increase in external debt payment obligations.

In the paper, the authors considered two possible aspects of public administration reform:

1. Creating the system for effective policy development and evaluation in the environment where the state apparatus' monopoly on expert knowledge in this area is getting increasingly challenged;
2. Improving the system for evaluation of effectiveness of public organization. It is the first (at least, the first public) attempt to initiate a discussion on recommendations for reforming public administration in Belarus).

According to the authors' recommendation, when developing a strategy for increasing policy capacity of government, it is important to take a number of institutional aspects into account, including:

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- The necessity for a balance between long-term and short-term perspective. In the situation where an expert community is relatively “young” and does not have enough experience of cooperation with government experts, the latter should take the leading role in setting long-term tasks;
- The desirability for continuous exchange of ideas and experience through communication between government and independent experts, especially informal communication (could be more difficult in the case when independent experts provide already “finished” product)
- Human resource dimension – how to attract talented young experts to public service, how to motivate government experts to cooperate with independent experts (often such cooperation could be only nominal, for example when it is a condition for obtaining donor financing)
- Costs – time and money, capital and running costs. Resources saved through not keeping a full-time team of government experts can be used for finding the best partner and subsequent management of the contract).

Therefore centers for public policy development in governments should be headed by experienced leaders who have a strategic vision or the development of their sphere, good contacts in independent expert community and in academia, who can talk on equal terms with international experts. The paper includes several examples of such centers which share the following common characteristics: These centers share several common characteristic, including centrality in relation to the government (the Cabinet); pro-activeness; publicity; the government is required (often by law) to respond to recommendations made by these centers; networking with expert community nationally and internationally.

Analysing the possibilities for evaluating the effectiveness of the governmental organizations in Belarus, the authors come to the following preliminary conclusions:

1. The system for assessing public administration in Belarus cannot be considered effective since it has an ideological and not a rational character.
2. It is practically not possible to measure qualitative performance of the system of public administration since all main indicators are quantitative and based on the existing “level of achievement” without taking effectiveness into account (for example, in accordance with the existing legislation, the program for medium-term social and economic development is based on the results achieved in the previous 5-year period);
3. A possible recommendation for qualitative transformation of this situation involved the following steps: changing the reporting system to focus it on the indicators of effectiveness, amending the hierarchical reporting and accountability system with horizontal evaluation mechanism within

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institutions and external audits (including independent audits by NGOs, analytical centers etc), ensuring transparency and availability of the results of the evaluation for the general public through the media and independent websites.