

HARD CASES AND IMPROVING 'GOVERNANCE' : PUTIN AND CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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'The first piece of paper goes for the attention of Petrov, and the 31st must go to be signed by the manager of Ivanov's department. At each moment there must be a continual supervision of things about which someone must know..... Let's get rid of this opportunity for bureaucratic red tape (volokiti)' Interview with Dimitry Medvedev, First Deputy Head of the President's Administration Itoji 21.8.02

'Of course, revision of the functions of the state – it can't be immediate, it's a long-term thing. Here it's not possible to be friendly. Friendliness which usually ends up with the smooth transfer of 'chinovniks' from one structure to another.' Vladimir Putin 18.4.2002

1. Introduction

There can be few better examples of how supposedly globalizing trends for the 'modernization' of public services have been dissipated and resisted than that of the Russian Federation, where the shortcomings of civil service reform have been widely noted (Kotchegura 1999, 2002; Nurnberg 1999; Parison 2000; Putin 2002; Fedorov 2001; Satarov 2001; Verheijen 1998, 1999). The factors behind this are worth exploring in some detail, as they may provide us with a better understanding of constraints on 'modernization,' and of potentially new ways of designing civil service reform programmes.

The Russian case is particularly worth exploring as an example of a state which may be balanced between a 'western', and a more alarming southern or 'Latin American' future (Goetz, 2001). A study of state machinery in the Russian federation may thus illuminate the characteristics of state institutions which are perhaps 'poised' or 'stalled' between alternative futures.

The recent election of President Putin has been accompanied by a number of initiatives for civil service reform, which provide an early opportunity to assess his record in this area, and to report on the renewed efforts that are now being made to unblock the process of change.

A review of the available literature on civil service reform identifies the following factors as affecting the outcomes of reform, in order of those most frequently mentioned:

Political leadership and support, administrative leadership and capacity, the availability of resources, political and social stability, support from those subject to reform, historical legacies, appropriate scope, scheduling, sequencing, the nature and extent of 'lustration' of previous civil service, the skill, determination and influence of external agents (including the EU and multinational consultancies), favourable culture, a critical civil society, attention to implementation, the sum balance of constraints, the existence of 'windows of opportunity' etc. (Bekke, 1996, Baker 2002)

Writers on reform can be broadly grouped into those who see reform as a matter of ‘agency’ – the decisions and actions of individuals and groups being critical to the process, and those who see reform as a matter of ‘structure’, the underlying historical, social, economic and institutional context within which the civil service is determined. These two traditions have deep roots in respectively the managerialist/public administration tradition, and the broader social science comparativist tradition. Unfortunately, both approaches are somewhat one-dimensional, often missing the key interactions between structure and agency which form each country’s unique pathway to development. The public administration approach tends to be overly optimistic about the capacity of organisations to change, while the social science comparativist tradition is perhaps over-pessimistic.

This article will therefore approach Russian civil service reform from both perspectives, analysing the current situation of the service within its historical context then turning to consider the narrower legislative efforts that are being directed towards its reform, but also the interactions between these levels, accepting that reform is to some extent an evolving, ‘complex, multi-layered game’ in which players are both subject to, and make the rules by which they play.

The article draws on the authors own experiences working with the Russian Academy of Public Administration, on material published by Russian and other experts, and on local press coverage to provide a picture of the service and attempts that have been made to transform it since 1991, particularly the current reform efforts of Vice Minister Medvedev and the various working groups around the Presidency.

A preliminary analysis of the backgrounds and attachments of members of some of the key groups involved in designing reform measures has been undertaken, and some observations are made about the role of international donors in this process.

The paper concludes that while the election of Putin has opened an ‘opportunity window’ for reform, and some features of the Russian/post-communist inheritance are no longer such fearful obstacles to change, nevertheless there is still a marked gap between the new Presidential rhetoric and its legislative enactment in specific measures. A preliminary analysis of key players in the reform process indicates many of these are unlikely to be ‘champions of change.’

2. Brief historical background to government service in Russia

Although all countries may make a claim to uniqueness, Russia perhaps can do so with greater force than most. That uniqueness lies in the order and nature of the steps taken towards its social and economic development.

