



Administrative reforms in Russia

Nancy Pathak

Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

With the emergence of the New Russia, the greatest question that faced the Post-Soviet ruling elites of Russia was whether they should continue with the old bureaucratic system in place or reforms into a new system. Surprisingly, unlike other Post-Soviet states, Russia chose to retain the bureaucracy. This was a huge step and needed some additional reforms in order to curb ideological loyalties, corrupt practice and to take steps towards liberalization. This paper discusses the administrative reforms of 1991, 2004 and onwards in this direction.

Keywords: Russian bureaucracy, administrative reforms, administration under putin regime, corruption control under putin regime

Introduction

With the coming of the New Russia it had to be figured whether the agents of the state had to continue the old way or the new state demanded a new bureaucracy. The first thing that had to be noted was that unlike the other Post-Soviet states, New Russia had not undergone practice of 'Lustration'^[1]. The first reforms that were undertaken in Russian administration were in the 1995, although many changes had begun during the last phase of Soviet regime itself. The new Elite agency for the selection of civil servants called Roskadry^[2] was established during the perestroika phase in itself. Under Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, there were attempts made at styling the existing Soviet bureaucracy into the western styled bureaucracy. Only in 1991 the Russian academy of Public administration was appointed on the same lines to appoint the civil servants in Russia. ROSKADRY made an attempt at restraining the existing staff and tried to establish some professional entry requirements.

A limited statute was passed in 1993 to define the lines on which the Russian federal civil services were to be based. But Roskadry had been starved for resources, soon after Yeltsin decided to dissolve the ROSKADRY.

The first detailed reforms came in 1995. It was in 1995 that the first attempt was made to bind the powers and privileges of the bureaucrats by the constitution. The employment rights, career structures of the bureaucrats, the duties, recruitment and selection procedures etc. were all laid down under these reforms. The new code of ethics strictly forbade the civil servants from accepting gifts, paid work along with services to state, misuse of the state property, employment of relatives as subordinates, strikes etc.

The civil services were divided in five grades of posts. Each

of these grades was divided according to the educational qualifications and attainments. Following the traditions of Peter the great, the ranks of bureaucracy could now not get promotion to the higher ranks until they had a certain years of required experience in the field.

1. The highest category Posts i.e. the category 'A' positions were excluded from this law.
2. One half of the second highest ranks, i.e. the category 'B' ranks assisted the category A officials. They could stay in their respective offices only till the pleasure of their political masters or as long as these political patrons stayed in the office.
3. The second half of the category 'B' services was truly permanent bureaucrats.
4. Numerous technical and ancillary services fall in the category 'C'.

At the top of the bureaucratic ladder the politicisation of the appointments is a norm. While the category 'C' appointments. Till date the most preferred criteria of giving promotions is on the basis of experience gained on the basis of long service and not merit.

In 2001 the commission for reform in the government headed by the President was set up. Under the commission the attempts were made to lay down in detail the arrangement for personnel management. New code of conducts was laid down for the personnel which were prohibited from engaging in corrupt practices. But there were various interest groups within the services who were working towards the protection of their interest so the reforms were only superficial. In 2002 attempts were made at defining the Principles of services at different levels of government and laying down the guidelines for interdepartmental communication.

The administrative reforms under the Putin administration were extremely thought after in order to deal with the problems that Bureaucracy had been posing for the central authority after the breakdown of the Soviet empire.

1. The territorial laws in contradiction to federal laws were eliminated.

¹ Lustration is the practice of rooting out the officials during a regime change so that the officials from the previous regimes do not continue to be the part of the new Regime. See pg 195, Mark. S Ellis, Lustration Laws, *Law and contemporary problems*, Vol. 59, No. 4 to see the status of the lustration laws in the New Russian state post 1992. It was drafted but never passed.

² Literal meaning for ROSKADRY is Russian Cadre

2. Presidential embassies were established in seven regions of the country.
3. The tax policies were reformed to benefit the centre.
4. Electoral rules were changed in order to replace the elected governors with those nominated by the centre^[3].

One of Putin's ambitions was to divide the country into seven administrative zones and bring it under the direct control of the Kremlin to reduce the post-Soviet chaos and to bring the elites under the direct control of Kremlin.

Putin although tried to bring down the strength of the military yet, in the civil administrative positions Putin tried to get in the military and security officials to assume the strategic positions. And the lower military officials were moved up in hierarchy. Thus, it can be assumed that the bureaucracy was being partially militarized.

There was an attempt made by Putin to downsize Russia's bloated military by introducing an all youth volunteer system. This move was resisted by the defense ministry but in 2002. Finally there was a decree published that very same year with the intention to reintroduce the compulsory summer military training for men under the age of 16.

In 2004 the biggest series of civil services reforms were introduced under the heading of federal reform #79. These reforms introduce some new approaches to bureaucracy such as:

1. Up till 2004, competition to enter the bureaucracy was not compulsory. It was proposed under this law that entry to civil services should be strictly restricted by competition barring some exceptions.
2. In case of these appointments were too tedious to be made through competitive exams, the pre fixed qualifications could be kept as the criteria for recruitment. Though these qualifications are yet to develop standards for civil services positions and criteria for the recruitment to it.
3. Attempts were made at bringing administrative discretion to the minimum by defining the terms of the service.
4. The civil services were brought under the contract.
5. The government bodies were mandated to create funds which could be paid to the respective departments by the head of the government body as per the criterias of efficiency.

