

ICPS newsletter

Administrative reform: Polish experience

On 28 November 2000, the International Centre for Policy Studies and the Polish research centre Instytut Spraw Publicznych held a seminar titled "Implementation of Administrative Reform in Ukraine in the Process of European Integration: Using Polish Experience". Alexander Nelicki, advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Poland, and Stanislaw Srocki, chairman of Regional Audit Chamber of Bialystok town, were invited as special presenters. This seminar was the first event conducted under the project "Ukraine's European Choice: Using Polish Reform Experience in the Context of European Integration." The project is supported by Freedom House Partnership for Reform in Ukraine program

The problems of local administration in Poland are similar to those in Ukraine

Stanislaw Srocki, chairman of Regional Audit Chamber of Bialystok town, informed Ukrainian specialists about the course of Polish administrative reforms in 1998–99. In particular, he described the changes in the administrative-territorial organisation of the country and about formation of the public service at the regional and local levels.

The problems of the public administration system in Poland that remained even after the first wave of reforms were conducted at the beginning of 1998 are very similar to current Ukrainian problems in this realm. In particular, the following problems can be identified:

- inconsistent and conflicting distribution of objectives and competencies between central and local administrations, as well as unclear scope of responsibilities at different levels of government;
- lack of citizen participation in the policy process, and weak public control over the activities of governments;
- highly centralised budget system;
- financing all budget-funded organisations from the national budget;
- highly spread system of public administration. The structure of this system is largely in contradiction to the principles of effective territorial structure. As a result, different authorities are often uncoordinated in their actions.

The initiators of reforms in Poland identified the following objectives: elimination of the abovementioned drawbacks, increasing the efficiency of public administrations, better quality of public services, and increased share of budget funds to be managed by local and regional authorities.

The major objectives of the reform were as follows:

- change of the territorial structure, with the introduction of

Public administration reform: distribution of responsibilities

Secretariat to the Head of the Council of Ministers:

- coordination of legislative work (laws on structuring and power)
- public awareness.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration:

- coordination of law implementation
- coordination of working groups on issues of administrative reforms in the provinces
- monitoring the process of reform at the local level.

Ministry of Finance:

- coordination of executing the law on revenues of local governments
- developing first budgets of local governments

Commissioned governments of provinces:

- direct work on transferring organisations, assets, and employees to new local governments.

a three-level (instead of two-level) administrative distribution and local governance at the level of the county (*powiat*) and province (*województwo*); previously, local governments existed only at the level of towns and villages;

- decentralisation of state administrative functions, with a new distribution of executive authority and change in the system of budget financing (increased territorial self-government share in public expenditures).

One of the most complicated problems in the process of reform is the distribution of powers between executive bodies and local governments. Following two principles of power distribution—by consumers of services delivered by public administrations, and by administrative function—the range of responsibilities for each territorial-administrative body was defined. The following numbers illustrate the scale of the resulting reforms in Poland: almost 70,000 regional public servants changed jobs, and about 7,500 organisations were transferred from under the central government to local governments (primarily education, health care, social security, and cultural sectors).

Formula for administrative reform

The process of reform entailed the definition of three segments of public administration, each of which had a number of objectives. Overall, governments should fulfil three major objectives:

- administrate: making decisions regarding specific questions, establishing rules and norms, controlling compliance;
- direct transformation process: making development policy and developing strategy for each sphere of social life;
- manage delivery of public services: education, health care, etc.

The reform aimed to assign certain activities to each segment of public administration.

Central executive bodies—government and central authorities—were made responsible for the process of transformation and administration. Central agencies are to deliver public services only in some situations; and they are responsible for establishing national norms and standards.

The regional public administration in Poland includes two components—state administration (institute of the *województwo*) and the body of local government (the government of the province, or *województwo*). The responsibilities of the province include law enforcement and assurance of safety and public order. The major objective of local governments in the provinces is to manage the transformation process—that is, to develop and implement regional development strategy.

The local level of the public administration consists of local governments of counties (*powiat*) and townships (*gmina*). As a result of the reforms, a new unit, which was not there previously, appeared in the sub-level between the townships and provinces. The activity of local segments of public administration is predominately concentrated on service delivery. However, as a result of missing public administration at this level, local governments are also entrusted with a part of administrative responsibilities.

The major condition for creating the three clearly defined segments of public administration in Poland was the introduction of new three-level territorial structuring. The Polish experience demonstrates that monitoring actions and changes related to reform is an important component of the reform process. This helps to identify mistakes and problems on time, and to adjust the process as needed.

Public administration reform is a step towards the EU

Alexander Nelicki, advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Poland, explained the role of public administration reform in the process of Poland's integration into the European Union. Mr. Nelicki emphasised that the European Union does not

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Difficulties related to implementation of administrative reform

The nature of reform:

- simultaneous implementation of four key reforms: public administration, health care, education, and pensions
- complicated nature of public administration reform: drastic changes in territorial structure (new three-level territorial structure, introduction of self-governance at the level of counties and provinces).

Political context:

- lack of consensus among parties in the parliament
- inconsistent legislation which results from changes in parliament membership.

Resistance of authorities:

- uneven institutional capacity throughout the country: different amounts of available resources in new governments
- lack of analytical information on the public sector.

impose a specific form of public administration on member countries. Instead, the EU demands compliance with "efficiency requirements"—that is, the public administration system must be productive. The speaker noted that administrative reform is implemented primarily for national domestic goals, including efficient public sector management and assurance of public control over the government. Simultaneously, the objectives originated by the need to comply with legislative framework of the EU should be put forward: development of legislation which follows these principles, and adherence to EU standards.

Prospects of the Polish reforms

Mr. Nelicki also reviewed the prospects for developing a modern system of public administration in Poland. He believes that an important objective of the government is the development and implementation of regional policy which follows new principles. The administrative reforms of 1998–99 created the conditions for making such policy. Nevertheless, there are some additional steps to be made first of all, including adopting new laws on local government revenues and on promoting regional policy.

The next major objectives are as follows: completing reform of central executive bodies, including revisions of the central government structure, in accordance with the decentralisation of public objectives and further development of the public service.

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The International Centre for Policy Studies is an independent non-profit research organisation with the objective of improving the Ukrainian policy development process. This is achieved by increasing the know-how of key government officials for policy choices, formulation, and debate, and the awareness of the public-at-large of the benefits of policy.

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