The pre-revolutionary 19th century state service contained a number of distinct elements, each reflecting a different historical epoch: a *technical* element, associated with growing industrialisation and supported by specialist schools and training institutes, a traditional, landed element which reflected a much older *feudal* tradition of service in return for privilege, and a nascent but growing, landless *state bureaucracy* (Fortescue, 1997)

Following the revolution, there was rapid upward mobility for many technical specialists, and a huge growth in government posts. The remaining ‘bourgeois’ or ‘Tsarist’ elements of the service suffered in the post-revolutionary period, particularly under Stalin, and the parallel

party bureaucratic hierarchy cemented its hold over administration. By the 1970's the regime began to stagnate, unable to cope with the demands of a more technically complex society.

There is wide agreement amongst observers about the basic features of this pre-reform system in Russia (and the former communist countries of Eastern Europe):

- parallel bureaucracy through the 'leading role' of the communist party, which shadowed every branch of government and controlled appointment to all key posts
- complex, overlapping structures within administration itself
- highly centralised, but mainly sectoral, decision making
- highly sectoralised training and careers
- authoritarianism, combined with overextended capacity for political surveillance and control
- accountability upwards to superiors
- lack of other forms of accountability (legal, financial, public)
- informal and personalistic systems for resolving disputes and making appointments (eg Konig, 1992, Fortescue, 1997)

In the immediate *post-perestroika* period, several important (and well-known) changes took place in Russia:

- the communist party lost its 'leading role'
- following a period of intense constitutional confusion, the new system eventually 'stabilised' around a powerful presidency with its own ever more extensive bureaucracy, grafted onto the existing system of poorly co-ordinated ministries (Huskey, 1995), and overseen by a weak and factional parliament
- an influx of 'reformers' began to occupy some key positions in the ministries
- the establishment of the CIS led to the disaggregation of ministerial staff to the new nation-states on Russia's borders, and the absorption of others to within Russia's new frontiers.
- some limited steps were taken to dismantle the machinery for planning the socialist economy, and in its place to establish new agencies with different tasks, notably in areas such as privatisation, and legal administration
- relationships with regional power – always an important factor in Russian political life, took a particularly difficult turn as different regions sought varying degrees of independence from the centre, and exercised their new freedoms by demanding (and in many cases taking) control of revenues intended for the centre, thus compounding a developing budget crisis.
- the establishment of limited freedom of speech brought with it increased media attention (not all of it 'responsible')

In effect Russia underwent in the shortest possible time, a simultaneous 'triple transformation' (Offe) of its economy, politics and nationhood, creating a condition which might be described as 'deinstitutionalization.'

However, some major continuities can also be observed in the *post-perestroika* period:

- the tradition of parallel power – with the Presidency and its offices assuming a parallel role vis a vis the ministries.

- the complex structure of the old Soviet ministries was retained – with extensive overlaps and competition
- the ‘authoritarian turn’ was restored by the new Presidency’s use of decree powers
- the lack of clear separation of political and administrative roles
- the high levels of personalism, clientelism and corruption
- the prevalence of sectoral disputes within the bureaucracy
- the weak ‘policy capacity’ of the system

In short, rather than a ‘failed transition’ it is probably better to see this period as one of decay from a previous settled or perhaps stagnant state, which left many features of the old untouched and increasingly derelict, but prey to ‘stripping out’ by those strong enough to do so. It is against this background that attempts at administrative reform must be understood.

3. Reform attempts under Yeltsin

Given the background above, it is perhaps not surprising that early attempts at civil service reform were soon marked by the very ‘Balkanization’ of policymaking with which such reforms are intended to grapple (Yassman 1993).

Under *perestroika*, a new elite unit responsible for the selection and training of civil service personnel was established, named ROSKADRY. In November, 1991 the Russian Academy of Public Administration acquired a remit to train civil servants for both local and national government. This was followed in 1993 by the passing of a limited statute on the federal civil service. However this apparent progress was to be short lived. Yeltsin dissolved ROSKADRY, and it had in any event lacked the resources and support needed to implement change. Reformist elements seemed unable to agree on the necessary steps, with three separate drafts of civil service reform circulating in the years 1992-5, each reflecting the different interests of particular groups of players, and competing for attention in an environment in which other more immediate issues were perhaps more important (Yasmann, 1993).