In order to cut down on the large chain of the bureaucracy, Putin also wanted to privatize the housing, municipal utilities, gas etc. As the bureaucrats heavily resisted the plan was rolled back swiftly. As Sergei Mikhailov the head of the Russian political center discusses that bureaucrats have always tried to resist change because the change may alter their status quo. The shorter the layer of bureaucracy the more transparency there might be. Hence any attempts at the reforms met with heavy resistance.

President Putin has tried to make several attempts to speak to Public directly through mass media to ask for cooperation from them in order to deal with the bureaucrats, but it is looked at as the recourse of the president who becomes helpless in the matters of bringing change.

³ Formally the president would nominate the governor, who were later to be approved by the regional parliaments but the regional parliaments never dared to go against the president's decision. No such Presidential decision had been overturned since 2008.

Steps taken to nip the Corruption

In order to prove to the masses that he is fulfilling his promises of taking steps towards curbing corruption he brought in some reforms. He decided to bring these reforms through following means:

- He introduced measurements of key performance indicators as a method of performance assessment of the bureaucrats, as was being practiced in many countries.
- In the process known as "offshorisation" Putin issued a decree to bring down the influence of foreign states on the bureaucrats. All the state officials were asked to declare their assets and disclose any gifts they took in foreign funds.
- The bureaucracy had to be made more efficient in order to meet the needs of the growing oil sector which was the most crucial sector for Russian economy. Corruption had to be brought down in this sector in order to attract more investment.

The reality of the Reforms: A case study of the recent changes in the Kremlin administration

Despite various attempts at reform in the administration the reality remains that the administrative positions in the Kremlin are still dependent on the choice of the political elites situated in Moscow. The re-election of Putin as President has only marked a step in continuity. Most figures in Kremlin are those who are really close to the President and many of them have shared a bureaucratic career with the President himself. This continuity defines the 'Putin Stability' in the kremlin administration. But this internal group stays under heavy scrutiny of the President. The Popular Shkolov group which wielded enormous influence in the Kremlin earlier lost its entire power because his group member General Denis Sugrobov was found guilty of corruption. Thus, the entire group was removed from the Kremlin bureaucracy.

As President Putin himself came to power out of nowhere, His new administrative officials are also people with not much of a public profile. Some of those who have come close to him in recent times are former FSB officials like Dmitry Shalkov. Such lesser known officials have been given space in Kremlin bureaucracy earlier too. Loyalty and obedience are the major criteria for these selections.

The staffing policy in the region although is very different. It is much liberal and undergoes regular shuffle. The policy is to basically overshadow the oligarchs by appointing young bureaucrats, politicians, entrepreneurs with the management approach to undermine regional elites and help keep them well within the ambit of the Russian constitution and Kremlin control.

Thus the reforms have been introduced on the pen and papers but the fact remains that the informal networks whether in Kremlin or in the peripheries of Russia play a major role in the appointments, work conditions, privileges and longevity of a position of the bureaucracies in Russia.

References

1. Daly, John. oilprice.com. oilprice corporation website. february 15, 2012. oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Putin-Looking-to-Modernize-Russias-Energy-Sector-Bureaucrats-Fight-Back.htm (accessed may 2013, 20).

2. Danks, Catherine. The federal Executive: The President. In *Politics Russia*, by Catherine Danks, 140-144. New York: Routledge, 2009.
3. Druzhinin, Alexei. en.rian.ru. Ria Novosti Website group. february 03, 2012. en.rian.ru/society/20120203/171114104.html (accessed april 12, 2013).
4. Ellis, Mark S. *Purging the Past: The current state of Lustration laws in former Soviet Bloc*. Law and Contemporary problems, 1996, 181-196.
5. Gray, Pat. *Hard Cases And Improving 'Governance': Putin And Civil Service*. *UN.org*. April 2003. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan009023.pdf> (accessed 2014).
6. Konov, Alexy. UN.org. Working Group on Public Sector Quality, Public service and administrative reforms in Russia. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPACEE/UNPAN025557.pdf> (accessed 2017).
7. Pertsev, Andrey. Expect no changes from Russia's New Presidential Administration. June 21, 2018. https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76651?utm_source=rssemail&utm_medium=email&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTW1Rek5XTmtaR0kyWkdKaiIsInQiOiJlbnkdpMjBSemh2cHZKVWFyV05FWElzZzFQwTzVpNINLRDFmT1FtNm1pMVg5dkpjS1FlTVBxV2ZwN0wrTkF0N1hHcEkrWDVJbjZzY0crT0R5dDBWb1BKZ0RkbIMxR2ZqTIR2ZHIGU.
8. Rowney, Don K, Eugene Huskey. *Russian bureaucracy and the state: Officialdom from Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
9. Weir, Fred. CSMonitor.com. the christian science monitor web site. April 3, 2013. www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2013/0403/Close-your-foreign-accounts-or-be-fired-Putin-tells-Russian-officials (accessed may 26, 2013).
10. —. Putin's duel with the bureaucrats. csmonitor. com. February 2002. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0222/p06s01-woeu.html>.
11. Zherebstov, Mikhail. *Public Administration Reform and building of vertical power in Russia: Exploring incommensurability*. curve.carlton.ca. 2014. https://curve.carleton.ca/system/files/etd/40cfe511-171c-44e8-8b1c-511d2115a013/etd_pdf/69756aa64b7edac91688518d2b515723/zherebstov-publicadministrationreformandbuildingofthe.pdf (accessed 2017).