3.1 ‘About the essentials of government services of the Russian Federation’ 1995

The final form of the civil service law of 1995 (passed on 31st July) can be seen as ‘constitutive’ rather than ‘organisational’, ‘Weberian’ rather than ‘Managerial’, seeking to establish:

- the constitutional status of civil servants
- a professional and stable career structure
- employment rights
- a disciplinary code
- the duties of civil servants
- recruitment and promotion procedures
- central arrangements for the management of the service

A new code of ethics forbade:

- all other paid work (other than teaching and creative work)
- ‘commercial activity’ or lobbying
- misuse of state property
- the receipt of gifts

- strike action
- the leaking of confidential information
- the employment of relatives as subordinates

However, and somewhat contradictorily, it also required civil servants to declare all relevant financial interests and to maintain their share holdings in trust.

The law provided for the civil service to be divided into 5 grades of post, with each grade corresponding to a specific level of educational attainment. In an echo of the reforms of Peter the Great, civil servants would also be allotted a personal 'rank' – those of lower 'ranks' would be unable to occupy higher level positions without having fulfilled the necessary years of experience and thus advancing in rank to a level sufficient to be considered for those higher positions.

The tradition of political criteria for appointment to top posts was retained however – category 'A' posts (the highest) were excluded from the law, while the top category 'B' posts (assistants and advisers of the 'A's) would normally retain their positions subject to their political master remaining in post. The remaining category B's could be considered true 'permanent' bureaucrats. The numerous ancillary and technical (category 'C') civil servants were excluded from the provisions of the law.

Meanwhile, a 40 strong 'council for personnel policy' in the President's administration retained responsibility for staffing matters. In January 1996, new competitive appointments procedures were supposedly put in place (Fortescue, 1997 p.50)

Much of the 1995 Act in fact contains a series of rights and entitlements for civil servants, and detailed outlines of procedures which in other countries might normally be found in contracts of employment or staff handbooks. It is therefore probably correct to see the act as a victory for conservative elements, and for the civil servants themselves. It is very much a document describing and enshrining an existing situation, rather than responding to a new one. Civil servants are to be servants of the state, rather than the public. Flexibility is ruled out by the inclusion of legislative measures defining working practices. Large sections of the service are excluded from these measures – at the top, politicization of appointments is maintained, with mechanisms for Kremlin 'over-ride', while at the bottom the privilege of legislative protection is denied to category 'C' staff. Long service remains an important criteria for selection for promotion, and a formal system of status and prestige (the rank system) runs parallel to the conventional hierarchy of government posts.

Yeltsin's second term seems to have been marked by a period of 'consolidation' in the field of reform, during which the provisions of the new laws in terms of ethics were widely ignored (Barabashev, 2001) However, international pressures for reform remained considerable, and resulted in some worthwhile research on civil service numbers, structure, strengths and weaknesses. As a result of World Bank inquiries, some information about Russian civil servants did become available – some of which tended to undermine stereotypical assumptions – notably the numbers directly employed in central ministries (and the service as a whole) was considerably smaller than many observers had expected. Information about pay also showed wide disparities between ministries, between levels, and between those working for federal ministries in the oblasts and those at the centre. Information about the continued scale of privileges enjoyed at the top and the high value of non-monetary rewards (especially housing and transport) coupled with public exposure to numerous tales of corruption did much to reinforce the negative popular view of the service at this time, and led to mounting

pressures for change. Overall, however, the wider political reform process is thought to have led to an *increase* in civil service employment under Yeltsin, particularly in Presidential staff. This growth in numbers later tailed off, to enter a decline under Putin.

4. Reform under Putin

In many ways the process of reform in Russia ought to be straightforward with a new President, so far enjoying broad popular support and ostensibly committed to the reform process and its goals, and supported by the international community. However, opinion about the capacity of the new Presidency remains divided: some argue that he remains trapped within Russia's chronically de-institutionalised state, where:

'the combination of autonomy, duplicate responsibility and lack of links [between institutions] leaves officials free to pursue strategies of competition, confrontation and deadlock' (Ostrow, J 2002)

Or alternatively, that the President's freedom of manoeuvre is bounded by the powerful interests of the new order: the 'magnates', the security chiefs, and the military (Reddaway, 2002).

Putin's election address made several mentions of the need for administrative reform, and indeed policymaking under Putin has shown a more markedly 'modern' pattern and some significant achievements:

'Unlike the Yeltsin administration, the Putin administration has carried through on its policy agenda, with a systematic effort to develop and enact legislation reflecting the policy proposals laid out in the President's messages [to the Duma]' (Remington, 2001, cf Sharlet 2001)

German Gref's 'centre for strategic planning' has played a key role in bringing more expertise to bear on policy formulation – though significant shortfalls continue to occur in many major programmes when it comes to enactment and implementation (see eg Cook,L.J.)

Civil service reform has formed part of a wider agenda , including reform of the military and defence, and of the legal system, and is thus being approached as part of an integrated strategy.

4.1 The working groups

In August 2001, 2 working groups were set up, inside the President's administration; the Commission for the Reform of Government headed by Mukhail Kasyanov, and the other headed by the Deputy Secretary of Kremlin Administration, Dimitry Medvedev (Pravda 21/07/01) with the initial task of developing legislative and organisational proposals for the civil service respectively, and an implementation plan. Their initial brief appears to have been to:

- improve the accountability of the civil service through a clear definition of their duties, administrative regulations, and citizen's rights
- consider pay levels in the service
- establish mechanisms for staff selection
- take steps to make the service attractive as a career

(Strana RU 09.01.02)

4.2 'The concept of government services reform in the Russian Federation' – January 2002

Detailed presidential proposals for civil service reform were finally published on 15th January, 2002. These however in some important respects went much further than the original brief given to the working groups. They included a commitment to an integrated ('tselostnoy') civil service acceptable to the public, and appropriate for new economic conditions.

The proposals comprise 6 paragraphs, dealing in turn with: the arrangement of functions and structures, organizational and financial management, the status of civil servants, information technology, estates and purchasing, and training.

The proposals sought to distinguish the different organs of government by their functions, into a 3 tier system comprising:

The government of the Russian Federation
The ministries
Service, supervisory organs and agencies

In which responsibilities and accountability would be clearly delineated.

The principle vehicle for accountability appears to be the 'introduction of contemporary ways to plan, organise, finance and account for activity', through the proposals also contain a commitment to 'orientate the government apparatus towards serving the interests of citizens and the public as a whole.'

Measures of 'new public management' proposed include an extension of the rights of managers to delegate funds between budgets, programme based budgeting, performance management, extending the use of management information systems and information technology, and an extension of short term contracts.

The controversial issue of 'poleetecheskee nakhachentz' or political appointments (in category 'a' and 'b' of the service) is recognised , but a commitment is given only to 'more clearly delineate' such appointments. It is accepted that 'sideways entry' will still be needed for specialists, subject to relevant protection against corruption.

A commitment is also given to make the 'soschealnee packet' or social wage (comprising rights to medical treatment and transport amongst others) both 'better founded', and 'more transparent' for each level of the civil service, and to review the possibility of substituting money payments 'in whole or part' for these.

Procedures for appointments and promotions are to be made more flexible, with the use of references and regular reviews.

The establishment of a central purchasing agency is to be explored as a means to reducing the costs of supplies, and ensuring the material conditions of civil servants are suitable.

The section on training civil servants strongly reflects the need to re-orientate the curriculum towards 'New Public Management' :-

‘contemporary methods of raising effectiveness....on the foundations of planning, organising, financing and accounting for the attainment of results’

It proposes that a better trained civil service will increase trust in, and hence the authority of government.

The key features of the new civil service are stressed: namely responsiveness to demand, operation within a legislative framework, a reasonable system of pay (including social guarantees), the interdependence of the federal and local level, and equal opportunities for advancement between federal and local levels of the service.

Finally, a priority of reform is yet again declared to be to ‘establish effective mechanisms for the prevention, exposure, and elimination of procedures conducive to corruption.’

4.3 Increasing pressure for reform

Pressure for action to follow publication of these detailed proposals appears to have mounted, with a major statement by Putin on 18th April, 2002, as part of his annual address, in which he lambasted the government apparatus as ‘clumsy and ineffective,’ citing as evidence calls to a TV phone in, of which ¾ were complaints about ‘administrative arbitrariness.’

In his speech Putin attributes this failure to the fact that civil service ‘functions were not adapted to the resolution of strategic tasks.’ He also attacked the lack of policy making skills, saying that ‘knowledge of contemporary government research was largely a rarity’ in the civil service, and set himself the goal of making the civil service ‘effective, compact, and hard-working.’

In the central executive areas, organisational structures remain ‘as if still in the era of centralised planning.....ministries direct their efforts to gain for themselves financial and administrative undertakings and organisations.’ This, he declared, ‘makes civilised business difficult.’

He then outlined four key tasks including :

- improving the strategic orientation of government
- establishing the conditions for economic growth
- providing quality public services
- managing government property effectively

‘The government apparatus must become the hard-working instrument for the realisation of economic policy,’ with a ‘clear technology of development and implementation of decisions.’

Declaring himself frustrated with the slow pace of change:

‘For two years we have been talking about reduction of the surplus functions of government....they will of course cling on, but this is not a way to lay out reforms’ he says that it is :

‘not possible to be friendly.....this usually leads to the smooth exchange of the civil service from one department to another’ and that it is necessary only to ‘protect what is essential,’ though change will be a long term task.

Corruption is again acknowledged as a problem, but seen not as a result of an absence of repressive measures , but due to the existence of administrative barriers, opacity in procedures, and a shortage of resources.

Putin returned to some of these themes in an interview with ‘Nevskoye Vremya’ in 10th June 2002, pointing out the large numbers of federal civil servants in the St Petersburg area, and the need for reform ‘ not formally, but in reality’, with change to match the system to the new tasks it faced. He also made reference to a recurring theme in civil service reform, the shortage of specialists in the service. On 30th June, 2002, he signed a decree raising civil service salaries.

In July, Prime Minister Kasyanov launched another assault on the service, citing unflattering international comparisons for the Russian government in terms of quantity of regulations, and openness. ‘Debureaucratisation’ was essential , he declared, together with a move away from funding ‘organs’ and towards funding ‘functions’ as a step to increasing effectiveness, and changing the mentality of the service.

On 13th August, Putin signed a further decree on the ethical code of the civil service, but this time ruled out reductions in staffing levels, declaring that the Russian Government was already smaller than comparable services, and accepting that a long term goal would be to raise pay to ‘European levels.’

Finally, on 21st August ‘Utogu’ published a lengthy interview with Medvedev, in which he again underlined some of the reform themes:

- the need to clearly distinguish and delimit the responsibilities of civil servants through both a revised ‘table of ranks’ specifying responsibilities and qualifications, and new legislation proposed for the autumn to establish the different levels and types of government organisation and the relationships between them
- establishing the core values of the service: federalism, legality, openness, responsiveness to public
- the need to combat corruption to control conflicts of interest

Thus the early part of 2002 was taken up with a developing rhetoric of reform, with a seemingly shifting agenda. Towards the end of this ‘agenda setting’ period we can begin to observe a more conservative tone emerging: the repetition of ethical reform themes, of ‘foundational’ and structural arguments, the cementing of civil service pay in the centre of debate, and a retreat from hard talk about staff reductions and ‘new public management.’

4.4 ‘About government services in the Russian Federation’ Autumn 2002

These more limited ideas were given concrete form in legislation laid before the Duma in Autumn, 2002, and envisaged as the first, and fundamental measure of civil service reform, and the basis for proposed future acts. However, it may be truer to say this act is largely a less detailed repetition of some of the themes of the 1995 legislation, and a major retreat from the radical aspirations of the spring.

The new act defines government service as:

‘the professional activity of citizens of the Russian federation (further – to citizens) to guarantee the fulfilment of the functions and authority of the Russian Federation, the organs of government power, different government organs(further –federal government organs), the organs of the subjects of the Russian Federation, ...and involved in duties established by the constitution of the Russian Federation and federal and subject laws.’

Federal government servants and local civil servants (those of the ‘subjects’ of the Russian federation) are distinguished by whether they are paid from federal or ‘subject’ budgets

The key principles of government service are to comprise:

1. Federalism, ‘guaranteeing a single system of government service in conformity with the constitution’

2. The ‘government service’ is deemed to include:

Federal government civil service
Military services
Law enforcement services

And such other subdivisions as are defined by legislation

3. Municipal and governmental services are deemed to be ‘interdependent’

4. Openness of government services and their susceptibility to public control including:

- Openness of procedures for undertaking governmental decisions ‘which affect the rights and freedoms of people and citizens’
- Objective information about the activity of government
- Protection of government services from ‘illegal involvements in their professional working activities’
- Recognition of the government service as a legal entity

5. Government service is to be managed centrally. Relations between the three branches, and the list of posts, the form in which records are kept, and the table of ranks and titles in each area, is to be defined by Presidential decree

The establishment of a personnel function will guarantee the creation of a ‘reserve cadre for appointment to government service and for its effective fulfilment’ through:

- development of the professional quality of government services
- provision of testimonials and qualifying exams
- implementation of ‘contemporary management technology’
- implementation of training programmes and government training standards

6. Conditions for admission to government service, and for appointment to government posts, for retirement and dismissal as well as for training, and retraining are to be determined by

law. The act mentions not only competitive recruitment but also ‘other forms of admission’, including provision for labour contracts, either fixed term or indefinite. Labour law is envisaged to apply to government service.

7. The system of ranks and titles is retained :

‘progression in government service includes in itself appointment to posts in government service, the award of ‘clasnova cheeha,’ diplomatic ranks , military and special titles , attestations and qualifying exams, and further other circumstances (events) distinguished in conformity with today’s laws’ These ranks and titles are awarded after years of service (though provision is also made for early award as an incentive) and match particular positions in the government service defined by law. The titles can also be removed, under conditions defined by law.

8. Further measures relate to the confidentiality of staff records and government secrets, with conditions for the recording and protection of such information defined by law.

These measures are declared crucial to strengthening the overall management of the service, through ‘overall co-ordination of admission to and promotion within the government service’

5. Evaluation of reform attempts

There has thus been a number of marked shifts in both the rhetoric and substance of reform since the first 1995 act. The early 1995 reforms were heavily biased in favour of the civil service, consolidating many procedures and privileges that were advantageous to them, while doing little to enhance the mechanisms of governmental control, other than in terms of broad statements of civil service constitutional and ethical responsibilities. The early reforms were lacking in measures to deal with major structural problems – misallocation of resources both human and financial, duplication and overlap, and showed little appreciation of the distinction between legislation and personnel management, with many features of the 1995 civil service law perhaps being more appropriate for inclusion in a staff handbook. The early legislation showed little understanding of new public management, nor of public service.

By contrast, Putin’s early steps towards reform show a wider awareness of the place of such reform within a process of both governance and market reform, at least in its rhetoric. There is also a rising awareness of the developing crisis in the supply of trained specialists and able managers, reflecting the shortages in the Moscow labour market as much as the legacy of pay erosion. There is a keen sense of impatience with the government machine, which shows some signs of turning into full-blown managerialism of a more ‘root and branch’ kind.

However, the 2002 legislation ‘about the system of government services in the Russian Federation’ noticeably fails to carry through this developing managerial rhetoric, although subsequent legislation may well do so. Rather the legislation is foundational in intent, and indeed returns to some common themes of Russian history, being both centralising in act and intention, and authoritarian in tone. The retention and enshrining of the east European ‘table of ranks’ in legislation, and the reinforcement of some of the rights and privileges contained in the 1995 act may be seen as conservative, and a victory for civil service insiders and their allies in the Duma.

A key theme which emerges repeatedly in the 2002 act is that of the establishment of a ‘whole’ or ‘integrated’ service, with integration created both through central control over the

records, training and promotion of civil servants, but also control over the establishments within ministries. The attempt to create a service which includes federal and local officials within its ambit is ambitious, but it remains to be seen in practice whether this is a realistic aspiration.

There are significant broadly liberal elements within the new act: the statement of the constitutional role of the service and the subordination of its procedures and structures to current and subsequent legislative enactment, and the key founding principles with their extensive commitments to openness, to public service and to the avoidance of corruption.

Nevertheless, there is to date a marked gap between the rhetoric of the leading politicians involved in the reform process, and its legislative enactment. There is also a very large question as to whether the presidential administration has the necessary authority to enforce even the limited measures of change included in the new legislation.

Constant themes between the early and later reforms remain – particularly the unwillingness to tackle seriously the issue of political appointments and patronage both within the ‘a’ and ‘b’ ranks, and within the ranks ostensibly open to ‘career’ recruitment, and the numerous re-enactments of ethical codes.

6. Analysis – factors driving and resisting change in Russia

Russian particularism is often reflected in academic studies – legacies of cold war scholarship plus difficulties of language, the isolation of western scholars all tend to generate arguments for a ‘special case within a special case’ or in Steven Fish’s witty characterisation ‘a catastrophe wrapped in a cataclysm, inside a disaster’ (Fish, S 2001)

This western tendency to construct of Russia the image of her that the west needs is facilitated by high levels of secrecy and closed decision taking within the Presidency which makes information hard to find, and enables speculation which is as much driven by ideology as by empirical evidence. Such commentary now tends to construct Russia as ‘going south’ , or at best, at risk of ‘going south,’ with high levels of corruption, state capture by special interests, low public trust, extensive shadow/informal structures, within a field characterised by institutional fragmentation and ‘balkanisation’, exhibiting low policy capacity, and a tendency to pure ‘political’ rather than administrative rule (Goetz) This case may provide some confirmation for such a thesis.

However, the Russian *gosoodarstvenny sloozhba* (government service) has in fact received comparatively little academic attention from scholars (at least in the West), compared to the massive attention given to privatisation or other areas of constitutional and political change. Information about the processes of reform and empirical evidence is hard to come by. However it is possible to identify a number of factors which tentatively explain the halting progress of such reform.

The specific Russian historical legacy is extremely inauspicious in nearly all its aspects to the modernisation of the civil service system. While containing all of the problems of CEE communist legacies : the capacity of the old system to over-ride administrative decisions for political and particularistic reasons, the culture of upward accountability and secrecy, weak policy capacity etc., Russia additionally presents its own difficulties: a particularly deep penetration of ‘nomenklatura’ appointments, coupled with the foundational crises of the

dissolution of the Soviet Union, and massive problems inherent in the scale of government operations in a state riven by central-periphery tensions and a catastrophic economic transition.

Notwithstanding these uniquely Russian features, it is possible to argue that Russia is now in the phase of *consolidation* – a phase which is marked by new structural characteristics which are hard to surmount, but different to those which have gone before. First amongst these is the truism that the civil service one must change is also the only one available to carry out one's policies, and the more dishevelled the system, the less likely it is to be able to reform itself. It is interesting to note that the harder measures of managerialism (resource accounting, performance management, contracting etc.) are also those that require the pre-existence of sound administration, and it is hence not surprising that these measures have been left for international donors to support, rather than placed at the top of the legislative agenda.

Russian (and CEE) semi-presidentialism also creates an environment in which *implementation* of reforms becomes particularly difficult. Faced with a lack of social actors to engage in the reform process, or their outright hostility to reforms, such regimes may be seen as reverting to rule by decree which although capable of cutting through legislative log-jam, prevents the engagement of social forces in the carrying out of necessary changes. In this context it is possible to see Putin's hardline reformist rhetoric as merely electoral populism, behind which the leader remains trapped by the powerful forces of internal Kremlin politics.

An analysis of the membership of some of the significant groups involved in designing the current wave of administrative reforms would seem to confirm this depressing hypothesis (see Appendix below). Taking the members of the interdepartmental working group, and the two Duma committees most closely involved in the reform process under Putin, we find that the majority are in mid to late career, almost all are male, and follow classic 'Soviet' career paths – strong local careers built in education, administration, heavy industry, the security forces or the army, followed by national roles. A high proportion have themselves held senior management positions in these organisations. The preponderance of academics in the interministerial working group is particularly striking, and may go some way to explaining how the 'managerialism' of Putin's rhetoric emerged in legislative form as a comparatively dry series of legalistic and constitutional measures. At any rate, it is hard to imagine such a group of stakeholders grasping the finer points of 'New Public Management,' or driving through the changes associated with it. In terms of the interministerial working group at least there are sufficient heavy Kremlin insiders with a stake in the status quo to make 'rocking the boat' unlikely.

External intervention has of course been a factor in driving change. Heavy conditionality accompanying debtor status can drive even the most recalcitrant regimes to at least 'speak the language of reform'. Indeed international support for civil service reform is a promising area for rent-seeking by higher level bureaucrats. However, until recently the role of the international community in Russian civil service reform has been limited; Russia is outside the golden ring of EU 'accession' countries, and not likely in the immediate future to benefit from the *acquis communautaire* and its associated high level interventions. More worryingly, there is some evidence that donors may have avoided Russia because they believe the country will not generate the kind of programme results which international agency sponsors require, in other words the country has been relegated to 'basket case' status. In any event, privatisation has been a far higher priority than governance reform – a disastrous error in the

early ‘sequencing’ of donor intervention which has prompted a great deal of soul searching but little substantial in the way of ‘catch up.’

The international intervention programmes in Russian civil service reform have accordingly tended to be either piecemeal, or ‘pilot’ in nature, and therefore unco-ordinated, and hard to ‘scale up,’ thus generating what is in effect a self-fulfilling prophecy about the country’s ‘openness to reform’. Some external interventions have by contrast been excessively ‘foundational’, assuming that development must start from a long way ‘back up the modernity ladder’, and thus perversely have the effect of reinforcing Russian ‘backwardness’ with legislative measures which have little chance of being implemented or are at such a high level of generality that they fail to address the pressing operational difficulties faced by Russian government day to day.

Other CEE countries, competing for support and attention, and aware of past injustices at the hands of Russia, are perhaps only too happy to contribute to an emerging intellectual consensus that underrates the potential for change in the country.

However there are powerful drivers for change, and a marked decline in negative factors. Noticeably, the Russian economy is now stabilising, and political stability has also improved for the time being at least. Responsibility for administrative reform has been made clear, and high level actors have committed themselves to the process. An outline plan has emerged for reform, capable of guiding a long-term agenda. The most pressing areas have been highlighted for attention and some steps taken to re-centralise control and to clarify central-local relationships. Clear objectives have been identified for many areas of government policy, which could be used to establish thoroughgoing systems for ministerial performance management. Some fundamental elements of reform have been enshrined in legislation. Civil service pay has been improved, reducing susceptibility to corruption.

8. Conclusion

Administrative reform in Russia is thus hampered by an inauspicious historical legacy. The election of Putin however has provided a window of opportunity for change which appeared to have been taken in the early part of 2002. Other contextual factors also make change more likely. However, powerful opposing forces undoubtedly exist, and may have diluted early Kremlin enthusiasm for reform. In content at least, the 2002 legislation appears conservative.

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APPENDIX

Opinion makers in Governance Reform – Russian Federation

a) Members of the *komitet pa gosiudarstbehhomiu stroitelstviu* (Committee for the construction of government) 3rd Duma 2000

Main employments mentioned by sector
(numbers in brackets refer to actual numbers)

Heavy Industry	(4)	36%
Administration	(4)	36%
Agriculture	(0)	0%
Higher Education	(1)	9%
Media	(1)	9%
Law	(3)	27%
Military/Security	(3)	27%
(n = 11)		
Percentage with higher education		91%
Percentage declaring previous membership of CP		18%
Percentage with previous career in local politics		82%
Percentage with experience of senior management		45%
Average age		52 years

b) Members of the *komitet pa delam federatsi i regionalnoi politike* (Committee for federal affairs and regional politics) 3rd Duma 2000

Main employments mentioned by sector
(numbers in brackets refer to actual numbers)

Heavy Industry	(6)	40%
Administration	(1)	7%
Agriculture	(1)	7%
Higher Education	(7)	47%
Media	(0)	0%
Law	(0)	0%
Military/Security	(0)	0%

(n = 15)

Percentage with higher education 87%

Percentage declaring previous membership of CP 66%

Percentage with previous career in local politics 66%

Percentage with experience of senior management 66%

Average age 52 years

c) Members of the *mezhdomstbehoi rabochay griupi pa podgotovke proektov reformerovani gosudarstbehovo sliuzhbi (Interdepartmental working group for the reform of government services)*

<i>Academics</i>	(5)	21%
<i>Civil servants</i>	(9)	38%
<i>Politicians</i>	(6)	25%
<i>Others</i>	(4)	17%

Total (24)

